Fur Industry as an Employer

Most Finnish fur farms are located in rural areas, mainly in the Vaasa province on the west coast. In addition to easily accessible feed recources from the sea, the Vaasa area has traditionally been known for small businesses and, therefore soon became a province of fur farming. About 90 % of all Finnish skins are nowadays produced there. Another fur farming area is eastern Finland, though in a much more modest scale. Fur animal farming did not gain popularity there until the 1970's when finnraccoon farming was started.

Fur farming used to employ even 20 000 people annually even five years ago. Nowadays ca 2000 fur farms employ about 5 000 - 7 000 people. However, it is estimated that farming gives living indirectly to another 5000 people which include feed producers and suppliers, fishers, builders, suppliers of materials and equipment, extension agents etc. $\bar{x}$ = 2 hm. / farm

Even though fur trade is a rather small field of business, it has been economically quite significant. It has not received any substantial subsides from the government but has operated independently for years. During the last ten years the volume of the Finnish fur trade has been over 12 billion FIM. Fur animal farmers have always wanted to stay indenpendent and let skin prices decide who stays in the business.

Fur Animal Feeding and Breeding

By-products from food and fish industry form the bulk of the feed. Fur farming is the main user for such products as slaughter offals (cow, beef, pig, poultry) and fishery by-products.

Raw materials are mixed into a homogenous feed in cooperative feed factories. These so called feed centers are established and owned by farmers. Such a feed center system has made it possible to obtain raw materials with bulk price which has contributed to considerable cuts in feed costs. 80 % of farmers by their feed from these feed centers while others mix it by themselves. Some farmers use commercial pellets, too.

Fur animal feed as well as other marketed feeds are controlled continuously. Even though feedstuffs are either by-products or waste, the feed has to be of high quality. Feeds are analyzed periodically for the nutrients and quality parameters. Feed laboratory is obliged to report analysis results every month to the State Institute of Agricultural Chemistry. Public results of feed analyses guarantee competition between the feed centers.

Because fur animal feedstuffs are mainly by-products their nutrient content and quality vary almost from one slaughtery to another. One important task for feed laboratory is to update feedstuff analyses and keep ration planners informed about changes. Ration^{R} (Valio^{R}) is a computer software developed for feed ration formulation. Computerized feed planning ensures that the feed meets nutritional rquirements. Feed manufacturers can maintain rations that are least cost without risking nutritional quality of the feed.

Breeding of animals is crucial in fur farming. Feed makes up a half of production cost, but if the stock is of bad quality a substantial part of the potential income can never be enjoyed. Sampo^{R}, the other software made for fur animal farming developed in Finland, calculates breeding indexes for individual animals. Computers are becoming more and more important to fur farming. Undoubtedly breeding work will be accelerated remarkably in the next couple of years.