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# Silver Fox Farming in Kentucky

By WILLIAM C. HAEFNER

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CONTRARY to the popular theory that good fur cannot be produced this side of the Arctic Circle, it is being proven that it is possible to raise good, heavy fur, right here in old Kentucky. In the last four years some of the finest Silver Fox furs in this country have been produced on a Kentucky Silver Fox farm. However, several factors combine to produce good fox fur and the most important is the fox. Good blood lines or pedigrees are of prime importance. Other factors, such as proper feeding, size of pens, environment and climate must be taken under careful consideration. The cold rains that visit Kentucky each spring and fall together with the occasional snow and cold snaps that we have, tend to produce a quality of fur that is very desirable. This quality of fur is recognized because of its abundance of soft, downy under-fur and the long, silky guard hair. It brings a high price at the fur market.

An idea of the prices received for Silver Fox pelts may be had from those taken last winter and sold since then. To give an average price would hardly be fair as the quality runs from the finest clear skins to the pieces or parts

of a skin. If there is so much as a tail or paw left it is sold. However, one may say that a fairly good skin, clear in color and from one-half to three-quarters silver, should bring from \$200 on upward. The highest price paid in this country last winter was \$860 for one raw skin. Many skins sold for less than \$200 but these were either dark or black or of an inferior grade of silver or culls.

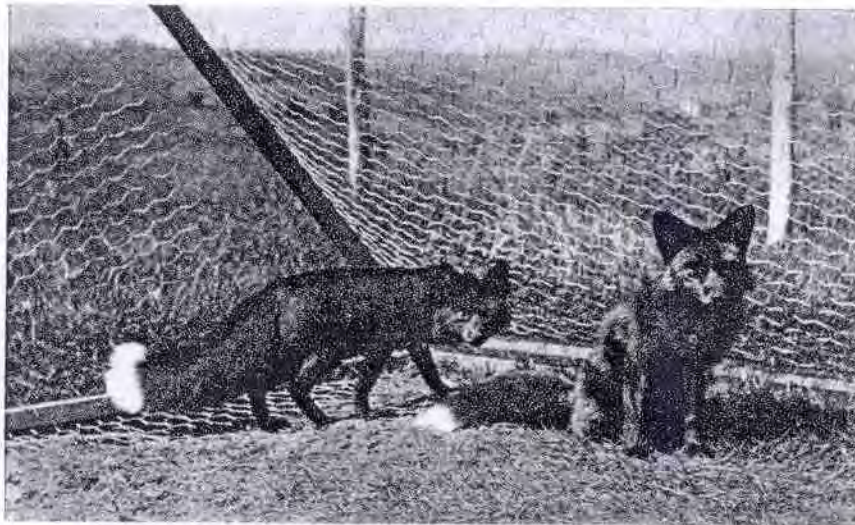
When the breeder starts with a good pedigree behind his foundation stock he has little to fear concerning the prices he will get for his pelts, providing, of course, that he feeds and cares for them properly.

Because of the large profits derived from the sale of pelts and breeding stock, Silver Fox farming has attracted wide attention. As a fur animal, propagated in captivity, the Silver Fox has no

rival as a source of income. Probably no other live stock enterprise pays larger returns for the money invested, when conscientiously and intelligently managed.

## What is a Silver Fox?

The Silver Fox is a color phase (or sport) of the red fox. It is dark all over, with silver banded hairs inter-



A pair of breeders. This photo was made in October, two months before the furs were fully grown and prime.



Mrs. Haefner and one of her tame silver foxes. This female fox has produced twenty pups within the last four years.



View of fox pens including the fox kitchen where all the food is prepared.

mixed, but no red, and the tip of the tail is generally, but not always, white. It is the guard hairs which give the silver appearance to the pelt. These are not entirely white, but are black with a white band. Some guard hairs are entirely black. The underfur, or down, is the thick, short fur next to the skin. This supports the guard hair and gives density or depth to the pelt and is of a dark slate or mouse color. The guard hairs of the fur are usually about three inches long and are of a dark, blue color for nearly two inches, then comes about a half-inch of black. A half-inch band of pure white follows to end in a tip of black. This combination causes the beautiful effect called "silver." It cannot be imitated by the fur dyer.

The breeding age of a fox generally starts when they are about ten months old. From then on, for ten or twelve years, they will breed once a year. This period usually occurs during the months of February, March and April. Litters normally consist of four or five puppies, although litters of six and seven are quite common. Sometimes a litter of eight or nine will be born but this does not happen often.

During this period the dog fox mends his manners as a husband. When the vixen goes in to whelp he carries food to her and guards her against every danger. At the least unusual sound or strange sight he will give the danger signal or "cry." This can easily be heard for a quarter of a mile. One reason why it is so hard to steal or catch a fox is that they are ever on the alert and are practically



This photo shows some of the furs produced on the Alexandria Fox Farms which sold for \$375.00 each in the raw.

their own watch dog. The male also helps in feeding the puppies when they are old enough to eat by themselves. The puppies are usually weaned at about the age of eight weeks and at about the age of fourteen weeks shed their puppy fur and start to grow their first winter coat. If properly fed and cared for they can be pelted the first winter, if the rancher so desires.

**Possibilities of Fox Farming**

Fur farming is now upon what we designate as a pelt basis, by which we mean that it is based upon the price brought by pelts of the animals in the markets of the world. On this basis, it must without question be regarded as a solid and substantial commercial industry.

To my mind one of the most interesting and promising futures of today is that of fox and fur farming, but as in any other business that is to be successfully operated, one must apply sound business principles. It might be well to warn the prospective buyer to beware of the

unscrupulous promoter and high pressure salesman. Their policy is to make one believe that by purchasing their animals on whatever plan they may have, he will become rich over night. Such, however, is not the case. The same breeding methods and rules that are followed in any other live stock enterprise are followed in Silver Fox farming.

In writing this article, it has been my wish to convey to my fellow Kentuckians, or anyone else what may be interested, a correct and honest impression of the wonderful possibilities of Silver Fox farming in Kentucky.



Fox puppies on the Alexandria Silver Fox Farm. Some real Kentucky scenery furnishes the background.