



About Fox Farming

Best Management Practices

Accommodation:

A fox farm's location should be carefully selected. Due consideration should be given to local environmental conditions, foreseeable neighborhood development and anticipated farm growth. Slightly sloping land with good drainage and no risk of flooding forms the ideal site for a fox farm. A supply of fresh, clean water is necessary to supply the watering systems and to provide for daily clean up in the feed preparation areas. It is advisable to construct a protective fence around the perimeter of the area where foxes are housed.

Sheds:

Any building used to offer protection must be designed to provide clean, well-ventilated and sanitary conditions. Sheds may be erected specifically to house foxes kept for breeding or those kept for pelting, or they may serve a combination of both purposes. Fox sheds are normally open-sided or partly closed. Where extreme conditions are encountered, such as strong winds, severe cold, drifting snow or driving rain, partial or total enclosure of sheds should be considered. However, foxes should be kept in enclosed buildings only if the environment indoors meets the natural needs of the foxes and does not interfere with the reproductive or furring cycles. Sheds should be situated in a direction that allows the use of natural ventilation and lighting. All equipment and services necessary for farm operation should be inspected regularly and kept in good working order.

Pens:

Fox pens must provide an area that is large enough for the foxes to move around in naturally and must allow for activities such as rest, sleep, defecation and other functions that maintain the comfort of the animal. Whelping pens must provide an area that is large enough for females to deliver and rear their young to weaning age. Every fox confined in a cage must have reasonable freedom of movement.

Nests:

A suitable, warm, dry nest that is large enough to house a vixen and her litter must be attached to or incorporated into every whelping pen. Nest boxes for a vixen and her litter must have a floor area of not less than 0.19 m² (2 sq ft). The interior of the nest box must provide a dry, draft free environment and should include appropriate bedding during nesting periods. Nests should be large enough to allow each fox to lie and sleep comfortably. Nests are usually constructed of wood, untreated and free from other toxic materials. Special care should be taken to avoid projections into the nesting area that could cause discomfort to the foxes.

Food and Water:

Foxes must be fed a complete and wholesome diet that fulfills the various nutritional needs throughout their life cycle. It is essential that fox farmers have a working knowledge of the nutritional requirements of foxes. Nutritional advice is available and fox farmers should seek assistance in acquiring this advice from all sources.

Watering Systems:

The fox farmer must make sure that clean, potable water is available ad libitum.

Feed Distribution:

A sufficient quantity of feed must be given at all times to ensure the health and well being of each fox. Spoiled feed should be removed from feeding areas.

Care and Supervision: Supervision and Handling of Foxes

All foxes should be inspected at least once each day. The arrangement of fox pens should enable easy inspection of all areas of the farm and all housed foxes, particularly where one attendant is responsible for a large number of foxes. It is the fox farmer's responsibility to see that every person working with foxes understands and accepts the responsibility of preventing any avoidable suffering on the part of the animals. Before duties are assigned, personnel should be adequately instructed in the care and handling of foxes and should demonstrate a knowledge of the basic needs of the foxes entrusted to their care. Attendants should be able to recognize behavioural symptoms that indicate discomfort, disease or the need to consult a veterinarian.

Health and Disease:

Fox farmers have a responsibility to be aware of the condition of their herd and should be able to recognize the signs of a distressed or sick animal.

Hygiene and Sanitation:

Fox farmers must ensure good hygiene and sanitary measures to avoid conditions that are unpleasant for the animals. Regular removal and disposal of manure, and fly control, are essential to a good farm sanitation program. Manure should be removed regularly from under the pens, especially where drainage is less than adequate. Pens and nests housing foxes should be cleaned as required.

Transportation of Live Foxes:

The transportation of foxes requires special attention to the design of traveling crates, the care of foxes while in transit and the completion of appropriate documentation as required by the transporter or government authority. Traveling crates must be adequately designed for transportation by road, rail and air to allow sufficient space, airflow and comfort for each animal.

Fox Breeding FAQ's

Q. What is the gestation period for a fox?

A. Fifty-two days is the normal gestation period for a female fox.

Q. What is considered an average litter size?

A. The average litter size is three, but they range from one to as high as eight or nine.

Q. How old is the female fox when she has her first litter?

A. She is about one year old, give or take a month, when she has her first litter.

Q. What are foxes raised on a fox farm fed?

A. Some fox ranchers feed their foxes a meat, fish, egg and cereal diet that they mix themselves and others feed them a pellet, such as your pet dog would eat, except it is formulated to meet the foxes nutritional needs.

Q. How long have foxes been raised in captivity?

A. Foxes have been raised in captivity dating back to the mid 1870's.

Fox Farm Calendar

January

This is normally the time that the rancher will start to check over the condition of the foxes to ensure that they are in Good body shape for going into the breeding season. Feeding and watering are the primary jobs to be done at this time of year. It is very important to keep a close eye on the body condition of your breeding herd. The quality of the feed is very important to ensure that your breeding herd is in good condition. It does not appear to present any problems for the breeder females if they are kept a little on the heavy side, but not too heavy.

This extra body fat helps them to get through the cold winter months a little better. It also provides a valuable reserve for the females when they give birth to a litter of 5 or 6 puppies. It is felt that this little bit of extra body fat will help her to maintain her strength during the 4 to 5 weeks she will be nursing those growing puppies. Another rather important factor to be considered is the housing of the breeding herd. When housing the herd in a shed, it must have adequate skylights so as to allow as much daylight in as possible. Another option is to house the breeding herd in pens out in the yard. The housing can play an important part in your breeding program. Insufficient daylight can either delay or, in some cases, even prevent the female from coming into a proper heat cycle. Besides providing plenty of daylight, the placement of your males and females, pups and adults can be a very significant part of your breeding program. A worst-case example is to house the males in one area and your females in another. This will minimize the production as many females will not come into heat and those that do may have a poor whelp rate. It has been found that if the males and females are intermixed, the females tend to come into a stronger heat cycle and this will result in better production. The ideal placement seems to be a male (pup or adult), pup female, adult female, pup female, male, etc. In summary, plenty of daylight, good nutrition and intermixing of males and females are essential for ensuring a successful breeding season.

February

This is a good time for the rancher to go over the last year's breeding records. It is very helpful to check out a list of preferred breedings along with a second and third choice option. The reason being that sometimes the male of choice won't breed the female of choice. Some other points to be considered when making out this list is the production performance of adults, and quality characteristics needed to be worked on. After a few years of breeding and raising foxes, the rancher will be able to see what desirable characteristics are being produced by each breeding. By using this information, it will help in producing more uniform quality pups.

Mid-January and early February is the time to start checking the females every five days until the female starts to show signs of coming into their cycle. Once the females start to show some signs of coming into heat, the females are then checked every three days. Once a female is starting to come into heat, that female must be checked every day. The rancher must try to remember how the females looked; he is looking for changes, not just a certain size, shape, or colour. It has been found that sometimes the pups do not tend to swell up as much as the adults at this time. When checking the females, a rut gage with a small probe is used, once a strong heat cycle has been detected. When the female has been bred, she may be taken out and placed in her whelping pen in the yard away from most of the activity.

March

From mid-February to mid-March, the majority of the foxes will be bred. It is important to keep breeding records up to date. Good record keeping is essential. If records are not kept, it very difficult to improve the production, as well as the quality from year to year. Good production, good quality and large size fox are the key factors in making the operation successful. The nest boxes are opened approximately two weeks prior to the female's whelp date. As the due date gets closer, it does not hurt to feed the females a little extra feed. Do watch to see that they are not packing their feed. It is not uncommon for the mother not to have eaten the day before or the day of whelping. If she does not start back eating by the next day she may be given a little bit of beef liver, this will usually get her back to eating.

April / May

These are the months in which most of the females will whelp, 52 days after being bred. Each day, all the new litters are checked for pup count and well being. The total number of live pups, as well as any dead pups are recorded. This total count is then later used in evaluating the males' performance. The new litters are then checked every day for the first three days and then just randomly to make sure that there are no problems. The mothers will start taking feed in to the pups at about three weeks of age. At this time the mothers are fed twice a day, once in the morning and again in the early evening after it has cooled down. At about four weeks of age, the puppies will start to come out and eat on their own. It is very important to make sure that they are given plenty of feed to avoid fighting amongst them.

June

The pups are weaned at six weeks of age, usually placed two to a pen. The puppies are treated at this time with Strongid-T for worms. A dose of 0.5 c.c. for each pup. Then a spray bottle is used to spray in each ear with baby oil to treat for ear mites. As soon as the pups are weaned they are put on a free choice dry pellet. Once all the pups are weaned, the mothers are then brought in to a shed for the summer months. The adults are also put on a free choice dry pellet at this time. Ranchers have had good success in producing large top quality pelts by using a free choice pellet feeding program for many years.

July

As the pups reach 10 to 12 weeks of age they should be vaccinated against distemper. Antibodies from the vaccinated vixens will be passed on to pups and protect the pups for the first few weeks. These same antibodies will destroy the vaccine virus if pups are vaccinated before they are 10 weeks old. Booster shots for distemper will also be given to all adult fox if being kept as breeders for next year. Adults to be pelted will probably not need to be re-vaccinated. Any adult foxes that are to be pelted should be in furring sheds by now. This is done to prevent any sun damage to the fur. Tattooing is done to all pups at the end of July, for ranch identification. This is also a requirement if raising pure bred registered foxes.

August

Good sanitation is always important, but as the year progresses, it becomes even more important to keep the area under the fox pens clean. Manure should be removed on a regular basis (at least every three to four weeks); if not, the resultant ammonia fumes can damage the fur. Keep pelting pens clean. Manure should not be allowed to build up on the wire pen bottoms. A close watch on the pens for any needed repair is very important. Broken wires may result in a fox being injured or fur being snagged.

September

It is at this time that plastic is put on the sides of the sheds. This helps keep out any direct sunlight and it also prevents any wind damage to the fur. Depending on shed design, it may be necessary to add additional sun block using wood or steel. Direct sunlight must be kept off the foxes to prevent off-coloured fur.

October

This is a good time to go around and clean out the nest boxes in the yard and re bed them with clean dry hay for the coming whelping season. They have had all summer to dry out and cleaning will be much easier now. This is also a good time to make any necessary repairs to the whelping pens.

November

By mid-November, the best pups are picked for the next year's breeding season. A careful balance of all factors is considered when making these decisions. Fur quality, production, size and temperament are all important factors. The importance of these will vary from year to year depending on what is already in the herd and what is needed to improve the herd. Each year the entire herd is graded, so that it is known exactly what is there and not what was thought to be there. A fox that graded out an "A" last year, could be a "B" this year. This is best done before pelting starts.

December

This will be one of the busiest months on the ranch. Early December is when the pelts become prime and it is time for the rancher to start to harvest his crop for the year. Adult males are pelted first, then adult females, early male pups next, then early female pups. Finally, late male pups are pelted, finishing with late female pups.