

U.S. Sen. Johnson: Leads colleagues in letter to USICA Conferees calling to protecting rural America, family farms

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OSHKOSH—On Thursday, U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), along with Sens. Mike Lee (R-Utah), Mitt Romney (R-Utah), Steve Daines (R-Mont.) and John Boozman (R-Ark.) sent a letter the Senate USICA Conferees requesting that they strike out a provision from the House America COMPETES Act that would prohibit raising mink for fur production.

The senators wrote, “This provision, which has no logical nexus to competing with China, would destroy multi-generational family farms in our home states. Approximately 1.4 million mink are commercially raised in 12 U.S. states. The 2020 mink farming crop created over \$47.4 million in revenue and supported thousands of jobs.”

The senators conclude, “In reality, the sponsors of the amendment generally oppose animal agriculture and are justifying the ban under the guise of a concern of COVID-19. Furthermore, American mink, which are highly prized on the world market, are a net export to China, making this ban incompatible with a bill intended to strengthen our trade and competitive stance globally. This language is a disservice to rural America, animal agriculture, and family farms, and we respectfully ask you to oppose any effort to include this ban in the final conference committee report for H.R.4521.”

Wisconsin has the largest presence of mink farms in the country. The 2021 Wisconsin mink farming crop was valued at \$40 million and supports over 250 full-

time employees and over 500 seasonal employees in rural communities. The total Wisconsin mink pelt inventory is estimated to be 1.5 million pelts with a valuation of \$75 million.

The letter can be found [here](#) and below.

April 21, 2022

Dear Senate Conferees:

We write to express our strong opposition to language included in the House of Representative's America COMPETES Act to ban the farming and trade of American mink.

This provision, which has no logical nexus to competing with China, would destroy multi-generational family farms in our home states. Approximately 1.4 million mink are commercially raised in 12 U.S. states. The 2020 mink farming crop created over \$47.4 million in revenue and supported thousands of jobs.

The "MINKS" amendment, Sec. 71108 of the House bill, amends the Lacey Act to prohibit the purchase, sale or transport of mink raised for fur production. The House adopted this amendment en bloc with no hearings or input from the American farmers, retailers, designers, or manufacturers whose livelihoods are impacted. Further, the amendment misuses the Lacey Act, a statute intended to protect the U.S. from the importation of invasive or injurious species. Instead, this amendment imposes an unprecedented ban on animal agriculture.

House sponsors of the amendment referenced COVID-19 as the basis for the ban on mink farming and trade. However, since early 2021, there were no clinical outbreaks on American mink farms, and instances of transmission to humans from minks were limited to isolated instances and posed no realistic threat to human or animal populations. Mink are raised on private farms, which are not open to the public, and maintain biosecurity measures. Covid-19 is not unique to mink and is found in feral cats, ferrets, whitetail deer, and several species of zoo animals. As the National Park Service recently stated: "the risk of getting COVID-19 from animals in the United States, including wildlife, is low."

In reality, the sponsors of the amendment generally oppose animal agriculture and are justifying the ban under the guise of a concern of COVID-19. Furthermore, American mink, which are highly prized on the world market, are a net export to China, making this ban incompatible with a bill intended to strengthen our trade and competitive stance globally.

This language is a disservice to rural America, animal agriculture, and family farms, and we respectfully ask you to oppose any effort to include this ban in the final conference committee report for H.R.4521.

Sincerely,