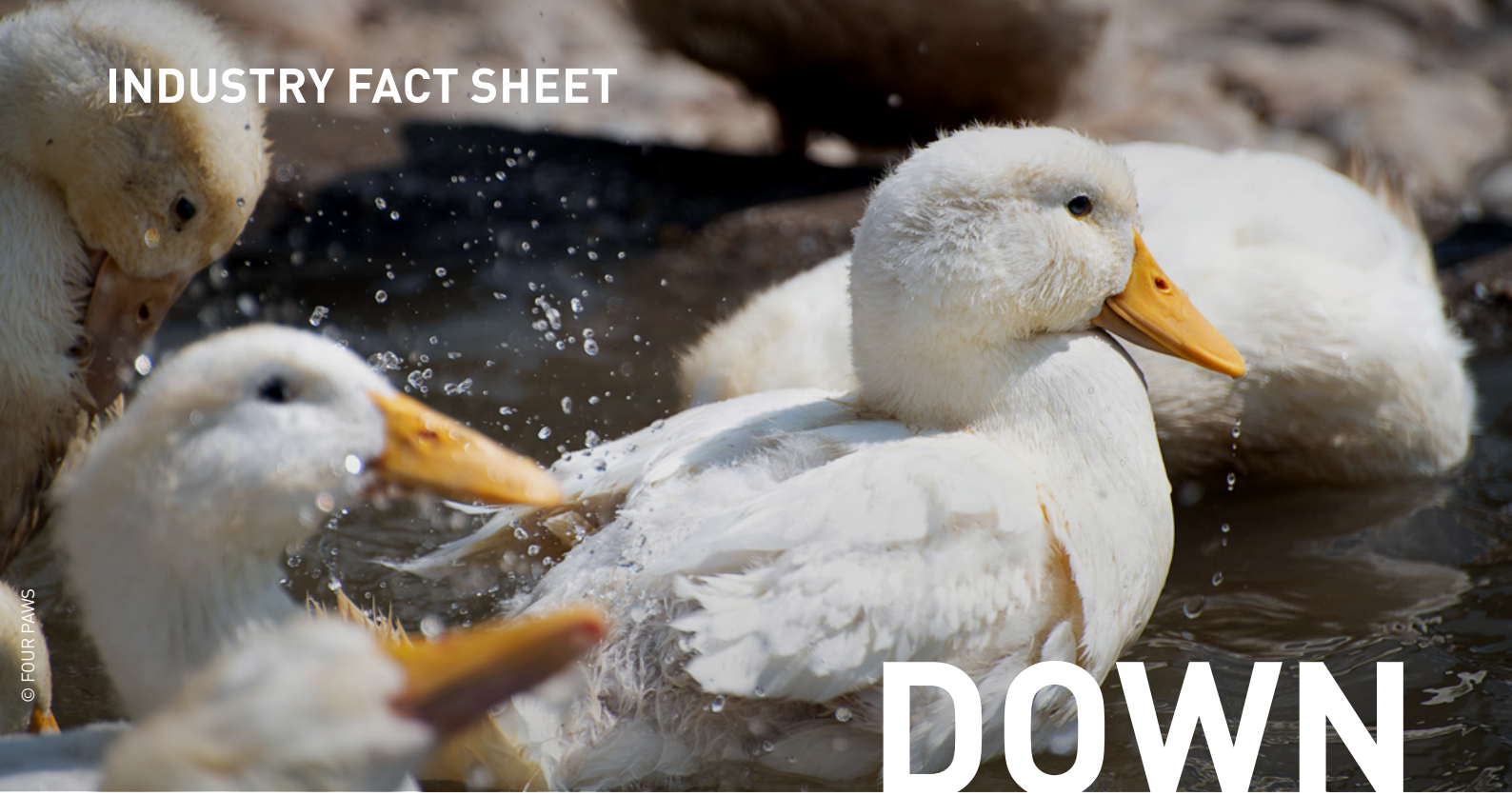

# INDUSTRY FACT SHEET

# DOWN

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Down, the light and fluffy layer beneath the feathers of geese and ducks, is commonly used as an insulator in fashion and outdoor wear such as jackets, coats, and vests, as well as in bedding. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), more than 5 billion ducks and geese were slaughtered for meat in 2024 alone[1]. Estimates suggest that global production of virgin down and feathers was at about 659,073 tonnes in 2024, with the majority of down being sourced from ducks (80-90%)[2]. In 2025, the value of the world trade in down and feathers reached USD 1.89 billion[3]. China is by far the largest producer of down, accounting for over 80% of global production[1,4].

## INDUSTRY ACTION

There is a growing number of brands that are committed to not using down obtained through live plucking, such as:

- ANOTHER TOMORROW
- BODEN
- BRAX
- CHLOÉ
- CLOSED
- ESPRIT
- EVERLANE
- FJÄLLRÄVEN
- H&M
- G-STAR RAW
- NAPAPIJRI

## LARGEST PRODUCERS[5]

## LARGEST IMPORTERS[5]

## WHAT BRANDS CAN DO

### Refine

Given the ongoing lack of parent farm traceability and the continued risk of severe welfare violations such as live feather plucking, FOUR PAWS advises choosing 100% certified recycled down as the only currently dependable option, if brands still choose to source down. Until standards close critical gaps and reliably ensure full supply chain transparency and meaningful welfare protections, certified virgin down cannot be considered acceptable to FOUR PAWS.

### Reduce

FOUR PAWS calls on all brands to set goals to both improve the level of welfare ensured, while working to reduce their use of animal-derived materials. While certifications and usage of recycled materials can help to ensure better animal welfare, any use of animals for commercial means brings inherent risks to their welfare. The best way for brands to reduce animal welfare risk is to move to animal-free alternatives.

### Replace

Use down alternatives such as, or similar to, Thermolite[6], FLWRDWN™ [7], and PrimaLoft[8].

### Be transparent

With consumers increasingly demanding better animal welfare, there has never been a better time to communicate your steps to stop animals suffering in your supply chain, or to remove animal-derived materials altogether. Ideally, this information forms part of a robust and comprehensive animal welfare policy, which is clearly communicated to suppliers.

### Cruelty revealed

In 2022, FOUR PAWS revealed footage which shows that live plucking is still a prevalent occurrence in the global production of down and feather, a practice that is spilling into fashion supply chains. Investigative footage showed live plucking occurred at multiple farms in Poland, including parent farms, where there is a higher risk of geese being plucked alive. The footage reveals intense suffering endured by geese, who have visibly suffered skin lesions, bruises, and other injuries, and broken or dislocated wing bones. Animals lay immobile – or even dead in some cases. Severe vocalisations and wing flapping by geese in the footage also signalled their distress.

### Did you know...?

Geese kept on breeding or "parent" farms are considered most at risk of live plucking because they live for several years and develop larger, more mature down clusters with higher fill power, qualities that are highly valued in the down industry[9]. Yet certification schemes, such as Responsible Down Standard (RDS) and DOWNPASS do not currently mandate the auditing of these farms. This omission allows down producers to purchase eggs or hatchlings from high-risk sources while continuing to supply certified material. In addition, none of the down standards currently meet the overall baseline identified in the FOUR PAWS Certification Insights Report.

# ANIMAL WELFARE ISSUES

## Live feather plucking:

Waterfowl used for down can be restrained and suffer dreadfully while their feathers and down are torn out, as workers quickly pluck the animals to produce the most expensive and high quality down. Rough handling can cause fractures & injuries that are either left untreated or are sewn together without anaesthetic or other pain medication[10].

## Foie gras & killing of female ducklings:

Many birds used for down come from the foie gras industry, where they are force-fed with metal tubes forced down their throats, multiple times a day, which causes the birds' livers to swell up to ten times their natural size[11]. This procedure is mainly imposed on male ducks, because their liver is larger. Female ducklings are killed instead – just for economic reasons[12].

## No water access:

Waterfowl need water access to bathe in, perform natural swimming behaviour, comfort behaviour (preening) and for beak hygiene. However, they are rarely provided with such opportunities in commercial keeping systems[13]. While we understand the challenges of providing water access, this is a key issue that must be dealt with long-term.

## Mutilations:

Painful interventions, such as beak trimming and wing clipping, are carried out on waterfowl, mostly without anaesthesia and pain relief [13,14]. The interventions are deemed necessary by the industry to mitigate the adverse effects of poor husbandry and inappropriate keeping conditions – however, we believe that the systems must be adapted to the animals and not vice versa.

## High stocking density / cage systems:

Waterfowl often live in cramped, inappropriate housing systems – either in cages or in overstocked barns. High stocking densities are a major problem as crowd-induced stress is a common cause of death. It also leads to injuries, lameness, feather pecking, poor air quality and corresponding respiratory problems[15]. There is also the issue of group keeping of Muscovy ducks. They are solitary animals and prefer to live in trees and bushes, therefore their basic needs cannot be met in industrial husbandry systems[13].

## Live animal transport and cruel slaughter methods:

Waterfowl are often transported long distances, for several hours or days, under disastrous conditions; causing extreme fear, stress, injures and even death[16]. These journeys are usually undertaken for slaughter, including to countries which allow inappropriate slaughter methods without prior stunning that also lead to severe suffering of the animals during the slaughter process[17].

## Environmental concerns

Intensification of the poultry (and waterfowl) industry has led to major environmental impacts. Slaughterhouses release enormous amounts of waste into the environment, polluting land and surface waters as well as posing a serious human-health risk. Poultry by-products and waste may contain up to 100 distinct species of microorganisms, including pathogens, in contaminated feathers, feet, and intestinal contents. Antibiotics, pesticides, and hormones leaked into waterways are found highly likely to have long-term ecosystem effects[18].

FOUR PAWS calls on fashion companies to stop using down from live plucked geese and ducks, to reduce the number of animal-derived materials used overall in favour of sustainable animal-free alternatives, and to ensure that the animals which continue to be used within domesticated animal supply chains experience an excellent state of welfare.

For more information, review the FOUR PAWS policy development guidelines or reach out to us directly via wearitkind@four-paws.org

> **Together we can drive an animal-friendly fashion future, and create a world where people treat animals with respect, empathy and understanding.**

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Artwork: FOUR PAWS | 05/2026