

INDUSTRY FACT SHEET

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DOWN

Down, the light fluffy coating beneath the feathers of geese and ducks, is commonly used as an insulator in outdoor wear such as jackets, coats, and vests. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), between 2016 and 2020 an estimated 30 billion ducks and geese on average were slaughtered each year for meat. Meanwhile, the global down and feather production volume in 2020 was estimated at around 532,528 tonnes.¹ In 2020, the value of the world trade in down and feathers was USD 1.22 billion,² and the global market is expected to reach a value of USD 8.24 billion by 2026.³ The largest producer of down is China, accounting for 80% of global production.

A growing number of brands are banning down that is derived from live plucking:

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|--------------|-------------------------|
| COLOMBIA | MARMOT |
| EDDIE BAUER | MONTANE |
| FJÄLLRÄVEN | NORTH FACE |
| HELLY HANSEN | OUTDOOR RESEARCH |
| H&M | PATAGONIA |
| KATHMANDU | ULTRALIGHT OUTDOOR GEAR |
| MAMMUT | VAUDE |

"Down and feathers must not be removed from live animals. Animals must not have been live plucked or molt harvested at any stage in the supply chain. Down and feather must not be from animals that are force fed during their life for any reason including the production of foie gras. [These principles] are zero-tolerance issues and must be met in order to become or continue to be a Patagonia Traceable Down supplier."

Patagonia Traceable Down Standard 2013

INDUSTRY ACTION

LARGEST PRODUCERS



LARGEST IMPORTERS⁷





Refine

Ensure to only source down from suppliers certified by the Responsible Down Standard or an equivalent standard and go the extra mile to ensure parent farms are also audited to ensure full supply chain traceability. If full certification has yet to be accomplished, publish a time-bound target to achieve this goal. Alternatively, use re-engineered down, made by certified recycled down products. For those brands who continue to use down, we actively encourage you to participate in multi-stakeholder initiatives to improve the level of animal welfare within the down certifications currently available, especially to call for parent farms to be included.



Reduce

FOUR PAWS calls on all brands to set goals to reduce their use of animal-derived materials. While certification can help to ensure better animal welfare, any use of animals for commercial means brings inherent risks to their welfare.



Replace

The best way for brands to reduce animal welfare risk is to move to animal-free alternatives. Replace down with alternatives such as or similar to Thermolite⁸, FLWRDWN^{TM9}, and PrimaLoft.¹⁰



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 new 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 from 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 signaled their distress.

Did you know...?

Around 96% of down and feather on the market is exposed to the risks of live plucking. Due to the global nature of down and feather production and the convoluted supply chains involved, fashion brands that source untraced or uncertified down leave themselves most vulnerable to this and other animal welfare risks.

Animal welfare issues

- Hidden from view, geese and ducks are restrained while their feathers and down are torn out without the use of any pain relief. This process, known as live plucking, can be repeated every five weeks as new down and feathers start to grow.
- Rough handling of geese and ducks during live plucking causes wing and leg fractures. The live plucking process itself leaves open wounds. These are either left untreated or are sewn together without anaesthetic.
- Many birds used for down come from the foie gras industry, where at around eight weeks of age, they are force-fed with metal tubes forced down their throats to pump their stomachs full of food – far exceeding what they could eat naturally. This process is repeated multiple times a day and causes the birds' livers to swell up to ten times their natural size and can cause organ failure, injuries to the birds' beaks and throats, and pneumonia.⁴
- Other welfare concerns for geese and ducks include lack of access to water, lameness, feather pecking, painful bill trimming and other mutilations, high stocking densities, poor air quality and the corresponding respiratory problems.⁵ There is also the issue of group keeping of the otherwise solitary Muscovy ducks.
- Many of the animals' basic needs, including access to adequate food, water, and veterinary care can be neglected, as well as ensuring the possibility to express their natural behaviour and positive mental experiences.

Environmental concerns

Intensification of the poultry industry has led to multiple 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 micro-organisms, 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.⁶



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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](#).

“ 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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References

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