

LEATHER

Leather is utilised throughout the fashion industry and approximately 553 million sheep, 493 million goats, and 371 million cattle¹ are used every year to meet demand. The leather apparel industry is worth approximately USD 6.15 billion dollars², but an almost complete lack of traceability throughout the leather industry makes it incredibly difficult for buyers to know the treatment of the animal that was killed to make it. Without this information, brands are completely in the dark, unable to have any confidence in the ethics of the leather products they purchase.

"We're phasing out leather completely by 2023, as it conflicts with our efforts to minimise our impact due to high levels of methane emissions from the livestock."

Ganni founder Nicolaj Reffstrup



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Animal welfare issues

- Animals killed for leather production have little or no protection during their lives or at the time of death. Both the farming and the slaughter of these animals involve violent and brutal treatment. This cruelty occurs out of public sight and is quite often within the laws of the countries in which the animals are farmed.
- Many calves, kids and lambs spend their lives in highly stressful and isolated industrial environments, before being slaughtered for their skin which, as they are still just babies, is highly supple and sought after for luxury products.

Many luxury and high-street brands are now offering animal-free leather, such as:

ADIDAS	HERMES
ASOS	HUGO BOSS
BOTTEGA VENETA	PRADA
CHANEL	TOMMY HILFGER
CHLOE	TOP SHOP
DR MARTINS	VEJA
FRENCH CONNECTION	ZARA
GUCCI	

And an ever-growing number of brands have committed to only sell animal-free leather, including:

GANNI	NATIVE SHOES
MIOMOJO	NANUSKA
JILL MILAN	MAREI 1998
STELLA MCCARTNEY	ROMBAUT
MATT & NAT	BRAVE GENTLEMEN
SARAH REGENSBURGER	

✓ Refine

FOUR PAWS is against the use of leather from intensive farming practices and concerned about general use, in part, as there are no textiles-specific certifications available today that can significantly mitigate animal welfare risk.

Brands who would like to begin sourcing from Leather Impact Accelerator-approved suppliers or farms should only use certifications categorised in the highest tier 'Category D', however this initiative is in its beginning phase and brands will need to carefully consider supply and procurement timelines prior to making public commitments to utilising this scheme. Especially in the case of leather, brands should take extra care to ensure supply chain traceability throughout all stages of farming and processing.

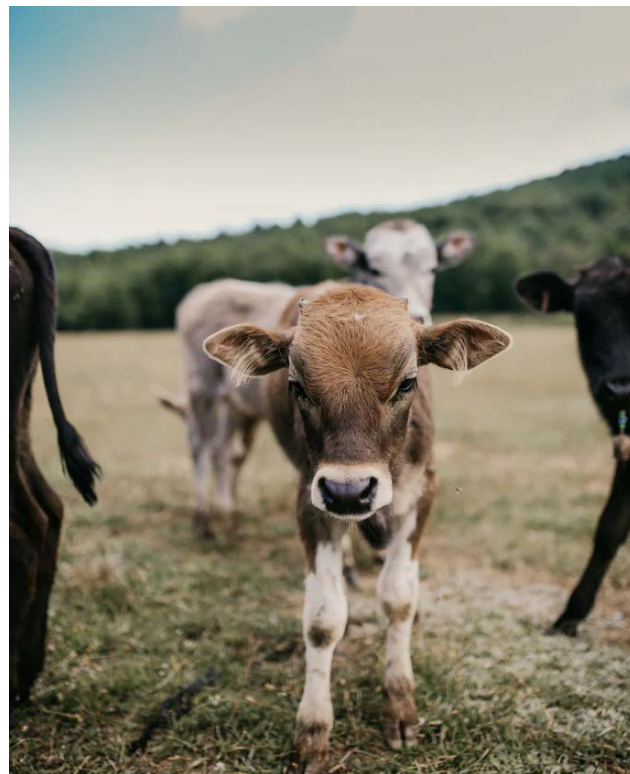
Brands should exclude sales of leather from aborted (sporadic or induced) animals, i.e., slink and karakul. For those brands who continue to use leather, we actively encourage you to participate in multi-stakeholder initiatives to include/improve the level of animal welfare ensured via the leather certifications available today.

✓ Reduce and Replace

Until the welfare of animals used in leather production can be properly assured, we recommend that brands reduce and replace animal-derived leather with innovative and humane alternatives such as Piñatex made using pineapple leaves⁵, or with leather made from apples⁶, mushrooms⁷, cactus⁸, coffee⁹, or bio-fabricated leathers¹⁰. These products are not only free from animal cruelty, but they are also often kinder to the environment¹¹.

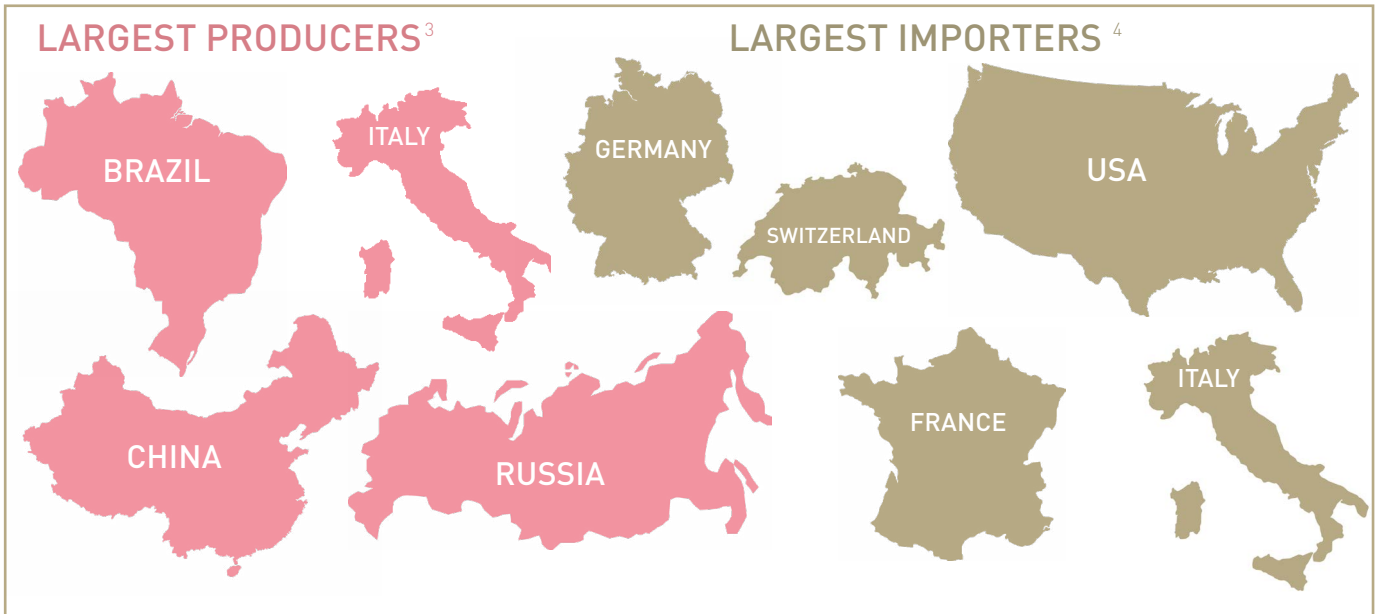
✓ Be transparent

With consumers increasingly demanding transparency¹², communicating the steps you take to improve traceability and protect animals in your supply chain has never been more important for you or your customers. Ensure to transparently communicate your current use of animal-derived materials and your timeframe for supply chain improvements. Ideally this information would form part of a robust and comprehensive overarching animal welfare policy, which is clearly communicated to suppliers.



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- Prior to slaughter, animals are often transported for very long periods in cramped, stifling, and unsanitary conditions, and they experience multiple abuses during the transport process. Due to rapid processing at the slaughterhouses (up to 400 animals per hour), some animals are often inadequately stunned (or not stunned at all) before slaughter and may still be alive during the skinning process¹³.
- Leather often comes from countries with no animal welfare laws and horrific track records of animal cruelty, where they are sometimes forced to walk for hundreds of miles to slaughterhouses. It is not uncommon for chili peppers, salt, or tobacco to be rubbed into the eyes of exhausted cows or to break their tails to force them to continue walking. Many animals don't survive the journey and die of hunger, thirst, or injuries¹⁴.
- Animals raised for leather are routinely subjected to painful procedures without the use of pain relief or anaesthesia such as castration, de-horning, branding, and mulesing¹⁵.
- Intensive farming systems, through which most leather is produced, involve severe animal cruelty and such systems subject animals to systemic suffering, pain, and distress. Many of the animals' basic needs, including access to adequate food, water, shelter, and veterinary care can be neglected, as well as ensuring their ability to express natural behaviour and have positive mental experiences.



Environmental concerns

Animal agriculture is responsible for an estimated 14.5 per cent¹⁶ of greenhouse gas emissions globally. The cattle industry causes most of these emissions, and 80 per cent¹⁷ of deforestation in the Amazon. The tanning of hides for leather production is a highly toxic process that can cause significant harm to both the environment, and the people working in the industry. Chromium tanning, a process that results in a highly toxic blend of chemicals and gases is used in approximately 90% of leather production globally¹⁸. In developing countries that do not have adequate environmental protection laws, the untreated toxic wastewater, potentially containing chromium, lead, arsenic, and acids, is often discharged directly into local waterways¹⁹, with disastrous impacts.

Cow leather is also a key contributor to water scarcity²⁰, global warming, and eutrophication, a nutrient overload in water sources due to runoff. Overall, cow leather has been found to be one of the most, if not the most, environmentally damaging materials in production^{21, 22}, and it continually performs poorly on the Higg Index, with most leathers receiving a poor ranking due to factors including water use, pollution, and contribution to climate change²³.

FOUR PAWS calls on fashion companies to reduce their use of leather 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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