

A Manifesto for Leather on the occasion of COP29

Buy better, buy less, buy leather

Consumption is one of the key drivers for man-made climate change. Consumers are driven to want more, buy more and ultimately discard more and more products, many of which are of poor quality, have short life spans and are designed to be discarded and replaced, rather than repair or repurposed. There is no better example of this than the fast fashion industry which uses a claimed 350 million barrels of oil a year and produces 282 billion kilogrammes of greenhouse gases from the production of polyester alone. Some 100 billion garments are produced annually with as many as 45 billion never being worn. Of those that are, most are discarded after 7-10 wears, resulting in 92 million tonnes waste going to land fill every year¹. This situation is only expected to get worse, with Textile Exchange reporting that consumption of polyester alone, rose from 63 million tonnes in 2022 to 71 million tonnes in 2023². Fashion is responsible for approximately 10% of total global greenhouse gas emissions and despite The Fashion Charter, set up in 2018 to provide a pathway to net-zero emissions by 2050, emissions remain unsustainably high.

Fashion is not the only sector blighted by an excess of consumption and the related environmental impacts, including climate change. It is no surprise then, that governments around the world are developing regulations intended to reduce the impact of the products that we buy every day, driving improvement in sustainable design, circularity and extended producer responsibility. Regulations like the requirement for Digital Product Passports (DPP) in the draft EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Products regulation (ESPR) will give consumers greater insight on the impact of the production of their products, as well as their expected lifespan, repairability and end of life options, allowing for better, more sustainable purchases. Keeping products for longer due to their innate durability and potential for repair will give consumers the opportunity to buy better and importantly, buy less.

Leather is an ideal material to meet these ambitions. Leather utilises an unavoidable by-product to manufacture a versatile, durable material that can be used to make long-lasting, repairable products with a huge potential for circularity. Owners will cherish their leather products, repairing them and even passing them on to subsequent owners. Products made from long-lived leather can have an undeniably positive action in reducing the climate impact of fashion and other sectors. Indeed, research has found that the climate change impacts of natural fibres in garments were negative if the number of wears was increased by 50% because emissions associated with the manufacture of a new synthetic garment were averted³.

However, leather faces considerable challenges, not only from the nonsensical claims of agenda groups, which undermine brand and consumer confidence but also well-intentioned but misguided regulatory efforts. Leather is one of the derived products listed in Annex 1 of the EU Deforestation Regulation, despite there being no evidence that it is a driver of deforestation. Indeed, analysis by the School of Advanced Studies Sant'Anna has shown that demand for hides has no direct influence on the number of cattle reared and slaughtered and as such, does not drive deforestation⁴. Furthermore, the study found that the impact of the EUDR on the leather sector could be devastating and achieve nothing for the reduction of deforestation. It could however, result in

¹ <https://earth.org/statistics-about-fast-fashion-waste/>

² <https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2024/09/Materials-Market-Report-2024.pdf>

³ Stephen G. Wiedemann *et al*, Resources, Conservation and Recycling (2023), Volume 198, 107119

⁴ https://www.euroleather.com/images//documents/Socio-economic_and_environmental_analysis_of_the_effects_of_the_EUDR_on_the_European_leather_sector.pdf

millions of hides being discarded to rot in landfill, with the associated emissions of greenhouse gases.

Similarly, giving consumers greater understanding of the expected lifetime of their products is to be welcomed but it will be essential that the measures used are evidence-based and realistic. The current proposals in the EU's draft Product Environment Category Rules for Apparel & Footwear, which may form the basis of the DPP under the EPSR, are not and in no way represent the true lifespan of leather goods. If consumers are not told the true story of leather, they may simply opt for cheaper, short-lived synthetic products, driving consumption of fossil fuels and waste.

The undersigned note that the Framework for Action proposed by the Presidency for COP 29 includes a call for an 'Inclusive process for inclusive outcomes'. We wholeheartedly support this call. The leather industry is constantly working towards ever greater sustainability and circularity, but our efforts will be undermined if regulators and brands do not give proper consideration to the real impacts and benefits of natural materials like leather. We humbly request that the voice of the leather sector be heard in the development of the policies and regulations needed to combat manmade climate change.

Therefore, we, the undersigned organisations, call on the COP to endorse our call to:

- Recognise the cyclical, climate efficient nature of leather and its potential for a positive contribution to reducing the climate impacts of consumer products. In particular, a full and proper impact assessment of the role of leather as a driver of deforestation and the development of reliable measures of the lifespan of materials and products and their impact on consumption
- Support LCA methodologies that accurately account for the environmental impact of all materials, including end of life properties and the consequences of use and substitution.
- In keeping with the aspiration for reduced consumption, greater circularity and reduced waste, to promote 'slow fashion', durable products, and items that can be used many times, repaired and refurbished, and last for years.
- Wherever feasible to encourage the use of natural fibres like leather and reduce unnecessary reliance on fossil-fuel-based materials.

Signatories to the Leather Manifesto

- Alliance Française du Cuir (AFC)
- Asociación Española del Curtido (ACEXPIEL)
- Associação Portuguesa dos Industriais de Curtumes (APIC)
- Australian Hide Skin and Leather Exporters' Association Inc (ASHLEA)
- Centre for the Brazilian Tanning Industry (CICB)
- Centro Tecnológico das Indústrias do Couro (CTIC)
- China Leather Industry Association (CLIA)
- Confederation of National Associations of Tanners and Dressers of the European Community (COTANCE)
- Fédération Française des Cuirs et Peaux (FFCP)
- Fédération Française Tannerie Megisserie (FFTM)
- International Council of Hides, Skins and Leather Traders Association (ICSHLTA)
- International Council of Tanners (ICT)

- International Union of Leather Technologists and Chemists Societies (IULTCS)
- Leather Cluster Barcelona (LCB)
- Leather & Hide Council of America (LHCA)
- Leather Naturally (LN)
- Leather UK (LUK)
- One 4 Leather (O4L)
- Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists (SLTC)
- Sustainable Leather Foundation (SLF)
- Türkiye Deri Sanayicileri Derneği (TDSD)
- UNIC Conceria Italiana (UNIC)
- Verband der Deutschen Lederindustrie e.V. (VDL)
- Wirtschaftsverband Häute/Leder (WHL)
- Zimbabwe Leather Development Council (ZLDC)