

**REAL
LEATHER.
STAY
DIFFERENT.**

REAL LEATHER:

THE FIRST CHOICE FOR SUSTAINABILITY... AND STYLE.

Real leather doesn't just look good, it is better for the environment than its alternatives in many, many ways. Because hides are a low-value by-product, every one used is one less being sent to landfill. Because it is natural it does not shed long-lasting micro-fibres that enter the food chain. And because leather is so durable, each product can last a lifetime. You may choose leather because it is stylish, but you can also rest assured it is sustainable.

L&HCA works to establish best practice and to share that with its sister organisations around the world. Using leather:

- **REDUCES WASTE TODAY & TOMORROW:** US hides account for less than two per cent of a cow's total value. They are not often rendered which is why, without the leather industry, they end up as waste. The US manages to salvage 85% of cattle hides, but this still leaves some 5.5 million hides destined for landfill. Each hide weighs an average of 25kg which means the US leather industry saves more than 780,000 tonnes of waste annually. Worldwide 40% of all hides are thrown away. (1)

Cared for properly leather can last indefinitely whilst synthetic items have a much shorter lifecycle and, once disposed of, can take 500 years or more to biodegrade versus just 25-50 for leather. (2)

- **REDUCES CONSUMPTION & OFFERS AN ALTERNATIVE TO FAST FASHION:** Cared for, leather is one of the most adaptable and longest lasting materials there is. Leather bags, clothes, footwear and furniture, if maintained properly, can last indefinitely.

Fast fashion means more consumption; a leather item can last a lifetime. This is what we call 'slow-style'.

- **REDUCES RELIANCE ON FOSSIL FUELS:** Synthetic materials are often produced using petroleum-based plastics, many are now looking at how we can reduce our use of fossil fuels and return to more natural alternatives. (3)

Synthetics do not last as long as leather and may shed microplastics during their lifetimes and after disposal. Production of synthetic alternatives also produces toxic compounds that remain in the environment for many years. (4,8)

- **CUTS CARBON FROM WASTE & FROM FASHION:** Buying leather means you contributing to an estimated annual saving of 2.5 million tonnes of greenhouse gases every year, the emissions that would have otherwise been created by the decay of hides sent to landfill. The carbon footprint of leather production has been steadily reduced over the last 30 years, and we are still striving to make further reductions.

Once purchased leather's long lifespan means that the carbon footprint of leather clothing is much smaller, over the whole of its life, than that of alternative materials.

US tanneries are independently audited by the Leather Working Group in conjunction with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and using evaluation criteria developed with WWF and Greenpeace. (5)

L&HCA, with international partners, is working with leading conservation organisation The National Wildlife Federation to develop a programme to promote zero-deforestation agricultural production in the tropics. This will ensure, for example, that no leather comes from cattle grown on deforested lands. (6)

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The international leather industry called, in October 2020, for a review of the Higg Index ⁽⁷⁾ calculations of the environmental impact of leather in the fashion industry. Alongside concerns of lack of transparency the industry noted that the Index fails to recognise that hides are a product that if not used by the industry go to landfill, and does not consider the lifespan of leather items. Without considering whole of life, a single use disposable item, for example a plastic fork, will have a better environmental rating than a metal fork offering many years of use.

L&HCA is working to secure up-to-date data on the whole-of-life carbon footprint of leather products and to assess the use of water and chemicals in US production in the US, which have been falling year on year.

This factsheet is produced by the Leather and Hide Council of America (L&HCA), established to promote the US leather industry which is responsible for a significant proportion of the international trade in hides. The L&HCA works to establish best practice in US leather production and to share this worldwide. Figures quoted refer to the USA unless otherwise stated.

SOURCE:

- (1) 2020 LHCA Infographic
- (2) <https://www.wwf.org.au/news/blogs/the-lifecycle-of-plastics#gs.iox1n7>
- (3) www.industrialprogress.com/your-clothes-are-fracked/
- (4) epa.gov/dioxin/learn-about-dioxin/
- (5) <https://www.leatherworkinggroup.com/>
- (6) <https://leatheruk.org/deforestation-is-leather-to-blame/>
- (7) <https://apparelcoalition.org/the-higg-index/> and https://internationalleathermaker.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/9032/Leather_industry_calls_for_Higg_Index_score_suspension_for_leather.html
- (8) 2020 LHCA factsheet

