

# Leather is Not a Meat Byproduct – A Hard Look At the Leather Industry

The mention of fur causes the majority of us to scowl a little. Most of us know how cruel, barbaric, and inhumane the fur trade is. But what about leather? It's time to shed light on the leather industry.

Leather is a cloth-like material made from the hide or skin of an animal. Cows provide the bulk of leather we use, but goats, pigs, and sheep are in high demand, and reptile skins are also sold at a premium. If you're like most consumers, you assume that leather is a byproduct of the meat industry, save the reptile skins.

And, the fact is that most of the cow leather that comes from cows is taken from those cows slaughtered for their meat or from dairy cows that no longer produce enough milk. But, that's not the whole story. It's assumed that the hide is 'leftover', and it will go to waste if it's not used. This is a common misconception. Also, much of cow leather and in many other animals hides that are produced and sold do come from animals that are killed primarily, or only, for their skins. Leather makes up around 10% of a cows total value. This means that the hide of a cow, not the meat, is the most valuable part of the cow, pound for pound.

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The demand for leather is increasing, along with the demand for more exotic, luxurious leather goods. The more sought-after, expensive, and "luxurious" (i.e. soft and thin) hide-material comes from veal calves. The leather sometimes comes from unborn calves taken prematurely from their mother's

wombs. In countries where animal protection laws are weak or non-existent, animals are often killed only for their hides, even when endangered or threatened. Thank consumer demand.

Leather production damages local ecosystems. The chemicals used to produce leather are extremely volatile. The toxic waste from making leather is often dumped illegally, polluting groundwater and rivers.

India and China are two of the biggest producers of leather in the world, and welfare laws there are either non-existent, lax, or seldom if ever enforced. China is the world's leading exporter of leather, and they aren't picky about their choices of animal hide. An estimated two million cats and dogs are killed for their skins, and most consumers have no idea what country these hides are coming from, or even from which animals the hide came from.

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Even worse, the production of leather involves unbelievable barbarity and cruelty. Even the animals one would suspect were hunted (pythons, alligators, lizards, stingrays, etc) may have been farm raised for their skins in abysmal conditions. In India, a PETA investigation witnessed the practice of breaking the cows' tails and rubbing chili pepper and tobacco into the cow's eyes in order to force them to get up and walk after collapsing from exhaustion on the way to their slaughterhouse.

Let's take a moment to consider that last fact. Can you imagine going out like that? Can you imagine your last days on this miserable planet consisting walking to your death at the behest of chili peppers and tobacco in the eyes? We're well past believing that animals don't feel pain, right?

Much of the most heinous abuses are due to the fact that the

world leather trade is mostly clandestine and illegal – and the authorities that could stop it are routinely bribed to let it continue. Hindus hold the cow in special esteem, and Jains, a hindu sect, regard all life as so sacred that they avoid hurting insects. But investigations have shown that all of India's major communities are complicit in the cruel treatment of their sacred cows.

If you don't want to contribute to the leather industry, don't! Natural and synthetic cruelty-free alternatives are available, Checkout MooShoes, Beyond Skin, Vegan Essentials, Alternative Outfitters and Vaute Couture. Vote with your wallet, read the labels, Google the companies, and support smaller ethical companies that consider their impact on the planet.

## **Excerpt from Peta's *14 Things the Leather Industry Doesn't Want You to See***

**1. Every year, the global leather industry slaughters more than a billion animals.**



*Bovina, Texas | CGP Grey | CC BY 2.0*

**2. If you're wearing leather, it probably came from China or India.**



In China, there are no penalties for abusing animals on farms.

**3. Along with cattle, other animals—including sheep, dogs, and cats—are killed for their skin in China.**



Dog and cat leather is often intentionally mislabeled, so you could be wearing dog leather and not even know it.

## **4. In India, animals fare no better.**



India's animal-protection laws are also rarely enforced.

## **5. In India, cows are forced to march for days—without food or water—to their own deaths.**



## **6. Cattle who collapse from**

exhaustion have their tails broken or chili peppers rubbed into their eyes in order to force them to keep moving.



7. There's virtually no way to tell where leather comes from.



Even if a product says that it was made in Italy or the U.S., the raw materials probably came from India or China.

Click here for the rest of *14 Things the Leather Industry Doesn't Want You to See*

### **Sources:**

- *The Global Leather Trade* – PETA
- *Vegan Guide to Leather Alternatives 2018 Edition* – The Vegan Resource Group
- *Is your leather from China? It might be made of dog or cat skin* – The Guardian