

# U.S. HIDE, SKIN & LEATHER

## A GLOBAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY

### In Brief:

The volume of hides and skins collected as a by-product from the meat industry is significant. The leather industry purchases these by-products, which otherwise would mostly go to waste, and transforms them into one of the most versatile and attractive materials on earth. Leather — a protective, versatile, durable, breathable material — is the best way of dealing with the high volume of hides and skins that have to be sustainably and affordably managed.

### Environmental Stewardship: A commitment to continuous improvement

- The U.S. meat industry generated 31.1 million cattle hides in 2016, along with 4.4 million pig skins and 2.3 million goat and sheep skins. The leather industry purchases these hides and skins – which otherwise would go to waste – and transforms them into leather.
- There is no better alternative to using discarded hides and skins than to make leather. The presence of large volumes of perishable animal waste would have serious consequences on solid waste systems and place tremendous pressure on the environment.
- In the U.S., the hide, skin and leather industry was able to make use of more than 30 million cattle hides in 2016, resulting in nearly 908,000 tonnes (more than 2 billion pounds) and €36.4 million (\$40 million) saved in waste management in just one year.
- The hide, skin and leather tanning industry – which treats the raw skins and hides of animals to produce leather – adheres to a comprehensive system of federal regulations covering clean water, clean air, waste disposal, and contaminated land cleanup.
- “Reduce, reuse, recycle” is a widely-adopted strategy in leather tanning. Some hide processors and leather tanners are moving toward renewable energy sources, as well as renewable vegetable dyes and renewable tanning chemicals.
- On a global scale, water consumption for the production of leather from bovine hides has declined by about 37% in the past 25 years from approximately 60 cubic-metres per tonne of hides, to 38 cubic-metres per tonne.
- While there are alternatives to leather products, most are made from non-renewable sources (oil), which are environmentally depleting, while leather is a readily available by-product that would otherwise be wasted.



- In the U.S., research is underway to improve the quality of animal hides and reduce environmental impacts of hide and leather processing. Specifically, new commercial methods are being explored for curing hides and skins that reduce salt usage, which traditionally has been used to preserve the tissue while in transit.

### **Social Responsibility: A commitment to future generations**

- From shoes to furniture and automobiles to sporting goods, manufacturers depend on high-quality leather products to remain competitive in today's marketplace.
- As a by-product of the meat industry, the demand for meat and dairy consumption is the primary driver behind the supply and availability of hides and skins for leather production, rather than the consumption needs of the leather sector.
- The industry has instituted a number of initiatives to ensure corporate responsibility throughout the supply chain. For example, started in 2009, the Tannery of the Year awards program and *World Leather* magazine have highlighted the extensive work which tanners around the world are carrying out in terms of corporate social responsibility and sound environmental practices.



### **Economic Profitability: A commitment to long-term viability**

- As demand for meat around the world continues to grow, the leather industry provides an important service to society and constitutes a lucrative part of the economy.
- The U.S. Hide, Skin and Leather Association (USHSLA) estimates that more than 26,000 people in the U.S. are involved in the processing of hides and wet blue (semi-finished) tanning. This includes those employed at hide plants, tanneries, exporters, agents, and others.
- The U.S. exports 95% of all hide and wet blue leather products it produces.
- In the past few years, U.S. hides, skins and wet blue leather exports doubled in value from €1.27 billion (\$1.39 billion) in 2009 to a record high of €2.6 billion (\$2.85) billion in 2014.

### **Resources:**

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Leather Industries of America, <https://www.leatherusa.com/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

Nothing to Hide, <http://nothing-to-hide.org/>

United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, <https://www.nass.usda.gov/>

U.S. Hide, Skin & Leather Association, <http://www.ushsla.org/>

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For more information see: [thesustainabilityalliance.us](http://thesustainabilityalliance.us)  
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