

C S R
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

A DYNAMIC REALITY
WITHIN THE FRENCH
LEATHER INDUSTRY



EDITORIAL 4
For an ever more ethical and responsible
leather industry: Frank Boehly

FOREWORD 6
Leather, a waste product our companies
transform into a quality product

CONTENTS

**CSR, A DYNAMIC REALITY WITHIN THE
FRENCH LEATHER INDUSTRY** 8

Chapter 1: The certification of CSR 10 - 11
practices in the leather industry, the ISO
26000 standard and others

Chapter 2: The leather industry is 12 - 17
committed to protecting the environment:
water purification, air quality,
reduction and reuse of waste products

Chapter 3: Providing information and 18 - 25
ensuring consumer safety

Chapter 4: The issue of animal welfare: 26 - 31
the industry's ethical duty

Chapter 5: Maintaining people at the 32 - 37
heart of the leather professions

CONCLUSION 38

Approaches presented at the 2019
Sustainable Leather Forum



EDITORIAL

FOR AN EVER MORE ETHICAL AND RESPONSIBLE LEATHER INDUSTRY

Leather production is the most ancient recycling practice in human history. Thus, the French leather industry is the worthy successor to a long tradition of savoir-faire that goes back to the dawn of time. It can justifiably be proud of its highly-skilled professions which place it in fourth place for leather production worldwide. The shock of globalisation and the constant search for cheaper labour costs had a severe effect on French industry in the 1970s and 1980s but, after having lost almost 90% of its companies and jobs, the industry managed to halt its demise.

The leather industry, a French success story

The leather sector reinvented itself for the premium market and its image, products and labels are now renowned the world over. The figures speak for themselves: the sector consists of 9 400 companies, more than 80% of which are SMEs, creating some 130 000 jobs and generating 25 billion euros of income, including 12 billion from exports! A real economic and social resurrection, thanks to the exceptional efforts of company owners and employees who have worked hard to ensure the success of their companies.

This economic transformation has been accompanied by far-reaching changes in the social environment of companies in the sector. Concerns about the environment, the harmlessness of products and the need for animal welfare have become major themes of the contemporary world and its values. This transformation has had a great impact on the leather industries, which are regularly criticised for their environmental impact and their responsibility in terms of animal welfare.

And yet, our sector is at the forefront with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments and is constantly striving to improve its environmental footprint. This daily struggle, the result of will, innovation and substantial investments in order to comply with the very demanding legislation and consumer expectations, must be publicised and recognised. That is why the Conseil National du Cuir (CNC), with the partner professional federations, decided to hold a major event on 16 September 2019 – the Sustainable Leather Forum – so that professionals from the sector could take the floor and talk about their everyday commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility.

The success of this event – accompanied by a very inspiring slogan: “For an ever more ethical and responsible industry” – has convinced the board of CNC to repeat the exercise, in order to offer a truly transparent evaluation of the developments in our sector and its professions in terms of ethics and responsible development. The wealth of experiences described by leather professionals during this event also convinced us to present a white paper on the profession to serve as a reference document during the current debates on CSR issues. Nothing can replace the testimonies of those who are at the heart of the real economy, in their workshops, their factories and their stores.

Frank Boehly
President of the Conseil National du Cuir

LEATHER, A WASTE PRODUCT OUR INDUSTRY TRANSFORMS INTO A QUALITY PRODUCT

“Our industry is the oldest recycling activity in the world: we transform the skin of an animal that has been farmed for its meat or its milk into a magnificent material, leather, which is used to product quality, lasting and repairable items.”

Frank Boehly, President of the Conseil National du Cuir

Leather is a complex, multi-faceted product. As emphasised by Egbert Dikkers, Chairman of Leather Naturally, an association that brings together many of the international players in the sector: “It is a waste product that we transform into a quality product.” Appreciated by the major luxury houses and designers, it is also widely used by industry. And this material has plenty of qualities: beauty, softness, texture, strength, it is multi-purpose and long lasting. However, these days public opinion is re-examining its motivations and consumption patterns, focusing on ethical and moral arguments around which to question leather and its production process. Is the industry responding to the ecological challenges we face today? The media have singled out the deforestation caused by the intensive farming of livestock, the huge water consumption and the use of chrome for tanning hides. Are leather companies involved in sustainable development? Do leather and its products correspond to consumer requirements on the origins of leather and the way it was made? And yet, for more than a decade now, the French leather industry has resolutely adopted and developed an ethical and responsible approach. “For a long time, CSR was an option. Now it is an obligation. There is an acceleration, under

the pressure of clients, society in general, and the regulations,” explains **Jean-Christophe Muller, Managing Director of Tanneries Haas**, which supplies the biggest French luxury groups.

Keen to preserve *savoir-faire* and natural resources, promote regionality, improve animal welfare, develop short supply chains, and respect the value chain and the circular economy, the French leather sector has been committed to responsible and sustainable development for many years.

This involves deliberately taking into account the economic, social and environmental impacts of company activities, a defining characteristic of CSR. The companies of the French leather industry - large, medium and small - are at the forefront of this movement to adopt an environmentally-friendly approach and take ethical issues into account, and all agree this has grown substantially in importance in the last two years.

As we were reminded by Agnès Pannier-Runacher, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Economy and Finances, when she spoke at the Forum on 16 September 2019: “Consumers are changing our productive model, a movement that the Government must accompany

by helping industries to anticipate the transformations.” An example of this collective commitment is the Fashion Pact concluded at the last G7 meeting in Biarritz, where 150 fashion and luxury labels signed up to 16 commitments to limit their impact on the climate, biodiversity and the oceans, via objectives set for 2030 and 2050.

The leader of this initiative is François-Henri Pinault, CEO of Kering. A commitment for the whole sector: with regard to biodiversity, the signatories undertake to refuse stocks sourced from intensive farming and to favour farms that respect the natural ecosystem, species protection and soil regeneration.

While the actions of large luxury groups have been clearly identified, speakers at the Sustainable Leather Forum also demonstrated that the SMEs in the leather sector are also very strongly committed to the search for a sustainable economy. It is useful to recall that the objective of CSR is to go beyond what the law and the regulations require, and to prioritise: reducing or removing environmental impacts, safeguarding the consumer, consolidating the local and circular economy, sharing these principles with stakeholders along the supply chain and ensuring animal welfare.

Europe, driving CSR

Europe has played a key role in defining a theoretical framework for CSR, as was underlined by Anna Athanasopoulou, Head of Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries at the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs. As far back as 2001, Brussels proposed a definition of CSR around a number of elements: taking into account the environment, sustainable development, societal aspects, innovation and competitiveness. The approach of the European Union, Anna Athanasopoulou reminded us, is to mobilise companies by offering them a coherent framework based on three fundamental pillars: sectoral benchmarks, training and awareness raising.

Today, in the fashion sector, Europe has highlighted three decisive issues: traceability along the value chain, the transition to a sustainable activity given the environmental challenges, and helping SMEs to implement CSR.



A close-up photograph of a person's hand, palm down, resting on a large, dark blue piece of leather. The leather has a fine, pebbled texture. The background is out of focus, showing more of the leather and some light-colored material.

CSR, A DYNAMIC REALITY WITHIN THE FRENCH LEATHER INDUSTRY

Chapter 1:

The certification of CSR practices in the leather industry, the ISO 26000 standard and others

Chapter 2:

The leather industry commits to protect the environment: water purification, air quality, reduction and reuse of waste products

Chapter 3:

Providing information and ensuring consumer safety

Chapter 4:

The issue of animal welfare: the industry's ethical duty

Chapter 5:

Maintaining people at the heart of the leather professions

CHAPTER

1

CHAPTER 1

THE CERTIFICATION OF CSR PRACTICES IN THE LEATHER INDUSTRY, THE ISO 26000 STANDARD AND OTHERS

Published in 2010 by the International Organisation for Standardization, ISO 26000 sets out guidelines for companies in the leather sector to operate in a socially responsible manner: working ethically and transparently in order to contribute to the health and welfare of society.

Companies undertake an audit that looks at seven central questions: the governance of the structure, working conditions and work relations, environmental responsibility, the fairness of practices, human rights, consumer rights and protection, communities and local development. ISO 26000 2010 sets out guidelines and not requirements. Consequently, it does not lead to certification, unlike the other well-known ISO standards.

A UN initiative for responsible companies around the world: The United Nations Global Compact

In addition to ISO 26000, the Global Compact brings together companies committed to sustainable development, under the aegis of the United Nations. Operating at both the global and national or regional level, the Global Compact offers a simple, universal and voluntary framework for commitment which is

based around ten principles of respect for human rights, international labour standards, environmental standards and the fight against corruption. Today, Global Compact France brings together one thousand businesses determined to develop their CSR approach. Companies in the leather sector that are members of this movement can share their experiences and best practices, dialogue with their stakeholders and promote their CSR efforts.

“Contributing to sustainable development objectives is not only necessary for the planet and human beings, but it is also a source of performance for companies.”

Fella Imalhayenne, General Delegate
of Global Compact France

The Lucie 26000 label, a private initiative, encourages and trains companies in a CSR approach that aims to follow the standards of ISO 26000. The company receives support for its CSR strategy, which is audited against reference criteria aligned with the seven areas of ISO 26000.

“With the Lucie approach, we want to prove to the company that its efforts are profitable, showing them how much it costs and how much it will earn them! According to a study by France Stratégie, responsible companies are 13% more profitable than others.”

Alan Fustec, Director General
of Goodwill-management

CHAPTER

2

CHAPTER 2

THE LEATHER INDUSTRY COMMITS TO PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT: WATER PURIFICATION, AIR QUALITY, REDUCTION AND REUSE OF WASTE PRODUCTS

The law of 19 July 1976 on installations classified for environmental protection (*Installations Classées pour Protection de l'Environnement (ICPE)*) forms the legal basis of the industrial environment in France. This text draws on what is known as the “integrated approach”, meaning a single authorisation is issued governing all the aspects in question: accidental risk, waste, emissions into water, air and soils. Since then, European and French legislation on the protection of the environment has become much stricter.

The French leather industry has continually improved its procedures and has innovated in order to become more sustainable and responsible: purifying and reducing water consumption, filtering emissions and protecting the air, reducing and reusing waste.

“We believe in CSR and do as much CSR as possible! Water purification, the number one problem in the tanning industry, is optimal at Raynaud Jeune thanks to our new water treatment plant, commissioned five years ago, with a yield of up to 97%. We recycle 95% of our waste. Because we do not use chrome in our tanning, we transform our waste into fertilizer, compost and recycled leather. We have greatly reduced our air emissions. We no longer use heavy fuel oil, we have replaced it with distilled pine essence, a natural material that we source from local companies, an example of the circular economy in action. Thanks to CSR, our clients are very loyal to us.”

Olivier Raynaud, Raynaud Jeune, producers of vegetable-tanned lamb leather



The expertise of CTC: pivotal for CSR in the leather industry

The French leather industry is supported in its CSR approach by CTC, the professional committee for the development of leather, footwear, leather goods and glove making. The result of the merger of the professional committee for economic development (*Comité Professionnel de Développement Economique (CPDE)*) and the industrial technical centre (*Centre Technique Industriel (CTI)*), CTC is the international leader in quality control and sustainable development for leather, footwear, leather goods and clothing. Thanks to its international network of accredited laboratories, audit firms and R&D platforms, CTC offers testing, inspection and audit services in line with international standards and references. It undertakes chemical analysis of raw materials and finished goods, as well as environmental studies (water, air, soils).

CTC's proactive approach to research and innovation allows companies from the sector to benefit from CSR procedures that go far beyond the requirements of the regulations.

Protection and purification of water: a managed goal

European and national regulations are very strict on the question of protecting and purifying water.

A national programme entitled 'research for the discharge of hazardous substances' (*Recherche des Rejets de Substances Dangereuses dans l'Eau (RSDE)*) was implemented in response to the framework directive on water (DIR 2000/60/CE). This set the objective of attaining a good chemical and ecological condition for aquatic areas by 2015.

The first phase of this campaign, which started in 2002, concerned 106 substances and sought, over a period of five years, to identify the discharge of hazardous substances from around 5 000 industrial establishments and make them take the necessary measures when a discharge presenting a risk for the aquatic environment had been identified.

The tanning sector was covered by this campaign and received financial support from the French federation of tanners (*Fédération de la Tannerie Mégisserie (FFTM)*).

After an evaluation of the first phase, the authorities launched the second phase of RSDE in 2009.

This search for hazardous substances also led to the publication of the decree of 24 August 2017, modifying the decree of 2 February 1998 as well as other sectoral ministerial decrees.

Since then, ICPE facilities, including tanneries, must include in their self-policing programme the new substances covered by this decree, and also respect new discharge limits.

Tanneries are subject to French and European legislation on 'Facilities classified for environmental protection' (ICPE). The standards applied are some of the strictest in the world. Companies are regularly visited by regional inspectors for the environment (*Directions Régionales de l'Environnement, de l'Aménagement et du Logement (DREAL)*) to ensure they are compliant with current legislation. There is also systematic monitoring of all classified companies, and according to the results, the authorities can impose temporary or lasting supervisory measures.

Air protection: solutions to reduce emissions

At the international level, the upper limits of emissions for certain pollutants are set by the Gothenburg Protocol (LRTAP) and the Geneva Convention. The protocol was revised in 2012 and set emissions reductions targets for certain pollutants for 2020, compared to 2005 levels.

At the European level, Directive (EU) 2016/2284 of 16 December 2016 sets the targets for reducing pollutant emissions, integrating the objectives of the Gothenburg Protocol.

A number of directives and regulations notably concern the reduction of pollutants from:

- industrial activities (IED directive, BREF, combustion installations...),
- the use of certain products (directive on the use of solvents to reduce emissions of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC)).

In France, reducing air pollution

In France, once again, it is the very strict regulations governing ICPE that require companies to respect the upper limits of pollutant emissions into the atmosphere.

Since the early 2000s, the tannery sector has notably concentrated its efforts on the reduction of VOC emissions, with the development of water-based formulae for leather finishing processes in particular. Science has allowed the leather industry to reduce the emissions of organic solvents in the air by 90% for most types of leather. This reduction is due to the introduction of better systems combined with new, more environmentally-respectful finishes.

Air emissions of a variety of substances and particles can occur at many stages in the production process.

The sector is putting place preventive measures as well as techniques for processing emissions, which reduce or eliminate discharges of organic solvents, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide, sulphur dioxide, particles, as well as any odours these substances emit.

Recycling and the circular economy: putting in place systems for sorting, removing and reusing waste, eco-design

The tanning industry is primarily a recycling activity, using and adding value to the millions of tons of skins generated each day by the slaughter of animals destined to be eaten as meat. It forms a natural part of a circular economy. "Nobody, in the world, has ever farmed cows for their hides," underlines Frank Boehly, President of CNC.

With regard to processing its waste, the sector recommends prevention, and the separation of waste products in order to maximise the possibility of recycling or re-using (upcycling) them.

"If leather did not exist, the waste processed by the sector would represent the equivalent of 12 – 14 Great Pyramids each year."

Egbert Dikkers,
President de Leather Naturally

Some examples of how leather offcuts are recycled

Production of gelatine and glues from non-tanned waste (in some EU member states, non-tanned waste is treated to make sausage casings), recovery of tallow from offcuts of raw hide samples. Collagen can be used in a number of ways, as an additive for meat-based products and baked goods, in the pharmaceutical industry and cosmetics, and as an additive for rubber items.



Thierry Poncet, Director of the Leather and Sustainable Development (Cuir et Développement Durable) department of CTC mentions the THERMICUIR study on reusing tanned waste to generate heat. This study showed that leather is a good solid recovered fuel, that generates a high-energy synthesis gas, via a process of pyro-gasification. A possible project would be to recover this gas for use by the tanneries.

The strategic committee for the fashion and luxury sector (Comité Stratégique de la Filière Mode & Luxe (CSF)) has defined a sector strategy that includes an ethical and sustainable development section, based around the following pillars:

- Support for companies demonstrating textile, leather or mixed recycling.
- Organising subsidiaries to collect, sort, categorize and condition waste for recycling (leather and textiles).
- Upstream initiatives with sectors that consume large quantities of recycled materials (aeronautic, automobile, construction).
- Drawing up specifications for the creations of tools for traceability and environmental performance.
- Designing simple, shared criteria that allow the sustainability of products to be described.

Most of this work is carried out in groups containing or led by staff from CTC, which is a stakeholder in the board of CSF.

The functional economy, a new lease of life for shoes: “A new pair of shoes every two months” from Atelier Bocage

“Changes in modes of consumption led us to test the idea of selling the use of a pair of shoes and not the shoes themselves! We are in an economy of functionality which consists in replacing the idea of the sale of goods by the idea of the sale of the use of the goods. An approach which tends to separate the added value of a product from the energy consumption and raw materials required for its production.”

Gauthier Bedek, R&D Director for Groupe ERAM

As part of Groupe Eram’s “Change for good” programme, its Bocage label created a new shoe-hire service, L’Atelier Bocage: the customer takes out a subscription allowing them to use a pair of shoes for a minimum of two months then exchange them for another pair, and so on. All the pairs brought back to the stores are reconditioned in the factory at Montjean-sur-Loire. Atelier Bocage guarantees a treatment that is 100% antibacterial and that restores the shoes to their former glory. The advantage in this approach is to extend the lifespan of items, thus reducing their environmental footprint.

Beyond the leather sector, **Stéphanie Kerbarh, the French MP in charge of the study group on CSR at the National Assembly**, recalled that France is planning to ban the destruction of unsold non-food stocks (art.5) within the context of a draft law on the circular economy, an important measure for the leather and fashion industries.

However, labels have already proven their capacity to integrate a circular economy approach.

Eco-design, a key feature of the circular economy

The responsible design approach so characteristic of the circular economy applies above all to the ‘creation’ phase, because 80% of the environmental impact of a product comes from its very design, noted **Chantal Malingrey, Marketing and Development Director for Première Vision Group**. She went on to explain how essential it is for labels to integrate from the outset the three basic elements that characterise eco-design: a clear company commitment to this approach, the implementation of a responsible transformation process and the use of raw materials with sustainable credentials: recycled, regenerated, organic, alternative materials, etc.

As a demonstration of this commitment to the environment, Chantal Malingrey highlighted the fact that at the last edition of the show, in September 2019, Première Vision incorporated a Smart Creation area which seeks to encourage the entire industry to conceive and produce collections that take into account contemporary values, resulting in creative fashion that is ever more innovative and responsible. This original concept is based on a three-pronged approach: the company, its industrial process and its material sourcing. All of the products showcased on the Smart Creation area have been identified, carefully chosen and verified on the basis of a choice of certifications. As an example, continued Chantal Malingrey, fashion is increasingly using raw materials that are residues from the agri-food industry. A certification is also being put in place around the values promoted by Smart Creation.

Emmanuel Pommier, Managing Director of the leather goods and saddlery section for Hermès, then reminded delegates that the vocation of the luxury industry is naturally to create objects that last. He went on to say that Hermès’ repair service is currently experiencing the fastest and most regular growth of any of the company’s departments.

“A product that lasts is quite the opposite of the items with planned obsolescence that have tended to characterise industrial production in the last decades.”

Emmanuel Pommier, Managing Director of the leather goods and saddlery section for Hermès



CHAPTER

3



CHAPTER 3

PROVIDING INFORMATION AND ENSURING CONSUMER SAFETY

The traceability of leather, a central question for the leather sector, is in the process of being resolved thanks to a global traceability system developed by CTC

Ethical considerations, particularly relating to animal welfare and respect for the environment, have become essential criteria for consumers, even more so when referring to luxury items. Buyers are increasingly keen to know the origins of the material used and where the bag or pair of shoes they are buying was made. They want total transparency: Where is the leather from? Where and how was my bag made?

Meanwhile, the tanneries and the leading luxury houses want high-quality leather. Although there are no formal studies on the relationship between welfare and quality of hides, there is no doubt that the hide of an animal that has been well-treated and cared for is more likely to be of better quality than if its health and its immediate environment had been neglected.

However, in 2018, France imported 43 million euros worth of cow, calf, lamb and goat skins and raw hides. In this context, it is increasingly necessary to ensure the traceability of hides at the global level.

As Jean-Christophe Muller, Managing Director of Tanneries Haas says: "Traceability resolves two issues: that of consumers who want information on animal welfare and reassurance that the farming and slaughter have been performed in good conditions, and that of professionals who not only want this information but also want to improve the quality of hides."

"Traceability makes it possible to carry out positive corrective actions at both an ecological and quality level."

Cedric Vigier, in charge of the traceability project within the Innovation department at CTC

How can we trace the origin of the leather, how it has been treated and how products are made?

Hides come from around the world and the implementation of CSR standards differs widely according to the country. For example, the best goat hides come from India, Pakistan or Nigeria, while Spain is the reference for ovines and France or the Netherlands for calfskin.

Supply chains are also complex. A raw hide from the Netherlands or Spain can be exported to Italy, be tanned there, then be sent for a specific finish in France.

There is a high demand, particularly in the luxury sector, for more information about the origins of the hide. CTC, the leather technical centre, has refined a new technique for marking leathers with a laser. The skin of each slaughtered animal is identified with a code, which allows it to be followed through all the stages of its transformation, from the abattoir to the workshop producing the finished goods (footwear, leather goods), via the tannery, which will itself be fitted with a reader system allowing the original markings to be identified. In time, the consumer will have information about the entire production cycle.

How is this new traceability system for leather going to work?

Meat traceability, which is compulsory in Europe, is a good starting point for hide traceability. Veterinary services allocate a unique number to each farm animal preceded by the farmer's ID code and two digits indicating the French *département* in which it was born. These are written on a ring attached to the animal's ear. Once the skin has been removed from the body of the animal, this number is marked on it using a laser by thermal ablation.

In tanneries, from the wet blue stage (chrome tanning gives a grey-blue colour to wet hides, hence the name), where the first defects appear, an automatic reading system registers the numbers in a database. At the different stages of the process, the successive operators can therefore associate the number with the defects, as they appear. And this information can be relayed back to the farmer, or the other stages in the chain (the abattoir and the rawhide dealers), so that they can deal with the cause of the defects (ringworm, veins, fences, bedding, transport, carcass, etc.) and take corrective actions. The tannery can market this hide with its identification number.

Meanwhile, a system is currently being developed to allow transformers to include this number on the underside of each cut-out piece, in the form of a data matrix code that is laser engraved or printed. With this code included on the finished product, the leather goods maker, footwear maker or tailor is able to know the entire journey of the leather used to make their product and can thus inform the consumer about the source of the leather, and ensure its production has been respectful of the environment and the animal.



France is currently the only country to offer this innovative laser marking. Eventually, it will be able to provide information to all players in the sector, from the farm to the consumer.

“This traceability will make it possible to secure the supply chain, because if there is a defect in the hide, we will be able to identify at which stage the damage occurred, whether at the farm, the abattoir or the tannery.”

Jean-Christophe Muller, Managing Director of Tanneries Haas

However, although this innovation is very timely, we need to go further and extend it to all hides and not just young calves. It must be generalised to young bovines, large bovines and even to ovines. To achieve this objective, the costs of the equipment must be optimised, particularly for small abattoirs, and the progress must be made visible to the consumer.

The Conseil National du Cuir would also like to see this system become commonplace in Europe and all leather-producing countries, so that the CSR efforts of the entire leather industry are recognised. CTC has filed a patent allowing them to start commercialising this procedure outside of France.

The harmlessness of leather, a major issue for leather which is increasingly well addressed

“With the implementation of CSR in our tannery, clients expect a guarantee that our products are harmless, and that our suppliers and the materials used are well managed.”

Jean-Christophe Muller, Managing Director of Tanneries Haas

The chrome tanning of leather has a poor reputation. Aside from the fact that chrome is a heavy metal, this method is also seen to be the reason for allergies caused by shoe leather coming into contact with the skin. This information is widely reported in the media and all too often leaves consumers poorly informed and sometimes misinformed.

Does the harmlessness of leather (meaning its non-toxicity) depend on the tanning techniques used? In theory the answer is no, but more pragmatically, chrome tanning is the method that attracts the most attention from order givers. In fact, the risk of chromium III transforming to chromium VI, an allergen when in contact with the skin, is mostly linked to respecting good production practices. In addition, there is a lot of confusion around certain assertions about chrome tanning, its environmental impact, and its harmlessness compared to other forms of tanning, which are also a source of problems for the industry.

To address this question once and for all, the Conseil National du Cuir took the opportunity during the 1st Sustainable Leather Forum to make an objective and precise assessment of the various methods used to tan leather and their harmlessness.

European and French legislation is the most protective in the world

Tanneries have to produce leather in compliance with various European regulations, which are designed to protect both the environment and the consumer.

The most widely used: chrome or mineral tanning

At the global level, 80 – 85% of all leathers are tanned using this method. There are many reasons why: its speed (24 hours maximum), its simplicity, its multiple uses and its lower cost (compared to vegetable tanning for example), as well as the fact that this type of tanning produces leathers with great mechanical and thermal resistance, able to be used in many ways. In particular, it can be used to produce very strong items from very thin leathers, or be dyed in a wide palette of colours.

The chromium III used in the manufacture of leather and leather items has no notable toxicity characteristics, according to the European classification

system. It should not be confused with chromium VI which can appear in certain finished products when the tanning process has been poorly managed. In very rare cases, chromium VI can be formed in the leather by oxidation of chromium III – in the same way that iron can rust – and can cause skin allergies. Chromium VI is recognised as an allergen for some people (around 4/100,000), and in 2015 Europe included it in the REACH regulations with a very low permitted level (3mg/kg). The European Union, via its 'Risk Assessment Committee', considers that the environmental risk related to the presence of chromium VI in leathers is very low.





The oldest method: vegetable tanning

Although for a long time overshadowed by the unrivalled softness of chrome tanning, vegetable-tanned leather is growing in popularity with consumers and designers who are increasingly aware of environmental issues.

Since Ancient times, artisans have submerged hides in baths containing plant substances to make them rot-proof.

Vegetable tanned leather is stiffer, firmer and very strong, holds its shape well and absorbs humidity better. This makes it an ideal material for protective clothing, moulded objects, saddlery, hunting and horse-riding accessories, the inner and outer soles of shoes, belts and luggage.

It used to take up to two years to tan certain hides, but soaking times have been considerably reduced: 24 – 48 hours are generally enough today to obtain a similar result. The use of powders with concentrated extracts of quebracho and mimosa rather than traditional oak bark accelerates the effect of the tannin, as does the use of rotating drums rather than pits and vats. But its light sensitivity, which renders it more beautiful over time with an almost living patina, means that the colour possibilities of this type of leather are limited. These characteristics mean that it cannot meet all the needs of the leather industry.

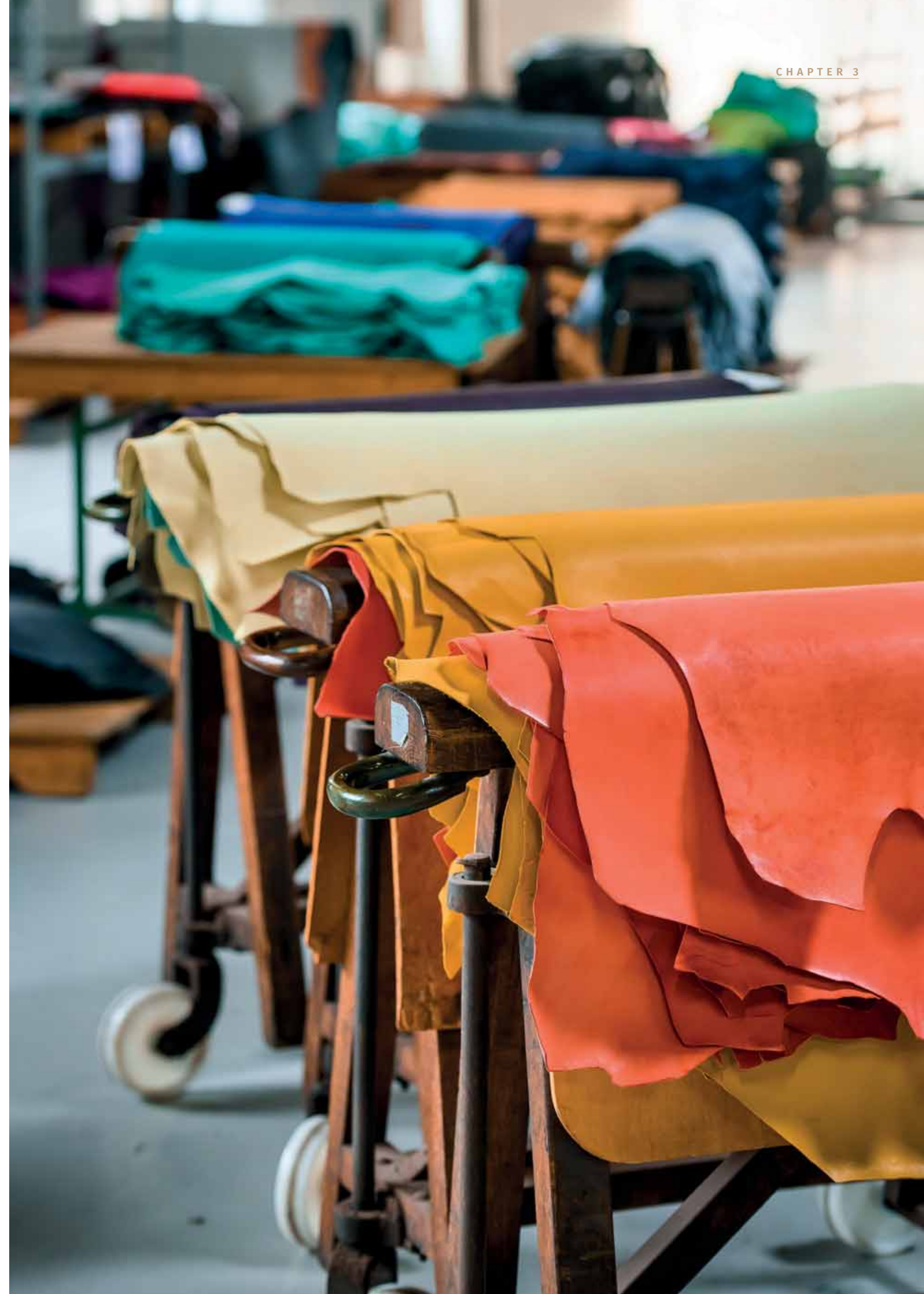
“Vegetable tanning is popular now because it has an eco-friendly, natural and sustainable image, although it is using ancestral methods. But it is not suitable for all uses. We believe it is very important that other tanneries respect the right procedures for tanning leather, whether using vegetable or mineral tannins.”

Olivier Raynaud, Owner-manager of Raynaud Jeune

The most recent: synthetic tanning

These days, some labels are looking for a chrome-free leather in order to remove all risk – and controversy – for consumers. Just like with vegetable tanning, synthetic tanning has the advantage of not using heavy metals. Using synthetic polymers, some of which come from the oil industry, it is possible to obtain leathers suitable for all typical uses: leather goods, clothing, footwear – particular for children – upholstery and even automobiles. It is available in all finishes: smooth, suede or nubuck.

In time, the aim is indeed to produce chrome-free leathers but at the moment, no alternative technique has emerged to fully replace this effective, economic and safe tanning method.



“We have developed a number of procedures in-house that allow us to tan leather without using heavy metals. By continuing to work closely with tanneries, our goal is to have metal-free leather make up almost a third of our collections in 2019 and to be 100% metal-free by 2025.”

Marie-Claire Daveu, Director of sustainable development and international institutional affairs at Kering

Harmlessness of leathers in imported goods, what is the solution?

Leather tanned in France and Europe is a material that provides some of the greatest security to consumers. But some products, notably shoes, are imported from other continents. How can their harmlessness be certified?

Anne-Céline Humeau, Director of Humeau-Beaupréau and one of the founders of the INNOSHOE charter, explains how, working with nine other companies, they ensure the chemical safety of imported leather and shoes for consumers.

“Ten footwear companies in the region of Cholet signed the INNOSHOE Charter in 2013 and undertook to test and control the raw materials in their products every six months, according to very restrictive rules, notably with regard to chemical security. We also ask our suppliers for their commitment. This charter guarantees consumers that the leather and leather products are harmless. The implementation of the charter is monitored by an independent third party.”

Vigilant State supervision

The French authorities in charge of customs and the prevention of fraud (DGCCRF) carefully monitor all imported and commercialised products.

The harmlessness of the leather and products therefore depends on traceability which will be implemented by all and in all countries, starting in Europe. The French leather industry is working to be heard beyond France.

Counterfeiting, a scourge to be eradicated that not only endangers the producer but also the consumer and the environment

France has a vast and binding legal framework to fight against counterfeiting. The aim is to protect intellectual property, the guarantor of creativity and innovation in companies.

However, despite this legislative arsenal, France is currently the third most affected country in the world in terms of counterfeit goods, and luxury leather goods bear the brunt of it. This blight considerably weakens our economy and companies as it generates unfair competition and generates a loss of

40 000 jobs per year. In addition, the trafficking of fraudulent products can represent a danger to the health and safety of consumers.

The CSR efforts of leading labels are designed to offer consumers guaranteed products and security with regard to their quality and harmlessness.



“According to an IFOP study in 2018, 37% of consumers buy counterfeit goods. Thus, nearly four out of ten consumers are deceived in this way. That is why we want to educate the general public, and particularly young people, about the problems of counterfeited goods. We suggest that volunteer employees from the large luxury labels educate children in schools about the topic of counterfeit goods.”

Delphine Sarfati-Sobreira, Managing Director of UNIFAB, the manufacturers union

It would seem to be essential to compensate for the limits in public policy on fighting counterfeit goods. And it is even more urgent because the smuggling of counterfeit products is used to finance terrorist networks, as highlighted in the recent report from UNIFAB “Contrefaçon & Terrorisme”.

This report raised awareness of this issue among the authorities and led to the strengthening of sanctions against organised trafficking. These efforts should be pursued, notably according to the guidelines laid out by the French Court of Audit in its ruling on 30 May 2014.

The legislation to combat counterfeiting should allow the legal system to apply the existing measures more strictly and more often. France has the legal resources to limit counterfeiting of goods but they are not used to their full effect by the legal authorities. There are two reasons for this: the lack of specialisation among magistrates and the restrictive application of intellectual property rights in a context of free trade.

Counterfeiting, a scourge that is not punished as it should be

Companies that are victims of counterfeiting have problems protecting their patents, brands and designs. In practice, this is due to timid use of counterfeit-seizing powers, but also the minimal sanctions imposed on counterfeiters. As a result, the sale of counterfeit goods in France remains an easy, risk-free source of income for traffickers, encouraged by the demand for copies of items from major labels.

The implementation of CSR in the leather sector implies that all stakeholders, from the public (authorities, customs officials) and private (labels) sectors unite and work together so that counterfeiting is not seen as inevitable. The leather industry must protect its production so as not to mislead the consumer.

Putting an end to the mis-use of the word “leather”!

The consumer is often misled because there are a number of products on the market entitled “leather” that are not made from the substance.

The leather sector wishes to alert the public to the increasingly corrupted use of the term “leather” in order to avoid confusion and fraud.

French decree 2010-29 of 8 January 2010 implementing article L.214-1 of the Consumer Code relating to leather products and certain similar products, clearly states that “Use of the word “leather” [...] is forbidden in the designation of any other material than that obtained from animal skin using tanning or impregnation that preserves the natural format of the skin fibres.” In other words, products made using fruit or vegetable fibres and which resemble leather cannot be considered as such or described as leather. For example, when we read in the papers about “pineapple leather”, “grape leather”, or “vegetarian leather”, the terminology is erroneous, as this in no way refers to the skin of an animal but quite simply to a material made from



an amalgam based on a fruit or vegetable. And that is without mentioning all the “eco-leather” and “vegan leather” labelling used to describe products made from synthetic materials. These products, presented as ethical and respectful of the environment, use materials derived from fossil fuels, namely oil.

This abuse of language not only misleads the consumer, but it often harms the leather industry as it suggests that leather is not an eco-responsible product, and that it could be made in other ways than the transformation of a hide. It seeks to convince the consumer that there is an equivalence between leather and a product of vegetable or synthetic origins.

Ensuring recognition of the word “leather” in Europe is a joint effort from COTANCE (the Confederation of National Associations of Tanners and Dressers of the European Community), the French Federation of Tanners (FFTM) and the Conseil National du Cuir (CNC).

“The leather industry must proudly and vigorously defend its products. Labels must speak to the consumer and impose a clear definition of leather. So-called ‘artificial’ leather cannot be called leather. This fight is one of Leather Naturally’s missions in order to promote the authenticity and quality of the noble material that is leather.”

Egbert Dikkers, President of Leather Naturally



CHAPTER

4

CHAPTER 4

THE ISSUE OF ANIMAL WELFARE: THE INDUSTRY'S ETHICAL DUTY

Enhancing the image of the leather sector involves taking into account all the questions being raised by society. The subject of animal welfare has become a particularly sensitive topic in recent years with the growing media attention around vegans and anti-specism. The leather professions are on the front line of this issue, and it is our duty to reply. However, we have to distinguish between the genuine concerns of consumers who want to know more about the ethical content of the products they purchase, and the outrageous accusations of activists who are unfamiliar with the realities of our professions.

The question is complex. While the constant efforts of French and European companies to improve animal welfare are undisputed, and are subject to much oversight, it is nevertheless difficult to impose welfare standards on all continents: how can we see, evaluate and monitor the situation in countries that are so different and so far away?

Rafael Andrade, CEO of Wow Creative Solutions and Strategy and spokesperson for the **CSCB**, an organisation promoting and standardizing Brazilian leather, pointed out that there are more cattle than people in Brazil and, in such a vast country, it is impossible to monitor all farms, many of which are small, almost invisible structures. It should not be forgotten that Brazil is the second largest exporter of tanned hides in the world.

But should we just give up? “No,” says Andrade, who asserts that the Brazilian authorities are aware of the economic repercussions of the subject and are multiplying measures to certify their products and put in place incentives to encourage farms to adhere to these welfare quality criteria. He does not hesitate to call on European players to do their part, asking them to show great rigour with regard to their Brazilian partners, demanding proof that they are complying with the certification standards.

Monitoring the ethics of the value chain has become a key issue for many French and European players. Faced with consumer demand, labels are at the forefront in this quality approach.

Already at **Louis Vuitton**, almost 70% of the leather used by the label comes from companies with Leather Working Group (LWG) certification and its aim is to reach 100% by 2025. In turn, a major retailer, **Decathlon**, declares that it does not buy leather that comes from deforestation zones and that 80% of its leather comes from Europe. Sté Mille, an SME that is well known under the Gaston Mille label, is proud that 80% of its products are Made in France, and it is developing “ecological” shoes that use vegetable-tanned leather.

The European regulation was put in place in 2009 and is particularly strict about slaughterhouse procedures. It draws on the definition given by the World Organisation for Animal Health on animal welfare, based on five fundamental rights: freedom from heat stress or physical discomfort, freedom from hunger, malnutrition and thirst, freedom from pain, injuries or disease, freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour and freedom from fear or distress.

A very strict legal and regulatory framework

France and Europe are at the forefront in the implementation of true traceability and control of animal welfare, explained **David Grangeré, Director of Groupe Bigard**, the French leader in the abattoir sector, with 12 000 employees, 50 sites and a network of 90 000 farmers.

He went on to say that in 2014, the profession drew up a best practice guide for animal protection on the farm, in transit and at the abattoir, which was approved by the national food authorities (*Direction Générale de l’Alimentation* (DGAL)). The national food safety, environment and work agency (*l’Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l’alimentation, de l’environnement et du travail* (ANSES)) proposed a definition of animal welfare that set out the basis for research and expertise on the subject. The Agency’s definition took into account the development of scientific knowledge in a multi-disciplinary approach. Animal welfare means a positive mental and physical state due to the satisfaction of the animal’s physiological and behavioural needs as well as its preferences. This state varies according to the perception of the animal’s situation.

By making reference to the “mental state” and “preferences” of the animal, this definition tends to attribute human behaviour to the animal. This anthropomorphic drift undermines the pertinence of the argument.

For Jean-Christophe Muller, Managing Director of Tanneries Haas, there is no doubt that the profession “is on the cusp of a veritable revolution”

around the issue of animal welfare, driven by the new demands from consumers. He believes that this revolution must adopt a cross-cutting approach that mobilises all stakeholders from farm to boutique, with an in-depth discussion between labels and the upstream players to build consensus in the leather industry about the issue of animal welfare.

This search for a consensus is already a reality, as the actions of the French Hide and Skin Association puis mettre entre parenthèses (*Syndicat Général des Cuirs et Peaux* (SGCP)). For 10 years, they have been working to raise awareness among farmers (hygiene in stables, removing barbed wire, animal transport conditions, etc.) and also young people in training. This programme is supported by all the stakeholders in the industry and notably by the French Federation of Tanners (FFTM).

Exotic species and biodiversity: labels are on the front line

The leather industry has a unique role to play in the conservation of biodiversity, as it also uses the skins of wild, exotic species. As a result, the industry is often the target for criticism and recurrent complaints concerning the overuse of endangered species or the mistreatment inflicted on the animals. The industry has heard these justifiable ethical requests and while some labels, such as Chanel, H&M and Nike have decided to stop using exotic skins, others are firmly committed to put in place a responsible approach to animal welfare. The future of our professions depends on it.

The first thing to remember is that since 1 July 1975, the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species, otherwise known as the Washington Convention, or by its acronym CITES, regulates the commercialisation of some 35 000 plant and animal species as well as their traceability from their place of production and when crossing borders. Our sector has embraced this normative framework and has multiplied initiatives that underpin this approach. For example, the Hermès company foundation supports the online Africa-TWIX platform, developed in 2016 by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which fights against the illegal trade in wild plants and animals by putting in place practices that help to preserve biodiversity.

Two wild species are of particular concern regarding the use of their skins to make leather goods, namely crocodiles and pythons. Action by labels has been vigorous in these areas, organising international campaigns to inform public opinion. The leading names in fashion have multiplied initiatives in favour of animal welfare.

LVMH, the global leader in the sector, recently announced the creation of the “first standard for the responsible sourcing of crocodile leather.” This structure is based on four main pillars: preservation of the species and respect for local communities, animal welfare throughout the animals’ entire life, the working conditions of men and women in the farms, and environmental protection. In addition, the



crocodile leather supply chain must respect new criteria, defined by a “committee of technical experts”, including the independent body NSF International. This new ethical standard, LVMH tells us, will result in the awarding of certification, which has already been received by three farms supplying the Asian tannery Heng Long, controlled by the French group since 2011. Indeed, it has become the first and only exotic leather tannery in the world to be certified by the Leather Working Group (LWG). LWG is an international association bringing together all the players in the leather sector, including chemistry companies, to promote sustainable practices in the leather professions.

Crocodile farmers, represented by the International Crocodilian Farmers Association (ICFA), created in 2016, have established farming standards and recently made them public. Drawing on their experience in the field and founded on a scientific basis, these standards have been developed with the support of the University of Pretoria and using texts from international reference organisations such as CSG (Crocodile Specialist Group from the IUCN, International Union for the Conservation of Nature) and OIE, the World Organisation for Animal Health. Endorsed by a panel of experts in conservation and animal welfare, these standards set out the recommended best practices, from hatching to slaughter. They allow farmers to guarantee their respect of sustainable farming practices: ensure animal welfare, the best working conditions, respect for local

communities and protection of the environment.

The ICFA standards were drawn up according to the ISO/IEC1, ISEAL2 and WTO3 procedures and recommendations. The audits to certify the compliance of member farms with ICFA standards are carried out by BSI.

Supported by tanneries, industrial players, and companies in the luxury sector including Hermès and Kering, ICFA works with farms wishing to provide a guarantee that items made from their precious skins respect the highest standards of sustainable development, through the application of the best farming practices.

Seeking to become the reference for the sector, these standards should allow the entire profession to progress by adopting more sustainable and responsible practices.

The ICFA is also committed to supporting research and working closely with veterinary experts to further develop its standards and take into account new scientific knowledge.

Innovative responses

The demand for python skin has also exploded in the last decade or more, and this species now has to be the subject of careful management and



monitoring. Not an easy task given that snakes are a difficult species to control in their natural environment. However, despite the obstacles, labels have managed to find some answers. For example, in 2013 Kering and Gucci combined with the IUCN Boas and Pythons Specialist Group and the International Trade Centre (ITC) to create the Python Conservation Partnership. The partnership is researching sustainability, transparency, animal welfare and local living standards in order to improve python trading conditions and initiate a change in the sector. The PCP is also undertaking promising experiments to adapt pythons to farming conditions – production is already operational in many countries of South-East Asia.

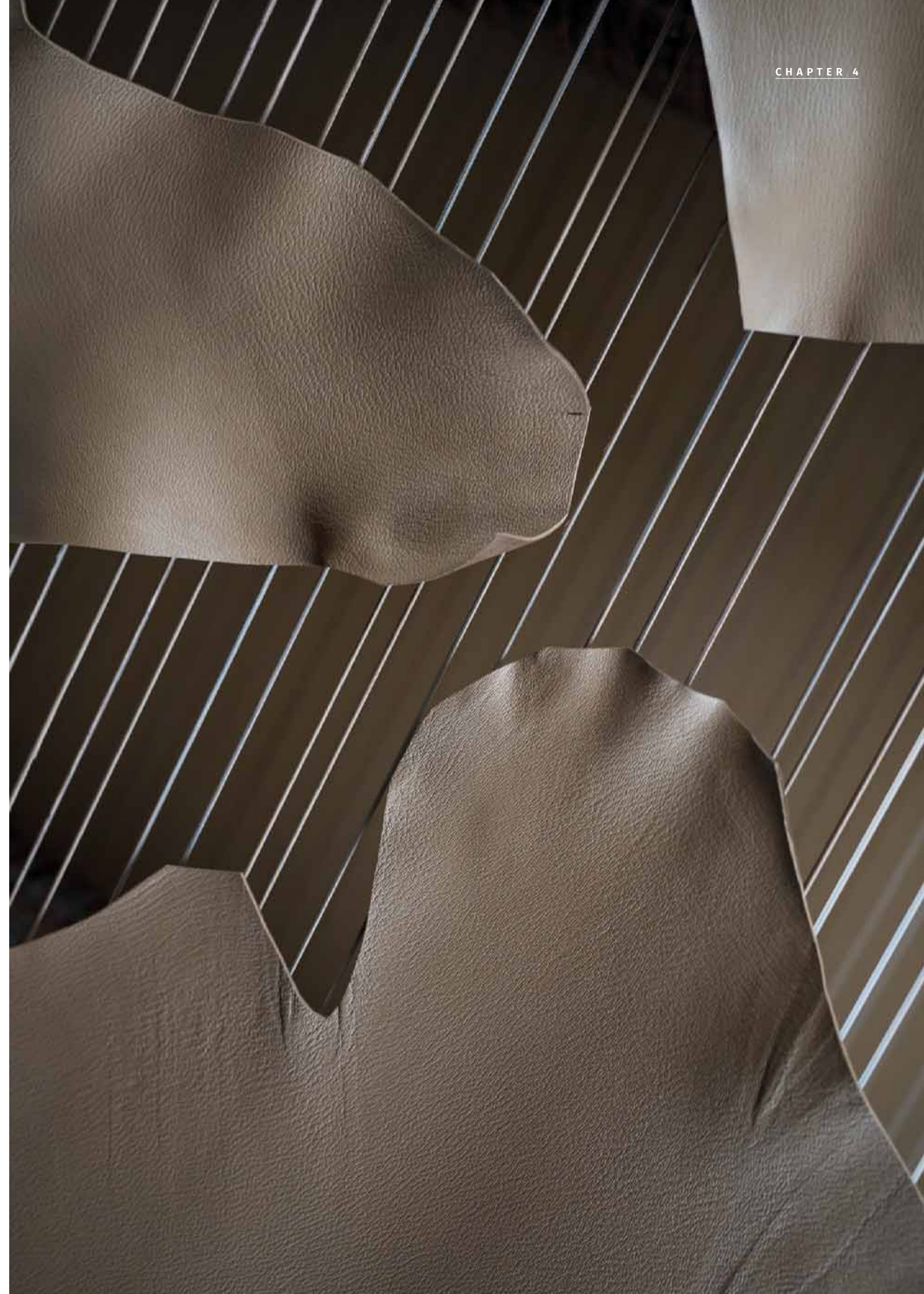
It should also be noted that the leather industry, despite the attacks to which it is subjected, can also be a solution for the conservation of endangered species, notably of crocodiles. In the post-war decades, these animals were hunted mercilessly, and demand for their leather was booming, resulting in a sharp reduction in population numbers. In 1971, with 23 species of crocodile threatened with extinction, the IUCN formed the Crocodile Specialist Group, which took decisive actions to save these reptiles.

One of the most effective measures was ranching – collecting eggs from wild crocodiles and raising them in farms. The eggs become a source of revenue for local populations, which encourages them to protect the animals' habitat. The Australian example, presented by **Grahame Webb, member of the Crocodile Specialist Group** during the Sustainable Leather Forum was very eloquent: farming saved the Australian species and has made it possible to rebuild a population to a level equivalent to that of the early 20th Century.

“The leather industry saved the existence of crocodiles in northern Australia. Almost extinct in the early 1970s, today the species boasts some 300 000 specimens, thanks to the revaluing of the crocodile sector in the early 1980s.”

Grahame Webb, member of the Crocodile Specialist Group

This approach has also benefited the Aborigine population, the owners of the land in question, offering them an income-generating opportunity, encouraging them to remain in the local area, maintaining their culture and protecting their environment. Despite all these efforts, the profession is well aware that much remains to be done in favour of animal welfare and species conservation. Although it only represents an infinitely small proportion of the skins harvested, demand for exotic skins is constantly increasing, with the arrival on the global market of new players such as China. The vision of the perception of animal welfare varies depending on the culture and action in this area is a long-term initiative. Animal rights organisations regularly denounce the mistreatment seen in crocodile, lizard and ostrich farms, the skins of which are used to make bags and accessories; this can be in living or slaughter conditions. However determined they may be, labels cannot change everything quickly, worldwide, but they have decided to put their international profile to good use and ensure that animal welfare and the defence of biodiversity are taken into account.



CHAPTER

5

CHAPTER 5

MAINTAINING PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF THE LEATHER PROFESSIONS

The advantage of strong regional roots

The solid regional roots of companies in the leather sector is a source of strength; they are part of French economic and cultural tradition. It is not by accident that France is the world leader in the fashion and luxury industries. This performance is generated by a centuries-old industry with a notable regional presence. A heritage that all our companies, large and small, are proud of.

According to a 2017 study by Mazars looking at CSR in the fashion sector, one of the first elements mentioned by companies is their links to their local region, along with the know-how found there. **Edwige Rey, a partner at Mazars**, explained that in this sector in particular, there is a very strong link between development of the local heritage and the value of the item produced there, which explains why companies are keen to preserve artisanal culture and the transmission of knowledge.

This local engagement represents an important source of employment in our regions. Indeed, Louis Vuitton, which employs 4 300 people in 16 workshops throughout France, recruited 2 000 people in the last two years and is planning to create a further 1 500 jobs in the near future.

This attachment to heritage and roots can be seen in a global label like Hermès, which values the artisanal culture of its employees because of the responsibility and autonomy it engenders, and demonstrates its commitment to them by creating work places on a human scale that respect the local architectural traditions. It is also expressed by other large groups and many SMEs, such as the Raynaud Jeune tannery, a family business in the Tarn region of south-west France, whose owner-manager strongly asserts his attachment to the local and natural environment.

These regional roots also mean that very high-quality expertise is concentrated there, and it is not a coincidence that many French tanneries and other companies in the leather sector have been awarded the living heritage label - *Entreprise du Patrimoine Vivant (EPV)* - by the French authorities. Their keenness to pass on these skills means these leather companies are strongly committed to training. Hermès, for example, has opened a number of schools and multiplied its partnerships with high schools to open classes training students in the leather professions. Hermès notes that of the 4 000 people employed by the company in France, 3 500 are artisans working locally in their home region. The major groups in the sector, as well as the best-structured SMEs, have taken control of the training of “their” artisans, by creating in-house schools that train new recruits and increase their abilities to meet the very high production standards required.

*“We make beautiful things
in beautiful conditions.”*

Emmanuel Pommier, Managing Director of
the leather goods and saddlery section for Hermès

Training people in the leather professions

The figures speak for themselves: the sector can draw from a network of 165 schools in France and abroad, training students for 63 diplomas (from high school to degree level) in all sectors: shoe and bootmaking, fashion and design, fur, leather clothing, leather goods, binding and gilding on leather, saddle making and tanning.

For a long time, the federations have been working to develop initial and professional training to guarantee high levels of quality, particularly through the leather technical centre, CTC (*Centre Technique du Cuir*). The CNC is part of this movement and encourages company initiatives such as that of Hermès, which has created partnerships with high schools, notably the *Pôle Cuir du Pays de Montbéliard* or the *Pôle d'Excellence de Thiviers*.

Other companies of all sizes are also working to transmit their traditions of excellence. A global player in the luxury sector, Kering is particularly keen to disseminate its expertise and best practices in-house but also to transmit them to new generations of designers, in particular, explained Marie-Claire Daveu, Director of sustainable development and international institutional affairs for the group. "It is with this in mind that we have created, in partnership with the London College of Fashion, a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on luxury and sustainable development: it is open to all profiles and is free."

A number of the Group's houses support artisan corporations and offer training programmes. Bottega Veneta created *La Scuola dei Maestri Pellettieri* in order to train a new generation of artisans, thus ensuring the continuity of cultural heritage and artisanal excellence. Gucci created the *Ecole de l'Amour* within its Art Lab, offering training in the Craftsmanship School (*Scuola dei Mestieri*), a six-month programme to train students in professional standards, the Factory School (*Scuola di Fabbrica*) which trains operators in production techniques or the Technical Academy, training Gucci employees in the latest technology and notably the use of digital tools in the design process.

The latest project launched by Kering in November 2019 is the "IFM – Kering Sustainability Chair", in partnership with the French fashion institute (*Institut Français de la Mode* (IFM)). The goal of the chair is to create a research and high-level teaching hub for the fashion sector, by incorporating all the aspects of sustainable development and CSR.

In turn, Maison Louis Vuitton is keen to return some of the intangible heritage held by the company back to the community, and has taken an innovative initiative in its United States subsidiary, with the creation of a "skills sponsoring" programme. A fund of 250 working days is made available to employees so that they can use this time to transmit their skills to other organisations.

Another example is SIS, a group employing 1 000 people, and mainly working as a subcontractor for the leading luxury houses. It stands out for the creativity and originality of its social policy. It has also created a school to train its workers in the various



professions, and they are recruited by the company if they complete the training successfully.

However, the size of the company is in no way an obstacle to innovation. Groupe Créations Perrin employs 200 people, but thanks to the commitment to CSR of the company's Managing **Director, Ange Alez Martin**, it has developed a training programme for its leather goods production, which sees the trainees, most of whom are retraining from other professions, being directly incorporated into the company. "We work closely with the local unemployment office and the local region, which pays for the first three months of training given by the Pays

de Montbéliard professional training association. It takes about a year for an employee to master the core techniques of their profession and 100% of our employees are locals," underlines Ange Alez Martin.

"We have to give our employees perspectives for the future, show them that our professions are highly-skilled and have a future, as they are a blend of art and industry. We should use the watchmaking industry as an example, where the image of artistic and technological excellence is renowned around the world."

Jean-Yves Chauvy, Managing Director of Groupe SIS

The unattractive image of leather professions

Despite their strong performance in economic and innovation terms, the leather professions suffer from a poor image and are considered unattractive, particularly to young people. This observation has been highlighted by professionals in the sector and particularly by Gustavo Gonzalez-Quijano, Secretary General of COTANCE, the Confederation of National Associations of Tanners and Dressers of the European Community. He insists on the need for the sector to make itself better known using marketing campaigns to promote its professions. This is what COTANCE has been doing since 2004, when it organised a first collective operation with its members entitled "That's life, that's leather", which was then offered to partners from the ICT (International Council of Tanners) in 2012. In collaboration with employee representatives and the European Union, COTANCE also led a campaign throughout Europe entitled "Leather is my job!" from 2013 to 2017. More recently, COTANCE, working with its counterparts in the clothing-textiles and

footwear sectors and with financial support from the European Commission, has also created a training and education programme as part of ERASMUS+ to attract young people to the leather sector. This has been completed by a marketing campaign targeting young people in six member states. It consists of short videos, a website and a multitude of concrete actions ranging from a creativity competition to visits to schools and companies, all under the banner of "Open Your Mind!"

Working with the European Commission, COTANCE has developed a training and education programme to attract young people to the leather sector. The Commission, under the aegis of Anna Athanasopoulou, Head of Tourism, Emerging and Creative Industries at the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship & SMEs, is also funding a programme to promote the fashion, leather and footwear sectors, through information campaigns about their respective professions.



The Hermès leather goods and glove making workshops at Saint-Junien

“Young people are looking for meaning in a company. To meet their expectations, our companies must be irreproachable.”

Olivier Raynaud, Owner-manager of Raynaud Jeune

The verdict is unanimous, the leather professions must communicate, contact the outside world and focus on schools in particular to promote their savoir-faire through training that leads to qualifications. These professions can offer young people a professional environment that gives meaning to work at a time where, as studies show, the search for meaning is an essential dimension of the professional expectations of Millennials.

Quality of life and quality of work

Quality of work is of capital importance for stakeholders in the leather sector. It is the best guarantee of preserving savoir-faire in a company.

Quality of life at work has become a key element in our company culture. As we have seen in the example of Hermès, this means taking into account the aesthetics and conviviality of workplaces. But for physical professions that require great concentration, ergonomics is essential. It reduces the efforts employees have to make, and also helps to make the organisation of work more efficient. Workspaces include the physical features of welfare but also seek to develop the autonomy of the employee and reduce distances between partners. As Emmanuel Pommier, Managing Director of the leather goods and saddlery section for Hermès, explains, “since we designed our workplaces to facilitate communication between artisans and bring the professions closer, we have been able to reduce our leather consumption by 11%, as a result of greater communication, collaboration and optimisation as well as improving quality even further.”

But it is not only the biggest names in fashion and luxury that are committed to truly social policies. These form part of the core criteria for CSR and affect all companies. SIS group, for example, is not

only involved in training, but has developed a global employee welfare policy, with the creation of an organic staff restaurant that also prepares dishes for the evening meal, a nursery, a gym and support for employee mobility.



COVICO SAS is a raw hide trader that supplies tanneries and whose work involves manually handling heavy loads when selecting each leather. The company has taken a particularly innovative initiative. In partnership with CTC it has developed an exoskeleton that substantially reduces the physical efforts of its workers. This action to reduce the arduousness of the work is an example of CSR and makes it possible to reconcile the most traditional efforts with the most cutting-edge modernity, explains Nicholas Butler, International Director of COVICO. In time, thanks to this development, it will allow these positions to be open to women.

Social dialogue is an essential aspect of CSR and Sté MILLE, an SME, has been investing for a long time in a strategy incorporating sustainable development, fair trade, respect for the environment and respect

for men and women. The company has embarked on a social quality approach and since the early 2000s has stated its position on working conditions and respect for workers' fundamental rights. Mille SAS has chosen to fight wholeheartedly for these issues and has received ISO SA 8000 certification, the CSR standard (it was the first French company to be certified, in 2006). It has also been awarded the Trophée Région PACA for Corporate and Environmental Responsibility.

Quality of life is a deciding factor for the attractiveness of a sector of activity. Leaders in the leather industry are convinced of this. They seek to enhance the image of the leather professions, which are described by Stéphanie Kerbarh, the French MP in charge of the CSR Study Group at the National Assembly, as “the flagship of French industry”.

She highlights the strategic dimension of CSR in the international competition between economic powers: “CSR”, she says “is a cross-cutting issue that will ensure the sustainability of the French and European economic and social model against the power of the Chinese and American models.” A French and European model of a “responsible market economy” to which we subscribe.

The commitment of our sector to an economic and social model that respects people and the environment was also expressed by **Isabelle Lefort, president of Paris Good Fashion**, an association bringing together leading labels and fashion industry professionals working for Paris 2024: “We want to make Paris the capital of a more responsible fashion,” she says, when the world’s attention will be focused on the Olympic Games in the capital.

Frank Boehly, President of the Conseil National du Cuir, observed that the Sustainable Leather Forum showed the entire sector is united in its actions in favour of CSR. Although the largest luxury houses are driving the change, SMEs are also the source of many initiatives and innovations. They have shown their commitment beyond the strict application of the regulations.

CONCLUSION

And yet, we have to recognise that there is still a long way to go, and that companies in the leather sector must continue to develop in order to meet the expectations of their clients, their employees and society as a whole. To maintain French leadership in the luxury and fashion sectors, they are seeking innovative ideas and achievements. The Sustainable Leather Forum was an opportunity for intense discussions between people working in the leather professions who were keen to share and learn more about the best ways to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment or improve the working conditions of their employees.

Based on this, the French leather sector declares its willingness to go further towards a responsible economy and pursue its efforts for Corporate Social Responsibility. The industry is preparing a joint charter, setting out clear and realistic commitments. The entire sector is working on this, with the active participation of the federations and based on the pioneering work of CTC, which plays a key role in clearly defining objectives and supporting current developments. Together, we will bring forward proposals to speedily roll out the practices mentioned herein on a much wider scale, as well as stimulating

innovation and cooperation, and accelerating the transmission of expertise, multiplying initial and professional training and attracting young talents to our professions.

Collectively, we have the absolute conviction that the ethical expectations of the public and the demand for transparency that accompanies it, will not diminish but instead will grow stronger in the years to come. Leather companies can see the justifications for their long-standing CSR approach, and are motivated to strengthen individual and collective activities along the entire supply chain.

Given the new challenges facing our sector, it is increasingly working towards respect for the environment and addressing contemporary ethical issues, while at the same time generating responsible value creation that will guarantee its future performance.

The very credibility and future of the French leather sector depends on it. Already, the sector has succeeded in reinventing itself and positioning itself on the premium market, conquering market share internationally, making consumers around the world dream about the quality of its products and demonstrating its culture of excellence.

SUSTAINABLE
LEATHER FORUM



THE FRENCH LEATHER INDUSTRY



Created in 1948, the National Leather Council is the inter-professional organisation of producers and users of leather and, by extension, all those involved in the production, use or retail of leather. Organised into a confederation, it brings together 20 federations and professional unions, ranging from the farming of livestock through to the finished products, and leads the entire French leather sector.

conseilnationaldu cuir.org

