



Nothing To Hide presents fact-based arguments that can give consumers extra confidence about choosing bags, shoes and other products made from leather.

Credit: Messe Düsseldorf, Constanze Tillmann

Nothing to Hide: World Leather completes essay programme

*The Nothing To Hide Series is now complete, but the programme is ongoing because the idea is (and always was) for the essays to be accessed, quoted and shared by everyone with an interest in leather. All 15 essays are now available and are free to use.**

A programme that began two-and-a-half years ago to provide the leather sector with a free-to-access resource for presenting the positives about the industry has now reached its conclusion. *World Leather* announced the project, called Nothing To Hide, in 2013 and published the first essay, online and in the magazine, at the start of 2014. The final component, essay number 15, appeared in the June-July 2016 issue of *World Leather* and has been uploaded to the programme's dedicated website, nothing-to-hide.org. This brings Nothing To Hide to its completion, but not to the end of its useful life.

These 15 essays, contributed by some of the most senior figures in the global leather industry, constitute an ongoing resource for countering the myths that proliferate about leather production and presenting fact-based arguments that support the past, present and

future of this most ancient industry. Examples include in-depth analyses of the relationship between cattle and leather, making it clear that cattle are not primarily reared for leather and that leather is produced from a waste by-product of the food industry. Elsewhere in the series, there are science-based expositions of how a large part of the leather sector works with chrome.

Clear ideas

There is evidence everywhere that the need for easy-to-access, free-to-share, fact-based information about how the leather industry really works is as keen as ever. The 21st Century tanning industry is advanced and has a strong commitment to corporate social responsibility. Many observers, including some in responsible

positions, seem unable or unwilling to recognise the reality of current tanning technology. As an example, in May 2015, one of the major international environmental campaigning organisations stated that cattle were mostly reared for leather and that toxic chrome was often used in its production. This organisation may have skewed ideas about how companies make leather today, but it is exceptionally good at disseminating its messages far and wide. Journalists and others who write about environmental issues and about the leather sector from time to time assume these statements are true—and the false messages are repeated and spread around the world all over again.

Away from the shadows

Another good example is an error that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) made in the 2006. That year, the FAO claimed in a report called *Livestock's Long Shadow* that the lifecycle of livestock produced 18% of all greenhouse gas emissions, more than all forms of transportation combined. It took years and the intervention of Professor Frank Mitloehner, now the chair of the FAO's committee to assess the environmental impact of the livestock industry, for it to emerge that the original report was flawed. Professor Mitloehner and his research team at the University of California, Davis, proved in 2009 that the 2006 analysis was incorrect. In a paper entitled 'Clearing the Air: Livestock's Contributions to Climate Change', the professor concluded that, in the US, rearing livestock contributes 3.4% of



Leather remains one of the most exciting of materials for a wide range of uses. Now concise information is available to counter myths and misinformation that undermine the leather industry.

Credit: Première Vision Leather

greenhouse gas emissions, while transportation's share of the total is 26%. Projects are under way in Australia, Brazil, the US, Europe, Argentina and elsewhere to reduce or reuse the biogas that livestock emits, and there is progress.

Professor Mitloehner provoked few headlines when he put the FAO straight on the comparison between cattle's contribution to global warming and that of transport, whereas the message from the erroneous original report appeared everywhere and is frequently still repeated today. At the start of December 2014, an independent policy institute based in London, Chatham House, issued a report that urged governments to include action on livestock and meat production in their climate-change strategies. Specifically, it said: "Greenhouse gas emissions from the livestock sector are estimated to account for 14.5% of the global total, more than direct emissions from the transport sector." The number is amended, but the sentiment is familiar, and the notes for the document give the FAO as a source.

Objective response

Now that it is complete, Nothing to Hide will serve as a reservoir of facts and knowledge that the entire global leather industry will be able to draw on to respond objectively to criticism and to increase consumers' awareness of the naturalness and value of leather.

This is a world in which nothing can be hidden, so organisations that want to prosper have to make sure they have nothing to hide. This phrase comes from a speech about the food business that Greg Page, the executive chairman of Cargill, made in 2012. It can apply just as easily to the leather industry today. It has taken a considerable length of time for us to complete the entire Nothing to Hide programme, but the benefits of this piece of work as a defence of leather will last much longer. The series deliberately attempts to include material with a long shelf-life. There is now no need to let unfair criticism of the leather sector pass uncontested because there are facts, figures, quotes and references here that provide answers.

The best in the industry have nothing to hide; they have much to be proud of, as this important series proves. 🌐

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