



ReVeal – the Dutch veal and calfskin industry opens its doors

Leather chemicals manufacturer Stahl hosted a one-day event called ReVeal last November. The aim was to give finished product brands up-to-date information about transparency and traceability in the leather supply chain, with the focus firmly on Dutch calf leather.



A group representing the whole leather supply chain went to the Netherlands in November to find out more about transparency in the calfskin sector. ALL CREDITS: STAHL



Calves stay in groups of ten at the farm until the age of eight months.

A one-day event aimed at giving finished product brands up-to-date information about transparency and traceability in the calfskin supply chain took place in the Netherlands last November. The day included visits to a number of locations with connections to the supply of veal skins and calf leather. The Dutch veal industry is conscious of the sensitivity surrounding the production of the meat and skins and wanted to show that it is meeting all the required legal and ethical standards and is going beyond these standards in terms of animal welfare. It hosted around 80 visitors on the day from a number of different interests.

The two biggest groups were European calfskin tanners and brands that use calfskin in their leathers. The main hosts were the PALI Group, one of the leading Dutch veal producers; Rompa Tanneries, producers of both part-processed and finished calfskin leathers, and Stahl, one of the leading specialty leather chemical suppliers.

The day started with five presentations. Mike Costello, Stahl's director of sustainability, gave a welcome address and introduced all the individual speakers. The first presentation was by John Fletcher from Stahl, group director, marketing and brand services. Entitled 'Compliance and Sustainability in the Leather Supply Chain', he gave a detailed overview of why these issues have become so important, not just for the chemical suppliers, but for everyone involved at every stage of the supply chain.

The second presenter was Freddy van der Sar, associate director, SKV, that is responsible for quality assurance in the Dutch veal industry. It is an independent certification body that all Dutch veal producers use. The responsibilities relate

not only to the quality and safety of the meat, it also looks at the animal welfare side and SKV is entitled to visit any farm or slaughterhouse without prior notice. Mr van der Sar was followed by Twan de Bie, director of the PALI Group (and also of Rompa Tanneries). The main theme of his presentation was traceability. The veal industry already has a system in place to show complete traceability of all animals, from the farm where the animal was born, any transportation during the life of the animal, the veal farm and the slaughterhouse. It is working on a system to ensure that all calfskins also carry the same information. The information is already publicly available for veal, so once a calfskin identification system is also in place, it will be possible for leathers goods brands to show the same level of traceability and to allow consumers access to this information.

Mr de Bie also gave an interesting overview of the Dutch veal industry. The Netherlands is currently Europe's largest veal producer, processing around 1.5 million animals per annum. Roughly half are of domestic origin and half are imported. The industry recognises that transport of such young animals – usually they move from the farm of origin at two weeks old – is a concern for many consumers. The PALI Group uses its own vehicles and drivers to keep a close check on this. The maximum journey time allowed is eight hours, there is temperature control in the vehicles along with fresh water. They have their own collection points in various locations, again to give better control over the whole transportation process.

Federico Brugnoli, chief executive of Spin 360 presented 'Sustainable Life Cycle Analysis in a Tannery Environment'. Mr. Brugnoli is a very familiar figure in the leather industry



following his work on the carbon footprint of leather. *World Leather* will be covering this topic in the course of 2017. This was a good follow-up on the earlier Stahl presentation, again giving a broader overview of the importance of understanding the full consequences of any actions taken during the production of leather. The final presentation was given by Rachel Wallace, programme project manager of the ZDHC programme. ZDHC, which stands for zero discharge of hazardous chemicals, was originally set up by a number of brands in response to issues raised during the Greenpeace 'Dirty Laundry' campaign in 2011. There are now around 25 brands involved with other concerned interested parties joining at different levels; Stahl, for example, announced at the meeting that it has just become an associate member. The aim of the programme is to ensure that any chemicals that give cause for concern are removed from the supply chain by 2020. As opposed to other lists that control levels of chemicals in leather, this list will apply to the chemicals themselves before they enter the leather processing chain. ZDHC is another topic to be covered in more detail in *World Leather* this year. At the end of morning session Huub van Beijeren, chief executive of Stahl, added his words of welcome before the whole group moved on to one of the PALI farms outside the town of Geldermalsen.

This farm currently has around 1,300 calves on site, housed in two large barns. They arrive at around two weeks old before eventually moving on for slaughter at around eight months. The calves are all from dairy herds. The dairy industry needs only a few of the male calves born each year and only uses around 50% of the female calves to keep up the strength of the dairy herd. This means around 75% of all calves can either be slaughtered soon after birth – in which there is very little commercial value – or be raised for veal.

The animals are kept in pens containing ten calves each, and these same ten stay together the whole time they are on the farm. This reduces any tensions between them. Food is constantly available, which again leads to a quieter life. There have been concerns in the past about veal calves only being fed on milk, but the diet now includes plenty of roughage and is much more natural. Plenty of natural light enters the barns and the temperature never goes below 15°C; the barns are air-conditioned in the summer months. The pen sizes are well above the minimum legal requirement. There was a discussion on the possibility of raising the animals in the open air and PALI is open to this, but feels veal consumers would be reluctant to pay extra for that. It would be interesting, perhaps, to run a trial to see if at least some consumers would pay a premium. With complete transparency on traceability, this could carry on from veal into leathers, giving consumers the freedom to make a choice.

The group then moved on to the Rompa Tannery in Lichtenvoorde. The big advantage of sourcing part-processed calfskins from this tannery rather than raw skins from the slaughterhouses is that all the PALI slaughterhouses have the ability to chill the skins before sending them to the tannery so that they process fresh rather than salted skins, resulting in a big reduction in effluent treatment demand. This tannery, in its central position in the town, has long been a leader in environmental matters, including processing much of the waste for protein. It is a complete tannery and can offer wet blue (and increasingly wet white) calfskins or finished leathers.

The various tours provided plenty of opportunity to sound out a cross-section of the attendees. Participants were pleased by the openness shown during the day and those representing



Transparency in the veal supply chain can flow into leathers production and offer consumers valuable information on the origin of the raw material, including details on animal welfare.



Leathers brands who took part in the ReVeal event have given some indication of being willing to give calfskin leather a higher profile.



Stahl chief executive, Huub van Beijeren, one of the hosts of the ReVeal event.

brands gave some indication of being prepared to give calfskin leather a higher profile. Looking to the future, we can expect to see many more events of this type. To meet the growing concerns of brands and consumers, all in the supply chain must be prepared to offer greater transparency. 🌐