



A thermal energy plant that the Scottish Leather Group's Bridge of Weir tannery has been running for ten years.

CREDIT: SCOTTISH LEATHER GROUP



RENEWABLE



WASTE-FREE



SUSTAINABLE



RECYCLED

The ongoing value of waste

Many of the articles *World Leather* has published in the Leather and the Circular Economy section since the start of 2020 have emphasised the importance of tanners' use of waste from other industries (meat and dairy) in producing the material. This millennia-old practice proves how well established the leather sector's circular economy credentials are.

However, leather manufacturing also produces waste and having a coherent environmental and circular economy strategy means that tanners have to be more conscious than ever now of keeping that waste to a minimum, reusing as much of it as they can themselves and finding downstream partners who can find value in what is left over.

At the end of last year, trends experts from the Lineapelle leather exhibition, which takes place in Milan twice a year, travelled to Spain to hold sessions on the types and colours of leather likely to be in demand for fashion season spring-summer 2021. A first presentation took place in the tanning cluster of Igualada in Catalonia, organised by Spain's national leather industry body, Acexpiel.

To supplement the talk of colour trends and the changing moods of the fickle fashion world, Acexpiel also devoted a session on the day to waste management, placing it in the hands of Dr Xavier Elías Castells, a Barcelona-based consultant with expertise in carbon capture, waste-to-energy projects and creating value from waste in the circular economy. He is the author of a number of books on these subjects and runs a consultancy called Econotermia.

One of the first points Dr Elías impressed on the leather industry audience in Igualada was that he views the circular economy as an important tool in addressing climate change. It is something he insists every company and every individual

Just as tanners are proud of the circular economy cachet that their use of waste from the meat and dairy sectors gives, they have to make the fullest possible use of the waste their own production generates too.

needs to do because modern life means most of us are in danger of making a contribution to climate change every day. He calculates a global average of 11 kilos of CO₂-equivalent per person per day, but in developed economies, such as Spain's, the figure is almost double, 20 kilos per person.

He explained that using materials better is one of the key ways of taking action to bring this figure down. Zero waste to landfill is one of his mantras and he believes most materials can go towards producing new materials if companies and societies are committed enough to innovation and a redesign of the way they make things. Real-life examples he flagged up to the Igualada tanners included blocks of insulation material made from industrial waste that offer 11 times the density of expanded polystyrene blocks and four times the conductivity. He also showed paving blocks that not only use up waste, but also offer carbon-capture functionality.

At the very least, he sees strong possibilities for extracting energy from those materials we cannot reuse in any other way, including, in the case of leather manufacturing, chrome and split shavings, trimmings, fleshing waste and so on. This, too, is valuable waste. ☺