



A Bottega Veneta bag. Parent group Kering has said that, by 2025, all of its leather will need to be fully traceable to farm level and that all of it will be metal-free.

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Metal-free and traceable



Life and business have changed for everyone in 2020 with the arrival of covid-19. According to the chief sustainability officer of luxury group Kering, Marie-Claire Daveu, other changes were already making an important impact on her work before the virus.

She says the luxury group's chief executive, François-Henri Pinault, has always put sustainability at the heart of the business. Even in the recent past, senior people would attempt to point out that other aspects of running the group were more pressing. He disagreed. "François-Henri has been proved correct," she says.

In parallel, she says that climate change used to be an abstract problem for most people, but that now, with bush fires and other extreme events frequently on our screens, climate change is "a daily reality" for businesses, employees and citizens everywhere.

Calculated steps

Kering has been running sustainability programmes since 2012, the year in which Ms Daveu took up her current position. It developed a method for calculating an environmental profit-and-loss (EP&L) for its entire business. Setting itself updated sustainability goals in 2017, it said it would reduce this EP&L by 40% by 2025. Next year will be halfway towards the deadline. So far, the figure it is able to share is a reduction of 14%, achieved between 2015 and 2018.

Luxury group Kering has been running sustainability programmes since 2012. Its most recent sustainability goals set ambitious targets for its leathergoods brands and their suppliers in the tanning industry.

Its sites and shops have reduced their greenhouse gas emissions by 77% and 80% of all the energy the group consumes now comes from renewable resources.

It has created a fund, Kering For Nature, that will pay for the regeneration over the next five years of one million hectares of land around the world to help protect soil, forests, farms, rangeland and animals. Its aim was to protect and revitalise six times more land than its environmental impact could be affecting negatively.

Upstream actions

However, the chief sustainability officer points out that 93% of the group's overall footprint comes from its upstream



supply chain. This, then, is where she and her colleagues are concentrating most of their efforts, with initiatives focusing on cashmere in Mongolia, on wool in New Zealand and on silk in China. Then there is leather.

In recent sustainability reports, Kering, whose brands include Gucci, Saint Laurent and Bottega Veneta, has described leather as its “highest-impact” material. As part of its objectives for 2025, it has said all of its leather will need to be fully traceable to farm level by then and that all of it will be metal-free. It will only work with suppliers who are willing and able to disclose all the necessary information for it to be faithful to these goals.

Mushroom cloud

Ms Daveu also talks about the importance to Kering of “nurturing start-ups”. An example that has generated considerable publicity already is California-based company Bolt Threads. Kering is part of a consortium of big names that have funded the start-up’s development of Mylo. It uses mass from mycelia and, working with a tanning partner, produces material that finished product manufacturers can put into handbags. Bolt Threads has the view that there may not be enough leather around to meet future demand for attractive accessories and other products as levels of wealth expand around the globe, and that providing alternatives that are not based on fossil-fuels is a good idea.

Unfortunately, it then adds completely unreasonable comments such as this: “Unlike leather production, making Mylo doesn’t involve raising livestock or emitting any of the associated greenhouse gases or material wastes.” This muddled thinking appears to have failed to put Kering off.

The group is currently working with 120 different start-ups at corporate level, putting money into some of them. Marie-Claire Daveu makes it clear she regards this as investing in the future rather than as a cost.

Powerful signal

Established companies have an important role to play as well, she says, and she points out that the Fashion Pact initiative that the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, formally launched in August last year, has almost doubled its membership in its first year. There were 32 companies on board at the time of launch; Ms Daveu says this has now grown to 60 groups and brands that, together, represent 35% of product volume in the global fashion industry.

“We are a coalition of businesses that want to work together on subjects such as the environment, ocean pollution and biodiversity,” she explains. “It sends a very powerful signal that these brands are working together to move things forward because it’s good to talk about sustainable development, but if you don’t actually do anything, there’s no point. It’s important that we work together on this. It’s a long process and the Fashion Pact is a good start.”

Marie-Claire Daveu was one of the keynote speakers at the Sustainable Leather Forum in Paris in September 2020. The event was organised by the Conseil National du Cuir with the support of France’s Ministry of the Economy, Finance and the Recovery.



Kering sustainability director, Marie-Claire Daveu, speaking at the 2020 Sustainable Leather Forum in Paris.

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