

Talking Point

This month, key industry figures from the raw and semi-processed hide and skins industry discuss whether overall raw material quality declined over the past decade? And if so, what can be done to improve it?



This is a very difficult question to answer. I think the issue of hide quality is subjective to the tanner and the end user of the material. It will change from person to person, company to company and product to product. Overall, I think there are many factors that

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play into this equation and so it is very difficult to say definitely "yes or no" as to whether hide quality at a global level has actually deteriorated. Furthermore, we do not have access to qualitative national or international raw material data which complicates the answer further.

One important point to mention though which can be seen as a positive is that traceability is becoming increasingly important for hide marketers. Data collected in this context allows partial traceability back to the birth farm, which will enable a better understanding of the sources of defects which in time should engage processes that improve overall hide quality. |



In my opinion there has been a significant decline in grading/selection of hides in general over the past 10 years when we look at farming practices. When you look at the grading patterns themselves and focus on defects which occurred during the life of the cattle on the farm then we are seeing frequent damage caused by scabies, ticks and scratches. On the other hand, there has been a huge step forward in hide

David Holz, Director, Gerber Leather, Brazil.

quality from the point of view of traceability, animal welfare and animal handling before the slaughtering.

In the end, each piece of genuine leather will carry the fingerprint of each animal, promoting it as a natural product with a high value in terms of exclusively, beauty and warmth to the touch that only a pure natural product such as leather can give to final consumer products. The grading of each hide should therefore be targeted according to the final usage and through careful selection during the leathermaking process. |



Michael Crawford, Director, Crawford Hide Company, Northern Ireland.

My feeling is that the question you ask is wrong. The question should be: 'For what reason have some tanners seen a drop in raw material quality?' Your question is almost a *fait accompli* that a decline is a fact. It is not and, for those that handle hides and wet-blue the reverse is true. Animal standards are higher today than 20 years ago and if you look at the UK and Ireland the age profile of cattle killed has significantly dropped since the BSE crisis which in turn leads to hides with less defects. What has changed in the industry is that some tanners have moved from working with hide traders to working directly with meat plants. What they fail to understand is that in doing this you cut out a vital point of quality control with expert hide handlers. That is not to say that meat plants are deliberately sending bad material. You have to understand how meat plants today work. 20 years ago, hide sales from a plant might have been handled by a 30-year industry veteran, today that person is unlikely to

ever have handled a hide, but they will be highly educated and keep close eyes on market reports and will truly believe their hides are better than anywhere else without any basis of fact. For many people a hide is a hide and that is it. The most important phrase is "value add". Hide dealers, who sometimes have an unfairly bad name, will all have handled hides themselves. They'll know the differences by feel and sight. It is an under used service by the tanner today. In the past at many tanneries the hide buying and quality control would also have been run by 30-year veterans, today I am not sure if that is the case. I suspect that excel sheets dominate. What we have seen is that some of the most prominent meat groups in Europe have decided to align themselves with hide traders and have undoubtedly seen benefits over their competition. Indeed, today many hide traders in Europe wet-blue their own stock as they know the hides inside out, this has led to greater competition in the contract tanning space. |