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**David Peters column: Circadian dysrhythmia**

27 March 2018 | 2 comments | Print This Page

I had a dream that the leather business had been discontinued. PETA, together with every tree-hugging NGO, had finally succeeded in destroying the entire leather industry, eliminating nearly 50 million jobs and causing over \$500 billion of economic damage. (Hey, it's my dream!)

The new law, adopted by all countries except North Korea and Greenland, requires that all golf courses be converted to hide burial grounds, the only exception being the facilities owned by President Trump, which will remain intact. Under 'Decree 45', once the cattle are slaughtered each hide will be immediately folded and receive a respectful ceremonial interment.

With a production of over one million hides per day all hide traders and tannery workers, together with machinery manufacturers and shoe salespeople, will be reassigned to oversee and manage hide funeral arrangements. Only chemical companies will be excluded from any involvement as they need to concentrate all their efforts on expanding synthetic products with an emphasis on faux/fake materials.

A representative of this global initiative proclaimed that cattle finally have a humane and respectful resolution, which protects the dignity and self-respect of their skins and allows them to remain intact and peacefully retired. PETA, overjoyed with their long-awaited victory, finalised their plans to acquire McDonald's, inspired by promoting hide-free hamburgers. They expect this initiative to be a game changer in the fast food business as they monopolise their hold on the vast vegan leather market.

As word spread, car seat manufacturers were relieved that they no longer had to get their hands dirty figuring out criteria compromises, conversion costs and challenging black box hypothetical calculations based on the fleshing factor. This was especially rewarding as many in the business thought the factor was a reference to a reality therapy show on Fox TV.

The petro-chemical industry was granted official status as the only material allowed to be used in all footwear and apparel. In exchange for this classification they have agreed to pledge 10% of their annual revenues for research into what causes carcinogen-related diseases and to promote the multitude of ways plastic bottles can actually help marine life.

The makers of the famous Birkin bag confidentially reveal that they have developed a replacement material that would improve the aesthetics and allow them to be more competitive, thereby maintaining their current recommended retail selling price. With collagen cases and pet treats no longer commercially available, the sausage and pizzle stick products have all gone either completely natural or synthetic, with new sales seemingly flat.

I was awoken from my restless sleep as the banging on my hotel door intensified. Guests were in a state of panic as word spread that shoe manufacturers were exhibiting footwear made from leather at the recent APLF exhibition. An unofficial spokesperson commented that with the lack of success in marketing leather shoes on the internet, it seemed opportunistic to think setting up a retail location during a leather fair might have merit.

After three days of soul-searching, the five pairs peddled were returned due to a choking incident when the infant son of one of the recipients preferred the taste of chrome-free leather, typically used by a more environmentally sensitive brand.

**Back to reality**

Firstly, beef demand is the only reason why we have leather, period, full stop, end of subject. Hides and, in turn, leather are directly dependent on the consumer's requirement for red meat in their diet. Hamburgers, steaks, hot dogs and pot roasts are some of the reasons that leather exists. If this essential protein were not an integral part of the human experience our industry would not exist.

We are totally dependent on the cattle industry's fully-integrated business model to react and manage an animal by-product which we convert into leather. To think or state otherwise is insane.

Leather, in simple terms, is a recycled material. Once cattle are harvested, strictly for meat, the wrapper, cover or hide is recovered and through multiple processes is converted into leather. When the raw material is received it is not new or unblemished as it has been subjected to the natural elements, often for over two years.

This by-product, commonly referred to as hides, has provided a consistent flow of goods throughout the history of mankind. While this statement is obvious to subscribers of World Leather, it seems there is a fundamental disconnect between hides, a by-product, and the industry's incredible ability to recover a waste material. We are essentially in the recycling business.

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, the definition of the verb 'recycle' is: "To sort and collect rubbish in order to treat it and produce useful materials that can be used again". Anyone who has sold or bought hides from disreputable sources can attest to the term "collecting rubbish".

Without the leather industry meat packers would have a disposal problem as the only efficient and productive use for a raw hide is converting it to leather. It is from this sector, the birthplace of our industry, that we need active participation. There is a clear lack of involvement from the beef-producing industries in the promotion of the features, benefits and advantages of leather.

Shifting the industry message from a defensive position to an offensive one requires the commitment and proactive participation of global meat producers. They have a vested interest in safeguarding the leather industry but, with a few exceptions, have been noticeably absent. While hides only represent around 5% of their revenue, the impact of not effectively and efficiently managing their hide production would be devastating.

Producers are clearly stakeholders and have historically taken for granted that each and every day there are a sufficient pool of hide buyers willing to clear their production. But this situation is changing. The need for a revolutionary approach to marketing is now evident. This is a clarion call for engagement as leather's usage is being challenged in a manner never before experienced.

**Impending storm**

Hong Kong did not disappoint, unless you were one of the two individuals looking for a sudden resurgence of demand from the footwear segment. The inhabitants of the world's leather industries practised their yearly procedural dance and formed a conga line around the numerous corridors festooned with examples of leather in a multitude of styles, colours and conditions.

It is interesting to note that of the approximately 840 exhibitors the amount of leather sellers actually operating fully-integrated tanneries was under 10%. Therefore, hide sellers were eager to trap potential buyers who chose instead to meander the halls and sample the numerous cookies, candies and chocolates proffered by the inmates as these individuals sashayed by.

It would appear that the only people wearing leather shoes were the exhibitors; the numerous attendees mostly chose to wear sneakers sans leather.

Representatives of the major producing regions put on an optimistic visage, all the while attempting to conceal a burgeoning supply of selections, created by increasing demand for beef. The meat industry entered the New Year after a record 2017, with a similar outlook for 2018. Beef is very much in fashion, with steakhouses and hamburger palaces expanding throughout the Far East. Producing countries such as Brazil, the US, Australia and Mexico are all flooding the Orient with chilled and fresh meat. It is assured that the growth in beef production will continue during 2018 and even into 2019, therefore providing ample hide supplies for tanners to enjoy.

Meanwhile, the collective mood of those departing APLF was pessimistic as the gap in demand for shoe leather became more apparent. This was made more evident by the pressure on prices from Brazil as numerous producers were eager to book business at new lower levels. Economical or value-associated hides were accumulating at a faster rate than new sales and buyers from various producing regions were scouring their buyer lists for active customers.

Jet lag-induced insomnia inspired my curiosity to address the questions: What are the associated costs and issues surrounding the disposal of nearly one million hides per day? How does the world function without leather? Both go unanswered as the masses continue oblivious to the impending storm.

Let us not forget that we are the solution not the problem.

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- Henry Bank wrote:  
27 March 2018 16:13

- don ohsman wrote:  
27 March 2018 18:59

Excellent David. All points well taken

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