



THE LOWDOWN ON DOWN

We use goose down (either gray or white) in insulated garments because of its excellent performance. Down has a higher warmth-to-weight ratio than synthetic insulation, and it is more compressible. The higher the grade of down, the more efficient the insulation. We also offer garments with synthetic insulation – in different weights, grades and styles – to meet our customers' varied needs.

Down clothes are tricky to make in two ways. First, special care has to be taken to safeguard workers who fill and sew the garments. Down rooms have to be sealed off from other areas and workers have to wear masks to keep from inhaling the fiber. We have worked with our factories to ensure healthy conditions for people who work with down.

More difficult to control is the treatment of geese. Live-plucking, in which feathers are removed from live geese before they molt, is said to be like having one's hair pulled out. Force-feeding geese to fatten their livers in the production of *foie gras* is another controversial practice.

We want to give our customers the highest assurance possible that the geese that supply us with down are treated humanely. To that end, over the last several years, we have been working to develop both short-term and long-term alternatives to the use of down from live-plucked or force-fed birds. Here is a timeline of our examination of our down supply chain, our discoveries and challenges, and what actions Patagonia is taking toward adoption of the best possible long-term practices.

2002

We re-introduce down garments to the Patagonia line, but have yet to examine where our goose down comes from or how it's produced.

2007

During an environmental impact assessment of the materials we use, we look at down. We find the global poultry industry (not

limited to geese) has a record of inhumane treatment of birds raised for their meat, including such things as caging, de-beaking, force-feeding and polluting air and water. We ask our down supplier a lot of questions to which they provide detailed answers. But wanting to confirm what they tell us, we send our strategic environmental materials developer to Hungary to visit a goose farm. He asks about living conditions for the geese, what kinds of chemicals the farm uses, and how the geese are slaughtered for their meat. Our down supplier assures us our down does not come from geese that are force-fed, which we later find out is untrue. We learn that some of our down is taken from geese after they've been killed for their meat, and some is taken from live geese during their molting period. We consult an agricultural professor, who says that removing down and feathers from live birds when they're molting is not painful to the geese. Armed with this information, we attempt to explain the impacts of making a Patagonia Down Sweater on our Footprint Chronicles website.

2009

Aware of the fact that geese do suffer when their down is live-plucked, we require our supplier to certify that all down for Patagonia products come from slaughterhouses and not contain any live-plucked down. We're told that that force-fed geese produce an oily, second-quality down that is not being supplied to us, so force-feeding is less of a concern.

2010

In December, Four Paws (a German animal-rights group) accuses us of using live-plucked down; a charge we refute. During the controversy, however, we learn from a Four Paws investigation that gray geese from Hungary, where we get our down, are being force-fed to produce *foie gras*. Force-feeding is now banned in many European countries but still legal in France and Hungary.

2011

Wanting to get the facts firsthand, we send our director of social

and environmental responsibility, our director of materials development, and our strategic environmental materials developer to Hungary to investigate. They make two trips, one in February and one in August, accompanied by principals from our down supplier. The group visits representative links from the entire white and gray goose down supply chains – from parent farms (where the eggs come from) to breeding farms, slaughterhouses to down processors.

Our suppliers are forthcoming, but what we learn does not sit well with us. Four Paws is correct: We are unwittingly using down from force-fed geese raised for *foie gras* and meat. We don't see any evidence of live-plucked down in the parts of the supply chain we visit. And we verify that the slaughterhouses we inspect take steps to ensure they do not buy live-plucked birds and that they contract with the goose farms to specify that there is no live-plucking. This is bolstered by occasional audits of those farms.

Existing chain of custody documentation provides good traceability of down from the farm level to the slaughterhouse thanks to Hungarian food industry laws. The chain of custody, however, is not as robust from slaughterhouse to down processors. We begin implementing a plan to improve document linkage, labeling and separation of our down at all levels of the supply chain, including the garment factories, to ensure that we get no live-plucked material.

We also begin looking at other down supply chains where live-plucking and force-feeding of geese is illegal. Our materials team visits Poland to investigate potential new down sources, and we approve one source (that has limited capacity) for use in a range of styles.

2012

We commission an independent chain of custody audit of our new goose down supply chain in Poland, hiring a traceability expert who begins a three-month-long investigation joined by the International Down and Feather League. Our goal is to score down traceability management systems and assess animal welfare. The two are intrinsically linked and equally important to assuring product content claims.

During the three-month period, auditors assess more than a dozen sites over seven field days, including a down garment factory in China, a down processor in the U.S., and various international

down processors, slaughterhouses and farms - including a parent goose farm (where eggs are produced) and a hatchery. The auditors evaluate animal-welfare practices against the August 2012 version of the Patagonia down standard, as well as European Union and individual countries' laws pertaining to animal welfare. To measure robustness of traceability of the supply chain, our expert looks at the hallmarks of good traceability: documentation trails, physical labeling and segregation, and management systems. She then verifies the system's robustness through the tried-and-true supply chain auditing methodology of document review, observation, and worker interviews.

We receive reports at each stage of the assessment in each country, which includes assessment summaries, analysis of gaps in tracing systems, good practices, and a final score for animal welfare and overall traceability management systems. We also receive a final summary report linking all site visits and one final quantitative score for traceability management systems and animal welfare/live-plucking/force-feeding.

To our knowledge, no other company has gone to such lengths to assure chain of custody.

2013

We receive results from the audit in January that show “no evidence of live-plucking or force-feeding practices” in our white goose down supply chain. Furthermore, the audit reveals “a robust traceability document chain, adequate labeling and segregation practices with room for improvement in a few areas.” We are now pursuing remediation of all report recommendations to further improve traceability and animal welfare in our down supply chains.

Patagonia has a history of affecting change in supply chains, and we are hopeful to do it with down. In this spirit, beginning spring 2013, our entire collection of Ultralight Down clothing is using white down from geese that have been verified by an independent, third-party traceability expert to be non-live-plucked, non-force-fed. It is our hope to expand this offering each season as we build up a traceable down supply chain based on our Down Supply Chain Animal Welfare Standard.

Going Forward

We are developing a screening process for our down suppliers

based on our chain of custody audit and the assessment tools that came out of it. We are also looking into the possibility of using the Textile Exchange's Content Claim Standard. And we continue to deepen our knowledge of down supply chains in order develop the best possible practices and ensure credible chain-of-custody documentation.

To improve down supply chains across the board, we are participating in the formation of an Outdoor Industry Association and Textile Exchange Down Task Force, part of the Materials Traceability Working Group. The goal is to foster collaboration among brands and suppliers to establish traceability standards and methodologies for down products and supply chains. Traceability will allow brands to verify claims about the down used in their products, including whether the geese that supply it have been live-plucked or force-fed.

In the meantime, the caveats we first raised to Patagonia customers in spring 2011, and updated in December 2011, still apply. Vegans whose avoidance of animal products extends to shoe leather may want to avoid down clothing. And those who believe *foie gras* should not be produced or sold may also want to avoid down products. We continue to offer high-quality garments insulated with synthetic materials as alternatives.

Thanks for your interest. We will continue to discuss this issue as things develop.