



NSF'S GLOBAL TRACEABLE DOWN STANDARD PROMOTES ANIMAL WELFARE ACROSS THE SUPPLY CHAIN

OVERVIEW

Down is widely considered a superior insulator for clothing, comforters and sleeping bags for the simple reason that, pound-for-pound, it is unmatched for personal comfort. Down is durable, biodegradable, and considered more sustainable than most man-made fibers. Today's abundant down supply is sourced primarily from regions where ducks and geese are raised and processed for food, notably China.

Over the past decade, some animal welfare and environmental groups have raised concerns over the treatment of waterfowl bred for food and down. Citing two issues in particular –live-plucking and the force-feeding of geese for foie gras – several NGOs have demanded greater accountability by down manufacturers and marketers.

CHALLENGE

Patagonia, an American company known for emphasizing responsible practices in the design and manufacture of its popular outdoor apparel and gear, includes several down products in its clothing collection. In response to the public outcry, the company looked for signs of live-plucking or force-feeding across its supply chain in 2007 and 2009, respectively. In both instances, the company believed it had identified and resolved any related problems.

Then, in 2010, Four Paws, an international animal welfare group, publicly presented evidence that Patagonia was sourcing down from a region where live-plucking and force-feeding existed. One immediate result: Patagonia received more than 36,000 emails from concerned customers within a one-month period.



The company responded by creating the Traceable Down Standard (TDS), a rigorous, supplier-focused set of principles designed to prevent unnecessary harm to ducks and geese. In 2013, Patagonia introduced its first group of products independently verified to the TDS. Early in 2014, an alternative outdoor apparel industry protocol known as the Responsible Down Standard (RDS) also made its debut. Patagonia felt its TDS set higher standards for animal welfare and responsible sourcing, and decided to engage the services of a third-party certification agency to make the TDS a publicly available, consensus-driven practice.

SOLUTION

In 2014, Patagonia selected NSF International to develop the TDS as a global down standard. NSF provided the credibility of a widely recognized and trusted third party certifier, one with the knowledge and experience necessary to assure that the TDS would account for full traceability across the entire supply chain, including the farms where the birds sourced for down products are hatched.



NSF began to develop what would become the Global Traceable Down Standard (TDS) in partnership with a group of industry stakeholders that included down processors, manufacturers, retailers, trade associations, NGOs and animal welfare groups including Four Paws.



The coalition established, developed and refined the criteria for a multi-tiered standard that permits various degrees of execution based on risks associated within the supply chain. Once the criteria were set, the next steps included supply chain education and preparation for onsite certification audits. NSF published and introduced the Global Traceable Down Certification Standard in January 2015, then commenced auditing Patagonia's supply chains. In order to guarantee the audits' effectiveness, NSF engaged animal welfare auditors trained specifically for different supply chain partner environments, including farms, manufacturing and processing facilities. NSF also provided the tools to help all suppliers meet certification requirements.

A MANUFACTURER'S PERSPECTIVE

Quang Viet Enterprise Co., Ltd. (QVE), based in Taiwan, manufactures Patagonia down products to strict quality specifications. QVE Merchandise Director Paul Wu says that his company's prior two-year experience with the RDS helped prepare it for the rigors of the Global Traceable Down Standard. "We can handle the TDS very well," he says. Subsequent NSF audits confirmed this, while also giving

Wu's managers greater insights into how best to handle TDS-specified down. Today, all TDS down that enters a QVE facility is placed in a separate, secure area. It is then processed, and related products manufactured, by a specially assigned work team on a separate assembly line. The finished products are then stored away from non-TDS merchandise until shipped to customers.

Wu notes that all employees are thoroughly educated in the specifics of the Global TDS, including the importance of animal welfare practices to QVE customers, the standard's impact on the corporate reputations of those who use it, and its value to QVE as a way to market its responsible down practices to potential customers. Wu cites a familiar name-brand known for its high-end casual clothing as a new QVE customer, thanks in part to his company's experience with the Global TDS.

"QVE wishes to project the image of a trustworthy company, one worth working with," he says, acknowledging that any added costs related to implementing the TDS are less important than establishing its reputation as a responsible manufacturer.



Supplier buy-in to a protocol like the Global TDS is essential to a brand's success in applying it. "Usually brands don't own their supply chain," explains Wendy Savage, senior manager of social responsibility and traceability at Patagonia. "We don't own the factories or the farms where the geese are raised, so we depend on our supply chain partners.

"When we try to implement an initiative like traceable down, we have to do it with a partner that shares our values and our philosophy of doing the right thing. With QVE, that was the case. From the beginning they were engaged and helped us educate the supply chain."



"This standard is something we believe in," Patagonia's Savage asserts. "We are deeply involved in discussions with suppliers, brands and industry with NSF and on our own to keep things moving forward." Savage notes that Patagonia is now at work on creating a similar standard for wool that will extend animal welfare protections to sheep, "and we continue to consider NSF our best partner for this endeavor as well."

For more information about the Global Traceable Down Standard, call email sustainability@nsf.org.

RESULTS

Patagonia has expressed its satisfaction with the evolution of its internal Traceable Down Standard into the global iteration developed by NSF and industry stakeholders. In particular, the company has acknowledged the technical expertise of NSF-led auditors in assuring suppliers meet the rigors of the standard.

As further evidence of the Global TDS's impact, Four Paws, the animal welfare organization that publicly challenged Patagonia for using down from force-fed waterfowl, rated the company second in 2014 for best animal welfare practices among all companies in the outdoor industry that use down.

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