



FINDING THE TRUTH ABOUT “LIVE-PLUCKING” & “HARVESTING”

11 February 2009

Recent Swedish TV stories and German newspaper articles have created a frenzy of concern about the issue of “live-plucking” and “live-harvesting” of down and feathers from geese and ducks.

What is IDFL doing about these issues?

- Separate fact from fiction in this news story.
- Cooperate with suppliers, manufacturers and retailers to understand the problems.
- Work with associations to gather and publish correct information:
 - ▶ European Down and Feather Association (EDFA).
 - ▶ Chinese Feather and Down Industrial Association (CFDIA).
 - ▶ International Down and Feather Bureau (IDFB).
 - ▶ Hungarian Down Association.
 - ▶ Other local associations.
- Continue to promote quality and humane production of down and feathers.
- Certify the origin of down and feathers from humane sources.

Where do down and feathers come from?

The majority of down and feathers are a by-product of the food processing industry. Food products are the main value of duck and geese farming. Down and feathers are collected during the food-preparation process. IDFL estimates that **over 99%** of the world’s down and feathers are by-products of the food industry. Therefore, **less than 1%** of the world’s supply is “harvested” or “live-plucked”.

What is “harvesting” and “live-plucking”?

For centuries family farms have traditionally removed down clusters and very small feathers from geese during the moulting season. The tradition has nearly disappeared. However, the process continues to occur in some east European countries and in Asia.

“Live-plucking” is wrongly used to describe two very different processes. These two processes must be defined separately. “Live-plucking” should never be used to describe both processes. The definitions and differences of the two terms are listed below:

- 1. Harvesting.** The laws of the European Union (EU) allow for legal “harvesting” of soft down and small feathers during the moulting season. The laws require special handling of the birds during the moulting season when down and feathers are naturally lost. In China, “harvesting” of soft down and feathers from geese also occurs in a few flocks that often originated from east European countries.
- 2. Live-Plucking.** Unfortunately, a few farms perform a dry “live-pluck” of geese without following the strict EU animal protection laws. This disregard for EU laws and the health and safety of the animals occurs in small numbers of farms in Europe and in Asia. “Live plucking” is condemned by both EDFA in Europe and CFDIA in China, as well as all other down and feather organizations.

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How much material is “harvested” or “live-plucked” in Europe?

A very small amount of goose down is “harvested” in Europe, mostly in east European countries. The most important country for “harvesting” goose is Hungary. Less than 10% of goose down from Hungary is “harvested”. The rest of Hungary’s down is a by-product of the food industry. The ratio of “harvested” goose in other east European countries is much less than 10%.

“Harvesting” is two times as expensive in Europe as the normal feather production from the food industry.

“Harvesting” of duck is rare because the process is so much more expensive than collecting the down and feathers at the time of food production. There is a very small demand for “harvested” duck.

How much material is “harvested” or “live-plucked” in Asia?

China produces 80% of the world’s supply of down and feathers. 90% of China’s supply is duck and 10% is goose. “Harvesting” is only commercially feasible in about 2% of the goose species raised in China. The demand for goose meat of young tender birds precludes “harvesting” or “live-plucking” in the other 98%. This means that the amount of material “harvested” in China is less than 0.2% of China’s production.

“Harvesting” in China is 1.5 times more expensive than the normal feather production from the food industry.

Some Asian buyers and retailers specifically order “live-plucked” or “harvested” down from China. A few farms in China “harvest” goose down to meet buyer requirements. It is possible that some Chinese suppliers claim to offer “harvested” or “live-plucked” down to satisfy buyers, but have no sources themselves. They simply purchase such material from the very few companies that actually “harvest”.

Who is buying “harvested” down from Eastern Europe ?

Most of the legally “harvested” down is sold to companies making expensive Japanese bedding and outerwear goods. Small amounts are also exported to other European countries.

Who is buying “harvested” down from China ?

Almost all of Chinese “harvested” down is exported to Japan for expensive bedding and outerwear products.

Is there a shortage of duck down and feathers?

The Swedish TV story claims that the reason for “live-plucking” is the shortage of duck down. Just the opposite is true. Currently, there is an oversupply of duck feathers and down. In both France and China, feathers are thrown away after processing the meat because the price is so low and the supply is so high.

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Is “harvesting” or “live-plucking” practical?

Legal “harvesting” or illegal “live-plucking” is very expensive compared with normal feather processing. It only makes economic sense if the bird is very large and mature and the buyer is willing to pay a premium price. Demand for this expensive material is the only reason that “harvesting” or “live-plucking” occurs.

For normal bedding and apparel products, it makes no economic sense to use the expensive “harvested” or “live-plucked” material. “Harvested” materials are sold only by buyer request at a premium price. Some buyers have specifications that prohibit the shipment of “harvested” or “live-plucked” material.

What can a buyer do to assure that down and feathers are not “harvested” or “live-plucked”?

IDFL recommends the following steps for buyers who wish to prohibit either “live-plucked” or both “harvested” and “live-plucked” material in their shipments:

1. Buyers should require all down suppliers to sign certificates stating that they will not use “harvested” and/or “live-plucked” material in buyer shipments.
2. The restriction forbidding “harvested” and/or “live-plucking” down and feathers should appear as a clause in all specifications and in all contracts and purchase orders.

IDFL is working with other laboratories on possible tests or protocols to assist in determining if material is “live-plucked”. A simple laboratory test may or may not be feasible. However, an IDFL-sponsored certification program is available.

Conclusion

- A very small demand for “harvested” and/or “live-plucked” material exists.
- More than 99% of the world’s supply of down and feathers are by-products of food production.
- “Harvested” or “live-plucked” material is much more expensive than by-products of the food industry.
- Buyers can assure that their material is only a by-product of the food industry.
- IDFL will assist buyers, suppliers and other parties in resolving problems and questions.
- Ducks are rarely, if ever, “harvested” or “live-plucked”.
- Most “harvested” goose down and feathers from both Europe and China is shipped to Japan for expensive consumer bedding and outerwear products.

For more information contact IDFL or one of the following:

- Ms. Juliane Hedderich, European Down and Feather Association (EDFA) at info@edfa.eu
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