

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Kering hopes to push industry towards sustainability with new standards

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Fashion is adapting to the future. Image credit: Gucci

By SARAH RAMIREZ

As traditional luxury brands strive to become more transparent about their sustainability practices, French luxury conglomerate Kering is the latest to introduce new standards regarding animal welfare.

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Today's shoppers, including the highly coveted millennials and Gen Zers, are becoming more vocal about their preference for sustainable brands, and many high-end brands are emerging to fill this consumer need. Meanwhile, groups of heritage labels such as Kering need to balance their identity as luxury businesses while moving in more eco-conscious directions.

"Kering is committed to embedding sustainability across our business and helping lead the way in luxury and fashion," said Marie-Claire Daveu, chief sustainability officer and head of international institutional affairs at **Kering**, Paris. "This means promoting responsible, sustainable and regenerative production systems for all of our group's raw materials.

"An essential part of this is ensuring the highest standards of treatment and respect for the animals in our supply chains," she said. "This is part of our sustainability roadmap to 2025."

Kering guidelines

Announced on May 13, Kering's open-source standards cover all of the species that are included throughout its supply chain, such as cattle, sheep and goats.

"There are already some important existing certifications and regulations, however they do not cover all of our needs for animal welfare internationally," Ms. Daveu said. "So, we decided it was essential to develop animal welfare standards for ourselves for our suppliers at farms and abattoirs.

"We also needed to have a baseline of how we define best practices' at Kering and to set the guidance for continuous improvement by our suppliers," she said.



Kering signed a U.N. Climate Change charter. Image credit: Bottega Veneta

To develop its guide, Kering consulted research and legislation and worked with experts including scientists, NGOs, farmers and herders over three years and in 16 different countries. The standards have three tiers, which range from a bronze level that meets or slightly exceeds existing European legislation to a gold level that represents the best in class ([see story](#)).

The open-source guidelines will be made public this week, further supporting Kering's commitment to transparency.

"We are sharing the standards, and hopefully they will be adopted by other companies and brands," Ms. Daveu said. "There needs to be collaboration for widespread improvement within our industry."

As a whole, the fashion industry is one of the world's largest contributors of pollution, including textile waste and water pollution. Animal-based materials including cashmere, wool, silk and leather also have a large environmental footprint.

Kering has ramped up its own sustainability efforts in recent years, with an emphasis on improving its supply chain.

Last year, Kering was among the fashion companies that joined with U.N. Climate Change to tackle the industry's impact on the environment by signing the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action ([see story](#)).

Kering also partnered with charity organization Savory Institute to tap the positive impact regenerative agriculture can have in the fashion industry. This initiative includes using a new network of farms ([see story](#)).

Earlier environmental efforts from Kering also centered on animal welfare.

In 2016, Kering and its research collaborators within the Python Conservation Partnership found that wild harvesting and farming of pythons is ecologically sustainable and economically beneficial to local communities in Southeast Asia ([see story](#)).



Kering sees sustainability as an opportunity for innovation. Image courtesy of Kering

"A number of animal-based materials are core to our brands' products in fact many are iconic for luxury overall," Ms. Daveu said. "Production of these materials is directly linked with the livelihoods of farmers and, when well-managed at farm level, they can also deliver significant positive outcomes for the environment.

"At Kering, we want to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are in place alongside these regenerative and wildlife-friendly farming practices," she said.

Luxury sustainability

While Kering hopes to lead by example regarding sustainability in luxury, other players in the industry have also revealed more stringent sourcing guidelines.

"Consumers are reading labels to learn about the source of the materials in products and often make purchasing decisions based on the sustainability standards of the product," said David Naumann, vice president of marketing at [Boston Retail Partners](#). "Transparency in material sourcing is a becoming a new customer expectation and retailers are realizing the importance of aligning with higher standards for the source of materials and the environments for the animals that are used in products."

This February, luxury goods conglomerate LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton introduced new requirements for its crocodilian leather sourcing, as the group continues its quest to be more transparent about animal welfare and other sustainability issues.

Although tannery traceability requirements were already in place within the company, LVMH's new standard has four primary tenets. The group plans to share an updated global strategy for the total animal sourcing as part of its LVMH Initiatives For the Environment program later this year ([see story](#)).

Hinting at a larger sustainability push within luxury retail and fashion, British department store chain Selfridges also announced its plans to stop selling items made with exotic skins within the next year. The retailer banned the sale of real fur in 2005 and is again becoming an early adopter in moving away from exotic skins ([see story](#)).

"Ideally, there should be an independent organization that monitors and certifies farmers and manufacturing plants for ethical and sustainable practices to make it easy for consumer to know if a brand or product is in accordance with consistent standards," Mr. Naumann said. "Brands that truly walk the talk' on these environmental issues will foster more brand loyalty among environmentally conscious consumers."