



## **Statement on the harvesting of feathers and down**

In the past few days we have been frequently asked to issue objective and relevant information on the topic of "harvesting feathers and down". We are glad to answer your questions now.

### **Which filling material do you mainly use for the fillings of quilts and pillows?**

European manufacturers use in most cases feathers and down from waterfowl (geese and ducks) to produce the fillings of bedding articles (quilts and pillows).

### **Which are the characteristic features of feathers and down from poultry?**

Feathers and down from waterfowl (geese and ducks) are a unique natural resource of high quality.

Used as filling for quilts, pillows and clothing, this material is distinguished by qualities such as breathability, humidity transport and thermal insulation together with a low weight.

These special features account for the homogeneous distribution of feathers and down, for instance, in a quilt as well as for the fact that already small amounts of feathers and down are sufficient for the filling of a quilt.

### **Are birds especially bred because of their plumage?**

Neither ducks nor geese are being bred or kept for the sole purpose of collecting feathers and down. For thousands of years, poultry has been bred and kept mainly for the purpose of human nutrition.

This has not changed much. The harvested feathers and down are a natural by-product of the poultrymeat industry or the poultry farming, respectively.

### **How is the filling material produced?**

Ca. 98% of the amount of waterfowl feathers produced world-wide are harvested after the slaughtering of the fowl – as a by - product of the poultrymeat production. Since the size of families is shrinking, and consumers are asking for young and tender poultrymeat, the animals are usually slaughtered around the time of their first moulting.

The harvested feathers and down are primarily a by - product which results from the meat production.

### **Who processes the harvested feathers and down?**

The bedfeather manufacturers purchase the products, which come from the slaughterhouses. These bedfeather - processing companies are grouped together in the industrial sector called "slaughtering of poultry – processing of the animal by-products" and must be provided with a certificate of admission issued by a competent veterinary authority to operate.

### **Which kind of companies are represented by your association?**

We represent those companies, which purchase raw feathers and down, then process them under hygienically sound conditions (water washing, steam drying – sterilizing, sorting) and further process them into finished bedding articles.

### **Are there other ways of collecting feathers and down, such as, i.e., plucking live ducks and geese?**

Duck feathers and down are – as far as we know – exclusively harvested after the slaughtering. Thus, duck feathers and down stem from dead animals.

Goose feathers and down can be collected by harvesting them from live animals, as well.

The harvesting must be carried out in accordance with clearly defined rules, (as defined in, e.g., the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes, the standard on the keeping of geese for the purpose of plucking and the national laws concerning animal welfare).

Should feathers be harvested from live animals, then the process must be carried out in accordance with the rules.

### **Is there a difference between "harvesting feathers and down from the live animal" and "live-plucking"?**

There is no difference on the level of technical terminology. The harvesting of feathers and down from the live animal, which should more accurately be called "gathering" or "collecting" feathers and down, is usually carried out at the moment of the change of feathers, the moulting season, when a new generation of feathers has matured and the old feathers will therefore be shed.

The moulting in birds is the system provided by nature to shed an old feather coat. The quill point is sticking very loosely in the feather follicle, because the nutrient supply of the feather has been interrupted due to hormonal reasons.

This makes it possible to harvest the feathers from the live animal without inflicting any harm or hurting the goose or its skin.

The technical literature on this topic has emphasized time and again that in general the sensitivity of poultry skin is much lower than the sensitivity of the skin of mammals.

### **Why does everybody speak of “live-plucking according to the rules“ or simply of “live-plucking“?**

These terms have become common practice. We use the term of “live-plucking according to the rules” when we speak of harvesting feathers and down from the live animal at the moment of moulting, because otherwise nobody would understand us.

We condemn improper live-plucking. It is strictly forbidden.

### **Who defined what is “in accordance with the rules” or “improper” and when was it defined? Was it done by you, the industry, or rather by the geese farmers?**

How the live-plucking according to the rules (= the harvesting of feathers and down from the live animal) has to be carried out, is laid down in the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes (see also: first publishing of the German translation of recommendations by the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals kept for Farming Purposes on February 7th, 2000 in the Bundesanzeiger [German Federal Gazette], volume 52 No. 89a, issued on May 11th, 2000).

Although we have triggered this process, we merely forwarded the topic to a working group of experts, in order to have it dealt with on a supranational European level.

This convention specifically forbids inflicting any harm or injury on farm animals. Thus, it is forbidden to harvest feathers and down from live animals outside the moulting season, for example.

### **Is live - plucking forbidden?**

Improper live-plucking is forbidden. The harvesting of feathers and down from the live animal as well as the live-plucking in accordance with the rules are not forbidden.

The process has to conform to quite specific regulations, however. These regulations are laid down in a standard concerning the harvesting of feathers and down from the live animal and the keeping of geese for the purpose of plucking.

### **Do you control the harvesting of feathers and down?**

During the past 13 years, our industry has been very much involved with animal protection in this field. We have Hungarian farms checked and monitored by the German TUEV.

How can I distinguish feathers and down, which have been collected by live - plucking from those which have been harvested from the dead animal?

For an expert it is quite simple to distinguish raw feathers and down which have been collected by live - plucking from those which have been harvested from the dead animal. Once the feathers have been processed, however, it is impossible to make this distinction.

As the collection of feathers and down by live-plucking according to the rules (the harvesting of feathers and down from the live animal) is much more complex than the harvesting of feathers from dead animals and as the material collected by live-harvesting possesses a particularly high degree of maturity, it is usually much more expensive than the feathers and down collected from the dead animal.

### **Which animals are live-harvested and why?**

As far as we know, ducks are not live - harvested, but only those geese, which are kept for the purpose of laying eggs and breeding. Throughout every year, these animals undergo several moulting seasons, the hormonally induced process of shedding their old plumage.

Harvesting the feathers and down from the live animal is a technique which has in former times been also applied for the purpose of landscape conservation.

In order to avoid that a flock of, say, 100 mother geese shed their old feathers and down and that these fly around the landscape and entangle themselves in bushes, trees, buildings etc., the farmers were requested to contribute to the landscape conservation by collecting the loosely attached material.

The animals are an important resource for the farmers. To treat this resource properly means to secure their income in the future. Cruelty to animals does not mean a secure income in the long run.

**Why did you not react to the horrifying press reports, which have recently been published? Are you against animal welfare?**

Our association has been working for 13 years now in the field of animal welfare as related to geese.

We have issued numerous press releases, which you will find on the internet under [www.edfa.eu](http://www.edfa.eu) or [www.vdfi.de](http://www.vdfi.de). We are quite ready to further concentrate our efforts on this topic.

More animal protection is of great benefit for our association as well as for our products. The European bedfeather industry does not benefit at all, if animals are tortured.

We are always very open for cooperation with political bodies, interest groups or animal rights organizations. We would welcome the idea of a round table with all interested parties and would be quite willing to cooperate in this field.