Bestseller invests in cell-based leather alternative

By Sandra Halliday  -  5 May 2022

Bestseller said on Thursday that it’s looking at the market for leather alternatives due to issues around the material related to animal cruelty and the climate impact of its processing, and it has just invested in an advanced technology-based solution.

It has made an investment in VitroLabs, a company that “can grow leather in just a few weeks via cultivated laboratory cells”.

The Danish fashion giant said the material represents only around 1% of its total materials consumption but it’s still a key issue to address.

It said “leather is durable, sturdy. And it has a high-quality finish which often only gets better with age and the more you use it”, but there remain issues around its use.

Dropping it altogether is “not a decision we are making now. But we are working on finding good leather alternatives, where we are 100% sure that they don’t just create another environmental problem, such as high plastic content or reduced quality and durability,” said Camilla Skjønning Jørgensen, its Sustainable Materials & Innovation Manager.

She added that “satisfactory alternatives don’t yet exist on a commercial scale. On the other hand, we currently see a lot of innovation when it comes to leather alternatives, gradually creating exciting, new opportunities.”

The company is in the process of researching all of them via its innovation platform, Fashion FWD Lan and Invest FWD, through which it has made the VitroLabs investment.

Using a single animal cell to grow lab-based leather in which the cell acts as a seed that self-generates in bioreactors, is a key area of research for several companies at present.

And VitroLabs, through its Series A financing round, has just received a total of $46 million to build and scale the world’s first pilot production of cell-cultivated leather.
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"VitroLabs is an exciting company with a team – and technology – that in the long run has potential to become an interesting alternative – among others – to conventional leather," said Jeppe Bredahl, responsible for investments at Invest FWD.

"We want to support the development of more sustainable alternatives that over time contribute to a reduced climate footprint in the fashion industry. It is an investment in the future."

In addition to the new investment in VitroLabs, Invest FWD has in recent years put money into a number of innovations, such as textile recycling and waste-to-fibre technologies. Those include Ambercycle, Circular Systems, Infinited Fiber and Evrnu.

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