
MELINA BUCHER

The vegan/natural fur of the future: an Interview with BioFluff

Author: Emma Leiber, 16.01.2023

Leather, wool, feathers or fur. In the fashion industry, many materials of animal origin are used. Luckily, more and more brands decide against them for both ethical and sustainability reasons – and more and more innovators are working on truly sustainable materials, such as the 100% natural, plastic-free and vegan leather MIRUM®.

The use of fur in particular is now widely frowned, because the truth of animal husbandry in fur farms is beyond cruel. Animals are bred specifically for the fur industry and live under the worst conditions. They are crammed into tight, filthy wire cages, unable to engage in their natural social behaviors and sometimes skinned alive. In addition, to prevent decomposition of the animal furs, environmentally harmful chemicals are used in tanning processes. Thus, fur loads animals as well as the environment and human health.

Thanks to the relentless work of animal rights activists in the last years, the fur industry is also a hot topic on the political agenda right now. This year, California became the first US state to ban the sale of animal fur products. On 1 January 2023, a law came into force that makes the production, sale and donation of fur illegal. In the EU, the European Citizens' Initiative is also currently actively campaigning for a 'Fur Free Europe' with the help of a petition. The number of 1 million valid signatures is already reached, which means that now the European Commission is obliged to act.

For fur coat lovers, there was no animal-friendly and sustainable alternative for a long time. This is because the alternatives to animal fur so far have been made of synthetic fibers (more on the problems of synthetic fibers in the interview). Good news is: That's over now. Ashwariya Lahariya and Martin Stübler, the founders of BioFluff, develop the first plant-based fur. The patented production process creates a unique ethically justifiable and sustainable fur alternative, without animal suffering. The fur keeps you warm and cozy, convinces with a stylish look and also protects the planet and the animals.

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We met the two founders and they told us about their journey as young pioneers and company founders, about their visions and the characteristics of BioFluff. In the following article you will get a lot of insights into the world of this new and exciting material. Have fun!

What motivated you to develop a vegan and sustainable fur? Where do you see the problems with the fur alternatives that are already in the market?

Martin Stübler: In summer 2021, I was working on various alternative leather projects. During research and visits to different tanneries, I discovered that the topic of alternative leather was already being worked on many times by scientists and designers. Ideas for animal-free furs, on the other hand, were rarely addressed. The only alternative on the market is synthetic fur, which consists of polyester and modacrylic fibers. These fibers are synthetically produced from petrochemicals, partly consist of fossil fuels and cause enormous amounts of waste. Accordingly, artificial fur is at best a temporary compromise solution. I definitely see a gap in the fashion industry here and I am ready to fill it!

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What is BioFluff's vision?

We have big dreams and visions. We want to become the biggest supplier for all environmentally conscious high-end fashion brands and replace animal fur and synthetic fur with BioFluff in the long run. It is important for us to set a sign and show the world that animal furs are not a necessity. The look and coziness of the furs can be combined with vegan, sustainable materials and fair conditions for people and the environment. We work according to the motto: *the future is plant-based.*"

We also place great value on transparent and honest partnerships. We carefully select them based on shared vegan goals and a common understanding of sustainability.

What makes BioFluff's vegan fur stand out in particular?

The 100% natural, plant-based basis is what distinguishes BioFluff the most. What may sound simple at first, actually solves two enormous problems in the fashion industry: 1. animals are not a commodity that should be used in clothing and fashion. We can prevent that with our fibers. 2. with natural, biodegradable fibers, the environment is not polluted.



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Can you name the fibers used to make the fur?

We really would like to talk about that, but this is part of the intellectual property and patent. What we can say is that we only use natural materials and ingredients. The combination of different types of fibers and plants with the help of our patented augmentation or enhancement process yield the unique soft and vegan fur. The softness is especially the result of the fiber density and a special fiber softening process. Moreover, the fibres are no cash crops, i.e. they are not cultivated specifically for economic purposes. At least 50% of them are residues from agriculture.

Let's turn back time: how did it all begin?

Martin: Every new change starts with the realization that something in the existing system is broken or wrong. I had such a realization when I visited the tanneries and saw how animal skins were processed. This was the moment I wanted to make a change. I asked myself: What can I do to help reduce the consumption of animal fur? Later I did some research and found out that the existing alternatives on the market are either petroleum-based or they contain only a small percentage of natural plant materials. None of the alternatives are biodegradable or can be recycled in a meaningful way. This became our approach: we wanted to develop the first fur made from 100% plant materials that at the end of the day can easily biodegrade. Our backgrounds in biotechnology and textile science were key to create a product in a whole new category: a fur made neither from animal nor synthetic materials, but instead exclusively from plants.

We are also sure that now is exactly the right time for such an innovation. More and more people are rejecting animal materials and are looking for vegan alternatives that are both sustainable and circular.

How does it feel to see the production really take off now?

Seeing our dream come true step by step is just a magical feeling. We are excited like children under the Christmas tree. What was first just a mind game is now becoming reality. We are sure there is a high demand for sustainable fashion right now. We feel this impulse every day when we go to work. We are looking forward to the future and are excited to see our BioFluff on the runway for the first time soon!

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You are one of the 25 teams that, like Melina Bucher, was selected by the EU for the Fashion for Change Growth Programme. Congratulations! What do you expect from this programme?

The F4C Accelerator Programme is one of the best growth programmes for young companies in the EU. It gives us as a sustainable tech start-up a voice and at the same time connects us with mentors who support young start-ups in the fashion field. We will also definitely be enriched by the contact with the other participants. We've seen the diligence with which the companies have been selected to create a perfect mix of diverse and innovative ideas. We could already learn a lot about ourselves and about other visions. Over the next few years, with the help of the growth programme, we hope to understand our product even better and develop it further.

Finally, a personal question: What vegan product do you dream of? What do you think should definitely be available on the market?

Martin: Personally, I would like a fluffy white vegan fur coat I can wear to fashion events and festivals. This is also a great inner motivation for me to work with BioFluff. Fur is a wonderful and warm material, keeping you cozy and stylish on concert nights or other events. I have always been a little envious of people with their fur jackets, but I still reject them because they are not compatible with my values. One day I would like to attend a big event confident and snuggled up in a vegan, sustainable BioFluff coat.

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Ashwariya: This might sound weird, but I dream of an app that is as popular as Facebook or Instagram, that everyone knows, everyone uses and that shows you the origin of a product within a second. Everybody should know if a product contains animal ingredients, plastics or petrochemicals. I would like to see this general awareness in society.

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