



August 14, 2025

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Joe Dudy, President and CEO
Kevin Murphy, Vice President and General Manager, Wilson Team Sports
Wilson Sporting Goods
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Re: Elimination of Cowhide Footballs

Dear Messrs. Dudy and Murphy:

I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 10.4 million members and supporters globally—to alert you about cruel methods in Wilson's confirmed leather supply chain.

PETA's undercover investigation captured footage at a slaughterhouse that supplies cowhides to Horween Leather Company, purveyor of the leather for official Wilson NFL and CFL footballs. You can [watch the just-released investigation video here](#).

This disturbing footage was captured at Rodabaugh Bros. Meats in Pandora, Ohio, where cows were killed in full view of their frightened herdmates. The terrified cows who were next in line to be slaughtered could also see others being beheaded, dismembered, and skinned. This slaughterhouse was featured in a *Sports Illustrated* piece about the making of Wilson's official NFL footballs.

Forcing cows to watch the killing and processing of other animals is cruel and in violation of best practices guidelines put forth by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the North American Meat Institute (NAMI). Furthermore, the slaughterer aimed and deployed a captive-bolt gun at the back of the cows' heads, violating guidelines put forth by AVMA and NAMI as well as those on the website of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which state that proper stunning should be done by applying a captive bolt to a cow's forehead because "incorrect positioning, resulting in an ineffective stun, will cause the animal to suffer pain and distress."

Seventy thousand cows are killed every year in the manufacturing of Wilson leather footballs. Cows develop friendships, have long memories, and mourn when a loved one dies or when they're separated from each other, so seeing their herdmates killed right in front of them is especially traumatic. Cows killed in leather production also often start out crammed into filthy sheds and feedlots and are usually branded, castrated, tail-docked, and dehorned without painkillers. They're also sometimes still conscious when their throats are slit, according to USDA enforcement records.

Entities:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

In light of the suffering filmed at this slaughterhouse and routinely documented in other cattle facilities, we urge Wilson to transition to using exclusively synthetic materials.

We are writing to the NFL Competition Committee as well about converting to an elite synthetic football, effective for the start of the 2027 NFL season, after a one-year development and trial period. This interval would allow the NFL to collaborate with Wilson to perfect the highest-performance model. Other outdoor professional sports leagues and associations, including the top levels of soccer and rugby, have left animal-skin balls behind and now use synthetic ones. These sports acknowledged the deficiencies of cowhide balls, especially their declining performance in wet weather, and switched to superior-performing options.

The NFL has also stated that it is measuring and working to reduce its carbon footprint. Switching the 27,000 footballs produced for the NFL each year from cowhide to non-animal leather would contribute significantly to this goal. Cowhide has almost three times the negative environmental impact of its synthetic counterparts, including polyurethane leather.

As the NFL continues to modernize its equipment, such as with the introduction of Guardian Caps for player safety, we hope Wilson and the NFL will work together to relegate cowhide to the history books, just like the inflated pig bladders that originally served as “pigskin” footballs.

Wilson already manufactures a variety of synthetic footballs for different levels of play, and even the current NFL “The Duke” leather football already has several synthetic components, including the polyurethane bladder, the polyester thread, and the PVC laces. We have full confidence that Wilson could perfect a fully synthetic football that would meet or exceed current NFL standards.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at [REDACTED] with any questions.

Sincerely,



Hannah Schein
Vice President of Investigations and Research