

## Brazil Creates Center to Improve Leather and Cut Waste

Contributed by Marina Sarruf  
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Brazil is investing in technology to improve the quality of the leather produced in the country. The state of Mato Grosso do Sul, in midwestern Brazil, is already building the Center of Leather Technology (CTC), to include five laboratories for research and treatment of the product.

"It is a school-laboratory to improve the quality of the leather and the animal hides," stated Edson Espíndola Cardoso, the technical coordinator of the CTC.

According to him, the CTC intends to work not only with cattle leather, but also with that of various other animals, as is the case with goats, pigs, alligators, fish, ostriches, capybara, chinchillas and even frogs.

Last year the leather-tanning laboratory was inaugurated, permitting the conservation of the product so that the hides do not decompose, as was a water treatment station.

"All the water used in the tanning of the leather will be reused, reducing the consumption and protecting the environment," stated Cardoso.

The other four laboratories being built are the one for finishing, where techniques for scraping, treating and dyeing the leather are used; the physical-chemical, to guarantee certification of the leather; the physical-mechanical, to measure the resistance of the leather; and the biotechnology which, according to Cardoso, is new to Brazil.

This latter will serve to develop techniques and research to use the protein in the leather in food and the keratin in medicine and cosmetics.

The Mato Grosso do Sul CTC is not a pioneer in Brazil, but it is the first in the Midwestern region, where the largest cattle herd in the country is located.

In 2003, there were 69.9 million heads of cattle in the region. According to Cardoso, the country produces 35.5 million pieces of cattle leather a year, being 80% of this total sold in the simplest form, or wet blue.

"We could make this leather into finished products so as to export," stated Cardoso. Currently, according to him, wet blue leather costs US\$ 50 on the foreign market, whereas finished leather costs US\$ 90. "The great deal is to sell finished leather," he added.

Another factor mentioned by Cardoso is the loss of raw material in the country. "Most of the fish skin is thrown out. Brazil throws out a large volume of raw material and we have a fantastic potential," he said.

According to the technician, Brazil could also extract from the cattle hides gelatine for use in various foods.

South America, according to him, produces around 55,000 tons of bovine gelatine and Brazil participates in this market with the production of 35,000 tons a year. Cardoso believes that the country may become the largest gelatine producer in the world.

### Challenge

The initiative for the creation of the Mato Grosso do Sul Leather Technology Center, in the city of Campo Grande, was

from Cardoso himself, who worked on the idea for ten years.

"I hope that this laboratory will be an instrument for stimulation. It will be a challenge," he said.

The coordinator of the CTC also works as a head technician at the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa), which supported the project and provided three hectares of land for the construction of the CTC.

The project has the support of 15 partners, like the Studies and Projects Funding Body (Finep), connected to the Ministry of Science and Technology, which was responsible for the largest part of the funds; of the Mato Grosso do Sul state Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae); of the Federation of Industries of the state of Mato Grosso do Sul; universities and unions.

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