



My Sustainable T-shirt

A guide to understanding cotton production and what eco-labels mean for people and planet





Written by Eliza Anyangwe
Edited by Ruth Rosselson
Designed by Martin Cooke

Pesticide Action Network UK
Development House,
56-64 Leonard Street
London, EC2A 4LT. United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)207 065 0905
www.pan-uk.org

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Cover Photos

Left: organic cotton farmer from senegal standing in front of her fonio crop.

Right: Fashion model wearing organic cotton t-shirt. Image courtesy of MADE-BY (©Komodo)





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Chapter 1

Introduction:

What's all the
fuss about
cotton?



The T-shirt is now one of the most universal garments of both male and female, adult and children's wardrobes, worn everywhere around the world, penetrating even the most remote tribes of the Amazon.”

Sandy Black, author of Eco-chic: the fashion paradox

At just eight years old, Modachirou Inoussa was already helping his parents in the cotton fields. 29 July 2000 started as a day like many others. Modachirou had worked hard and ran back to the house feeling thirsty. Finding nothing to drink, he set off to search for his parents. On his way, Modachirou found an empty container, and scooped up some water to drink from a ditch. That evening he did not return home. A village search found his body next to the empty pesticide bottle innocently used to quench his thirst¹.

Cotton is the world's most important non-food agricultural commodity. It has been used to make textiles for over 5000 years and is grown on 76 million acres world-wide; 2.4% of global arable land. Cotton is a \$334 billion industry that provides 47% of all textile needs². Though cotton textile is natural, in that it is derived from a plant and not from petroleum like polyester³, the pressure for more cotton processed cheaply and quickly has created a final product that is far from natural and certainly not sustainable.

The atrocious conditions faced by garment workers in sweatshops across Asia have been well documented and led to the first consumer-driven efforts to create a more responsible garment industry. However, the negative environmental and social impacts of cotton fibre production - the result of which led to



Modachirou's tragic death - are still scarcely recognised and as a result, scarcely addressed.

My Sustainable T-shirt aims to outline the various stages along the cotton supply chain and the environmental and social challenges along each stage. With the growing demand for ethical alternatives has come a proliferation of labels, all claiming to ensure sustainable and ethical practices. This guide summarises the benefits to people and planet of the various eco-labels, standards and initiatives.

Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN UK) has published this guide to give consumers an unbiased understanding of the issues, the sustainable alternatives and as an aid for consumers looking to make more ethically sound choices.





Chapter 2 From Harvest to High Street:

The Cotton Supply Chain

Image courtesy of
MADE-BY (©Kuyichi)

Getting conventional cotton from the harvest field to the high street is a complex and global process. Over 300 million people across the world earn their living from cotton production; 99% of them live in the developing world and right at the bottom of the supply chain are the cotton farmers – some 50 million of them.

The conventional cotton supply chain makes it difficult to trace where the cotton fibres in our clothes come from. In order to produce garments of consistent quality, and at the cheapest price, fibres from all over the world are blended together and spun into yarns of the required quality. Because the country of origin of the fibre is often invisible at the consumer end of the supply chain, the consumer might inadvertently end up supporting oppressive regimes as was the case with cotton from Uzbekistan. The Environmental Justice Foundation (EJF) uncovered horrendous conditions in Uzbekistan, the world's third largest exporter of cotton. The ruling elite were profiting off the near-enslavement of a whole nation and the prevalence of child labour shocked buyers and consumers in the West. In the conventional cotton supply chain, the 50 million cotton farmers who are an integral part of the textile industry are invisible.

 Watch it! EJF's White Gold video www.ejfoundation.org/page85.html

The Cotton Supply Chain

1 Planting

Cotton is very vulnerable to pests. To address the problem, 22.5% of the world's insecticides and 10% of all pesticides are sprayed on cotton⁴

Cotton is a very 'thirsty' plant; requiring a lot of water to grow. While cotton fields in much of Africa are rain-fed⁵, three-quarters of all conventional cotton is irrigated leading to salinisation⁶ and occasionally, ecological disaster⁷.

3 Ginning

This stage separates the seeds from the fibres which produces cotton lint. This is then compressed and packed into bales

4 Spinning

Lint is cleaned, carded (a combing process) then spun (often by hand in developing countries) into yarn



2 Harvesting

The cotton bolls or 'seed cotton' is harvested by the farmer. In developing countries such as Benin or Uganda, this process is done by hand



Knitting/Weaving

Weaving and knitting transform the yarn into fabric. This is a largely mechanical process with high energy use and waste production as the negative environmental impacts.



5

7 Finishing

The chemical finish applied to a garment gives it various properties e.g. shrink resistant, crease resistant, water-repellent or flame retardant. Most of the chemicals used have negative effects on human health and other creatures.

6 Dyeing

Dyeing gives the textile its colour. Both natural and man-made dyes are used, along with other processing chemicals that must be washed out after dyeing. As such, the dyeing process uses a lot of water, energy and chemicals.

On average, a t-shirt that weighs 200 grams needs 16-20 litres of water to dye it. Every year the global textile industry discharges 40,000-50,000 tonnes of dye into rivers and streams.⁸

9 Post-consumer

The way we wash and care for our clothes can have significant environmental impacts. Often ignored, but still vitally important, the post consumer phase looks at what happens to the garment after it is used and disposed of.

There are also development implications when cheap second hand clothes from the UK and other developed countries flood the markets of poor countries, destroying what local textile industry there might be. Environmentally, with 74% (1.8 million tonnes⁹) of the clothes we don't want any more ending up in landfill and another 13% incinerated.

8 CMT – Cut, Make, Trim

In making the garment, accessories such as zips, buttons and screen prints are added which, as well as using non-renewable resources to make, are often non-biodegradable.

Garment factories are infamous for their neglect of workers' rights, low pay and unacceptable working conditions.

Beyond the supply chain complexities there are further issues that make it difficult for farmers to compete in the conventional market: trade regulations and the purchasing behaviour of large brands both exercise a constant downward pressure (the race to the bottom¹⁰), the brunt of it borne by garment workers.

 **Read It!** Chapter 4: Reuse, Recycling and Zero Waste, Kate Fletcher (2008)

A transparent supply chain

In order to produce a t-shirt that can be labelled as 100% organic, the organic fibre needs to remain completely separate from any conventional cotton fibre. As a result it cannot enter the conventional supply chain. This has led to the creation of a new model of supply chain, founded on partnership, with every member of the chain playing a part in the ultimate success of the business. Instead of the downward pressure exercised by retailers in the conventional supply chain, ethical retailers commit to buying the farmers' harvest at a reasonable price, at times even assisting with pre-financing.

MADE-BY Member Brand Jackpot's supply chain how this Danish women's brand has integrated social and environmental programs into their supply chain. Jackpot introduced Organic Cotton into their collection after February 2007. Additionally after visiting farmers in India, Jackpot gained a real understanding of their supply chain and the people involved. Transparency has motivated the Jackpot team to extend their organic range beyond initial expectations.

“

One of the hallmarks of the 21st century is the imprint of our global interconnectedness. Global systems of supply criss-cross our planet...That means, as with climate change, that decisions we make have effects which ripple outwards to distant places and create a backlash which hits producers we know little or nothing about.”

Camilla Toulmin, Director of IIED⁴

MADE-BY Track&Trace

Track&Trace this garment code: A26417002

Supplier

Jackpot, Copenhagen, Denmark

Jackpot is a lifestyle brand for modern women in love with life. A variety of vivid colours and hand-painted patterns characterise the look of the relaxed and feminine collection.

www.jackpot.dk

AnnHageThomsen (Design Manager)

"To take care takes time and patience. That can be hard to match with fashion business deadlines, but sustainability matches with Jackpot's brand philosophy."

1



2

Manufacturer

Tubeknit, Tirpur, India

Tubeknit does everything in-house, from knitting to washing and dyeing the end product. Being keen on working conditions has earned them the SA8000 certificate.

www.tubeknitfashions.com

Mr. Parthasarathi (Director)

"I hope the message can be spread out and that the efforts we put in our improvements programmes return in increased volumes."



3

Spinner

Super Spinning Mills, Coimbatore, India

Started as spinning mill, Super Spinning Mills also produce fabric and garments. SSM supplies the MADE-BY brands with organic yarns is also developing new organic fabrics.

www.superspinning.com

K. Rajeswari (Cone Winder)

"After finishing school I had to start working to support my family. My parents work at the ginning factory in the village I grew up in. It's a tradition in my family to work with 'Charka', a traditional way of hand spinning, which makes the job easy for me." a traditional way of hand spinning, wick makes the job easy for me.



4

Cotton Farmer

Mahima FIB. PVT. LTD., India

The biggest cotton production is done in developing countries where most of the cotton growers are small farmers. In normal (conventional) cotton production, farmers apply hazardous chemicals such as pesticides and insecticides in large quantities resulting in disastrous impacts for health and environment. It is therefore crucial that these farmers switch to organic cultivation and only use inputs available from mother nature which respect people and planet.





Chapter 3 Cottoning on:

What are my
sustainable
options?

“

Pesticides threaten the development of our community...they only bring us...poisonings, suicides, increased production costs and debts – without increasing yields.”

Cotton farmers in Linguewal village, Senegal¹²

The evidence of the negative economic, environmental and social impact of conventional cotton is undeniable. Yet it hasn't stopped consumers' love affair with clothing, in particular t-shirts and jeans. In 2007, UK consumers were expected to buy 86 million pairs of jeans. Tesco reportedly sells 50,000 pairs a week¹¹, so a boycott hardly seems realistic. Instead, consumers and retailers are responding to the issues by demanding and supplying sustainable alternatives that show greater respect for people and planet. Organic and Fairtrade cotton are two such alternatives.





The best way to avoid chemicals in clothes is not to wear clothes at all, which is, save for a select few, impossible.”

Matilda Lee, author of *Eco-chic: the savvy shopper's guide to ethical fashion*

Organic

Organic cotton is cotton fibre which has been grown to the strict standards set for organic agriculture by the European Union. Organic standards require the plant to be completely free from the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilisers; instead natural alternatives such as compost for fertiliser and plant-based pesticides, such as those made from the neem tree or garlic, are used. Beyond replacing synthetic inputs for natural ones, organic farming aims to restore the natural balance within the farm; restoring healthy soils and promoting biodiversity and responsible water management, especially on small-scale farms across Africa where the plant is rain-fed.

One of the underlying principles of organic agriculture is crop-rotation which helps prevent the build-up of disease and harmful pests. This involves dividing the farm into a number of fields and sowing different crops on each field each season. African cotton farmers also plant different crops within the cotton field. Some act as 'trap crops', attracting pests away from the cotton, others provide habitat for parasites and predators and some fix nutrients into the soil, making it more fertile.

While conventional cotton farming may have adopted some of these sustainable practices, unlike conventional cotton farming, organic cotton farming does not permit the use of genetically modified (GM) cotton seed.

Organic cotton farmers in Africa are also encouraged to plant different cereals, nuts, vegetables and other crops as part of the rotation which they can consume – improving their health by varying their diet. They can also sell these crops, which include cashew nuts, sesame seeds and sunflowers, locally or in export markets. This diversifies

their income and ensures that they aren't just relying on cotton for their livelihoods.¹³

Although Organic cotton doesn't have a guaranteed premium, the limited supply means that farmers can command a higher price for their crop – up to 20% more than conventional cotton. The largest financial benefits come from the savings made in not having to buy synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. Pesticides account for up to 60% of cotton's production costs¹⁴. Organic cotton farmers also save on the, almost inevitable, costs of treatment from exposure to pesticides

Does all this mean that organic cotton is 100% sustainable? Unfortunately not. While organic cotton is certainly a vast improvement on conventional cotton, it still requires a significant amount of water to grow. Even though some suggestions have been made that organic farming leads to water conservation, thanks to healthier soils which retain water better, water use still remains an issue. Like with any other agricultural activity, there is a risk that new cotton farms sometimes will encroach on natural habitats. While some organic standards prohibit this, not all do. Lastly, the cotton remains very volatile; dependent on the market which changes dramatically and can have a huge effect on farmers' wages. World cotton prices are still being kept artificially low by subsidies to farmers in Europe and the USA making it harder for cotton farmers in other countries to compete.¹⁵

Table: Organic cotton fibre check list

- ✓ 100% of cotton fibres are certified organic: no synthetic chemical pesticides or fertilisers used
- ✓ Guaranteed GM-free
- ✓ Processing stages free hazardous chemicals and waste water discharge has to be properly treated
- ✓ A maximum of 10% synthetic or man-made fibres may have been used; for example to give the elasticity to socks. The proportions vary depending on the label.



I did not get any education but I want my children to. Because of the Fairtrade price, I can send them to school. ” - Laljibhai Narranbhai, Fairtrade cotton farmer, India¹⁶

Fairtrade

By the end of 2006, there were 860 products using Fairtrade-certified cotton sold in the UK and 27,000 farmers worldwide were working on Fairtrade-certified cotton farms.¹⁷

The Fairtrade movement began in the 1960s but the Dutch Foundation Solidaridad was the first to launch a Fairtrade label, Max Havelaar, in 1988. Fairtrade is now a worldwide movement which aims to ensure that producers in developing countries receive the Fairtrade minimum price for their products. If the market price is higher, then producers get the market price. The other criteria include paying women farmers directly (and not their husbands), no child labour, working hours are not excessive, employment is freely chosen and the right to collective bargaining respected. Cotton producers also receive an additional premium to be used on community development projects, including access to education and healthcare.

Though Fairtrade standards do not require the cotton to be organic, and synthetic pesticides and fertilisers may be used, the most hazardous pesticides are prohibited. Fairtrade criteria stipulate that farmers must wear protective clothing to minimise the risk of pesticide poisoning and farm workers also benefit from acceptable working conditions. Unlike organic cotton, where the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) can be applied along the whole supply chain to produce an organic t-shirt, the fair-trade label only guarantees working conditions in the planting and harvesting stages of the supply chain. This means that there is still not an ethical supply chain that meets all the requirements for a fully Fairtrade t-shirt¹⁸

Unlike organic cotton, there are no government regulations for fair trade labelling; anyone can claim their products are fairly traded. However, only products meeting Fairtrade Labelling Organisation's standards can use the Fairtrade label and trademark.

Table: Fairtrade cotton fibre check list

- ✓ Fair minimum price that reflects the costs of sustainable cotton production
- ✓ Fairtrade premium paid for use in meeting development needs
- ✓ Restricted use of agrochemicals and sustainable farming practices encouraged
- ✓ Up to 60% of the purchasing price can be paid to producers pre-export if requested





Chapter 4

How do I know it's genuine?

Standards,
Certification and
Labelling

The 'eco-textiles' industry has been experiencing a lot of growth. The market for organic cotton is now bigger than bridal wear. Meanwhile, organisations such as the Fairtrade Foundation and the Soil Association both known mainly for their labelling of food products are starting to certify and label textiles. How do you know what is genuine?

Standards

Growing availability of products that were supposedly ethical – claiming to have positive impacts for the poor and the environment – led officials in the EU, US and Japan to establish standards that would ensure that consumers could be confident that the claims made about the products they bought were accurate.

European Economic Community (EEC) Organic Standard No 834/2007 came into force in 2009¹⁹ and sets the basic or minimum standards for all agricultural products and foodstuffs that want to be labelled 'organic' across all EU states. In some countries, well before national legislation came into force, organic farmers' associations were creating their own private standards in order to self-regulate.

International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) was the first organisation in 1980 to issue international private standards. These have formed the basis of many other private standards and have influenced EU legislation.

Products and processes have to be certified to show they are meeting the standards set.

Certification

Certification is the process of verifying that farms (and organisations along the supply chain) are fully meeting the rigorous standards that will then enable them and/or their products to be labelled Fairtrade or Organic. Certification of organic cotton is done by private companies; there are over 100 worldwide and the UK's Soil Association Certification is one. There are many standards that can be set out by the different certification agencies but in Europe, they must all meet the basic organic standards set out by the EU.

However, the EU regulation only applies to food and, at this time, only private standards exist. Additionally, certification does not automatically correspond to every stage of the supply chain. Indeed, unless otherwise stated, certification usually applies to the production stage (from planting to ginning). However, it is possible to have a 100% organic t-shirt, where every stage along its supply chain has met organic standards and be certified to prove it



If you want more than just the fibre in your t-shirt to meet high environmental and social standards and be all encompassing, though there are no laws governing the entire textile supply chain, the Global Organic Textile Standards²¹ (GOTS) is the industry benchmark. GOTS ensures that textile products meet high standards from the field, through the factory to the final product. For example, no PVC can be used in the packaging of the end product.

GOTS applies the following standards:

- ✓ Cotton fibres must meet international or national standards
- ✓ Allows for cotton in conversion²²
- ✓ A product carrying the GOTS label grade 'organic' must contain a minimum of 95% certified organic fibres
- ✓ A product with the label grade 'made with organic' must contain a minimum of 70% certified organic fibres

With regard to Fairtrade, the Fairtrade Labelling Organisation (FLO²³) sets the standards for Fairtrade certification and its sister organisation FLO-Cert certifies all the products. FLO-Cert also carries out a social compliance assessment of the processing and manufacturing stages, ensuring that minimum national and international labour legislation is adhered to. FLO has separate standards for farmers and for workers. A fully Fairtrade supply chain doesn't yet exist.

Image courtesy of
MADE-BY (©Kuyichi)



Labelling

As much as labels are indicative of the environmental and social benefits of a product, they are also used for marketing and product differentiation – so that one brand stands out to the consumer over another. This means that labels are highly valued and ones with better consumer recognition are favoured over ones which are more obscure. For that reason, though textiles may be eligible to bear the GOTS label, in various countries they are unlikely to because it is not as yet as well known as some of the other labels. The eco-labels that the consumer is most-likely to recognise are listed below alongside the product categories the labels currently cover.



The Fairtrade label

Fairtrade labelling began in the Netherlands in 1988. The UK's Fairtrade Foundation was established in 1992 and its label did not come into existence until 1994. It is now recognised by over 50% of the British public. Fairtrade standards were applied to cotton for the first time in 2004.

For a product to display the FAIRTRADE Mark it must meet international Fairtrade standards which are set by the Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO). The label indicates that only the product is Fairtrade, not the retailer or the organisation that sells it.

Products covered

Underwear, Mens and Womenswear, Babywear, Childrenswear, Household textiles, Accessories, Cotton, cosmetic products, Schoolwear.



Soil Association label²⁴

The Soil Association organic symbol is the UK's main certification mark, appearing on approximately 80% of organic food produced in the UK. Launched in 2003, the Soil Association began to certify textiles to GOTS standards. The label shows consumers that the product is free from pesticides and chemicals that cause environmental damage and are harmful to health.

Products covered

Underwear Men and Womenswear cotton cosmetic products
Household textiles knitting yarn mattresses

The EU Ecolabel²⁵

The EU Ecolabel is Europe's official environmental label. It has the shape of a flower and it is only awarded to goods and services which meet strict criteria limiting their impacts on the environment. In particular, the EU Ecolabel criteria for the textile products group aim at measuring and limiting water and air pollution in relation to textile processing and manufacturing.

It is a voluntary scheme based on studies which analyse the environmental cost of the product or service throughout its life-cycle, starting from raw material extraction in the pre-production stage, through to production, distribution and disposal.

Products covered

Until now, the EU Ecolabel attracted only a few licence holders within clothing retailers. In the UK, licence holders have been mainly rewarded in the cleaning products group.





OEKO-TEX Standard 100²⁶

Introduced at the beginning of the 1990s, the Oeko-Tex Standard 100 is primarily concerned with the health risks of textiles to the consumer. It doesn't address the issues faced by the cotton producer. Recognising that it is impossible to meet the multiple requirements we have for textiles (from the purely aesthetic such as fashionable colour trends to easy care and functionality) without the use of chemicals, Oeko-tex was developed to provide consumers with a reliable gauge of the ecological impact of the textiles they use; and to provide industry with a uniform standard that can be applied.

An Oeko-tex certificate is valid for 12 months and confirms that the textile product is

- ✓ free from any prohibited substances
- ✓ chemicals that are known to be harmful to the health
- ✓ include precautionary measures to safeguard health

Certification is given for 4 broad product categories; criteria are made stricter according to the extent to which the product comes into contact with the skin. The validity of the label can be checked on the company's website, where the certification number is available.

Products covered

Babywear and toys, textiles in contact with skin such as underwear and bed linen, textile that have little or no contact with skin such as coats, household textiles.



MADE-BY

MADE-BY is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to improve environmental and social conditions in the fashion industry. MADE-BY was founded in the Netherlands in 2004. It launched in Germany in 2008 and the UK in 2009. MADE-BY was founded by Solidaridad, the non-governmental organisation who focus on poverty alleviation in the developing world. Solidaridad promotes investment in fair trade and sustainable environmental practices.

MADE-BY works with brands to improve sustainability across their entire supply chains from raw materials to finished product. MADE-BY seeks to help address a wide range of issues including child labour, unsafe working conditions, pesticides in cotton farming and water usage in dyeing houses.

MADE-BY use existing and highly respected international standards to measure the progress of brands. These results are then demonstrated through MADE-BY's unique scorecard system. These scorecards are shared with brands and are published online. MADE-BY also use an innovative approach that allows customers to track garments through the supply chain called Track & Trace.

Another strong communication tool for the brand is the MADE-BY Blue Button label. The MADE-BY 'Blue Button' label shows consumers that a brand has committed to a plan to improve their social and environmental standards. Brands that have demonstrated significant progress can use the 'Blue Button' label across their entire range.

Products Covered

Fashion items. For Example; Dutch streetwear brand Kuyichi use the Blue Button to show consumers that they are working with MADE-BY towards a more sustainable supply chain. The Blue Button concept harmonises the main social and environmental initiatives. Much more detailed information regarding the progress of Kuyichi's initiatives is published in the MADE-BY annual report.



Chapter 5 Still Confused?

Ethical Clothing FAQs

With the myriad of environmental, social and political issues at play in the garment industry, and almost as many initiatives launched to address these issues, here are a few more points worth knowing. Use the consumer tool kit in each section to find out more.

What about GM Cotton?

GM cotton is cotton which has been genetically modified to produce specific toxins designed to kill the pests which commonly prey on the plant – such as the boll worms. According to companies that develop GM, this will lead to a reduction in pesticide use.

The reality, however, is that GM crops still require pesticides to be used as the modified crops are only resistant to certain types of pests. Some research has found that some farmers have used even more pesticides on GM cotton than on conventional cotton.

There are others issues with GM cotton. When farmers farm conventionally, they will save seeds to plant new crops each year. However, the companies behind GM crops require farmers to buy new seeds each year. This means that GM cotton – which is already more expensive than conventional cotton seed - becomes even more expensive for small farmers; many Indian cotton farmers found themselves in debt because of the higher costs of farming GM cotton. There are other environmental worries of farming genetically modified crops, such as the negative impacts on beneficial insects and real fears of contamination – when non-GM crops become polluted with GM material. The planting of the GM seed prevents farmer from being able to grow an organic crop and so missing out on an opportunity to sell their crops at a premium.

Lastly, if all farmers grew GM seeds, this would reduce the number of local crop varieties being grown meaning that some varieties which are better suited to local growing conditions would be lost. GM also therefore presents a threat to biodiversity.

GM cotton now represents more than 30% of the total world production of cotton and is grown by the world major producers of cotton: the USA, Australia, China and India. However unlike GM food, GM cotton does not have to be labelled. Because your t-shirt is likely to be made from cotton from several different sources, it's highly likely that conventional cotton clothes will contain some GM cotton.

If it is not Fairtrade certified, can it still be fair to farmers?

It is in poor, small-scale farming communities where the benefits of organic farming are most pronounced. The high cost of pesticides coupled with the declining effectiveness over time means that cotton farmers end up needing greater and greater quantities, causing them to spiral into greater debt. Every year, thousands of farmers commit suicide because they cannot pay their debts. With organic farming, the costs of pesticides are eliminated; savings are made on health care, while crop rotation diversifies the farmers' source of income. But a survey of organic cotton farmers in Benin showed that their main motivation for converting to organic is financial: the organic cotton supply chain pays them on time – soon after the cotton is collected from the village. Conventional cotton farmers in contrast have to wait months, sometimes a whole year before they get paid, worsening their debt problems.²⁷

While organic cotton production doesn't set out development objectives, the removal of chemical pesticides helps farmers break the cycle of debt while also gaining new skills and training as they learn how to manage pests using locally available resources.

Significantly, women in cotton farming communities were often unable to earn a living due to the high cost of agrochemicals and the health risks posed by pesticide spraying. Organic cotton provides opportunities to earn a wage and improve their position in their communities.

 **Read it!** The story of female cotton farmers in Benin and their neem mill at www.pan-uk.org

What is the difference between Fairtrade and Fair Trade?

Fair trade and Fairtrade have slightly different meanings. They are two models that aim to achieve the same objectives but use different methods. Fair Trade, represented by fair trade shops – often called World shops – is a trading partnership based on dialogue, transparency and respect that seeks greater equity in international trade. This is a wider movement promoting fairer trade practice, not restricted to products carrying the FAIRTRADE Mark. To be sure a shop is selling genuine fairly traded goods, check the shop is a member of established fair trade members associations such as IFAT²⁸ (now known as WFTO World Fair Trade Organisation) or BAFTS (British Association for Fair Trade Shops). The ethical fashion retailer People Tree is a well-known member of WFTO.

Fairtrade relates only to FLO (Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International) and its partners (e.g. the Fairtrade Foundation) as described in Chapter 3.



What is the Better Cotton Initiative?

Better cotton is produced through the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), a partnership between major brands such as IKEA, Adidas, Gap and NGOs such as WWF. The partnership aims to make conventional cotton production better by: minimising the use and impacts of pesticides, responsible water management and sustainable soil management practices such as minimum tillage of the soil and the use of cover and rotation crops to improve soil fertility. BCI has set the goal of ensuring that 1.3% of global cotton production is Better Cotton from Brazil, India, Pakistan, Western and Central Africa; 50% of its cotton to be used by BCI members; and that globally 100,000 farmers are producing Better Cotton. The Better Cotton Initiative is currently at piloting stage and is expected to become available on the market in 2011.

bettercotton.org

What is the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)?

ETI is the UK's biggest multi-stakeholder initiative (MSI)³⁰ with high street favourites such as Primark, The Body Shop and Zara agreeing to adopt the ETI Base Code and to gradually implement changes in their supply chain. The size of the member organisations means that 8.6 million workers could potentially benefit from the standards set by the ETI. However, to date, the ETI has not tackled the issue of paying workers a living wage. In addition, the code of conduct is not legally-binding and is very difficult to enforce because of the complex nature of the supply chain. Retailers such as Levi Strauss & Co, Primark, Asda and Tesco have been exposed for not implementing the code with their suppliers.

www.ethicaltrade.org

What is cotton in conversion?

It's not possible for a farm to become certified as organic overnight. Gaining organic certification can take 2-3 years to achieve, even if the farmers might be farming organically during this time. A crop that's "in conversion" means that the farmers have been farming organically, but have yet to meet the requirements for full certification. This cotton will have an 'in conversion' label, but because consumers do not understand this, the cotton often gets sold at the same price as conventional cotton. It is therefore important to support in conversion cotton whenever you see it. You can buy in conversion cotton safe in the knowledge that the crop will still have been farmed organically while helping farmers convert to fully organic along the way.



Is there any way to trace where my t-shirt is from?

In the conventional supply chain, as shown before, traceability along the supply chain from shop to seed is impossible. The ethical supply chain is different.

MADE-BY³⁰ is one organisation working with brands to improve traceability and sustainability across their supply chains. The team and its partners work across the world, undertaking social and environmental improvement projects with brands' suppliers and supporting brands towards certifying each step of their supply-chain. To achieve transparency, MADE-BY (in association with Historic Futures) developed a Track & Trace System that follows the trail of your clothes and enables the consumer to Track & Trace the journey of a garment.

With the MADE-BY code in your garment you can find out where your garment was made and by whom. A garment completes numerous stages before it ends up in a store and brands generally

do not have the power or resources at their disposal to change all of these stages for their entire collection in one go. In the meantime it is important to be transparent and show their progress to the consumer. MADE-BY Track & Trace is the very first system to trace the origin of clothes.

 Surf it! MADE-BY website www.made-by.org

Where can I find ethical clothing retailers?

Though much of the high street now offers basic ranges in organic cotton (Wal-Mart/ASDA is the world's largest consumer of organic cotton) there are still helpful directories in print and on the web that can help you find what you are looking for.

- ⦿ The Wear Organic Directory is a comprehensive list of retailers in the UK www.wearorganic.org
- ⦿ PAN Germany also has an organic cotton directory www.organiccottondirectory.net
- ⦿ The Fairtrade Foundation lists all the retail products that carry its label www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/retail_products
- ⦿ The directory in Matilda Lee's book Eco Chic – the savvy shopper's guide to ethical fashion

Looking for organic fabric?

You can source fabric from the Organic Exchange Sourcing Directory or for much smaller quantities from resources section of the Ethical Fashion Forum website.

 Surf it! Ethical Fashion Forum www.ethicalfashionforum.com



Image courtesy of
MADE-BY (©Kuyichi)

What other sustainable textile fibres are on the market?


Much research has gone into developing other fabrics from natural and renewable sources, as well as into technologies that enable non-biodegradable materials to be recycled.

Hemp: Hemp is largely considered to be ecologically sound and a viable option for garment production. It is considered to have a cleansing effect on the soil to which it also adds nutrients. Hemp grows easily without the use of synthetic inputs, it produces a breathable fabric for different desired effects, it is hardwearing and also it grows in the UK. However, with no facilities to process hemp into fabric in the UK, most hemp clothing is produced in China or in Eastern Europe³¹.


 **Buy It!** From UK brand The Hemp Trading Company www.thtc.co.uk

Tencel: Developed by the Austrian-based company Lenzing, Tencel is made from eucalyptus tree pulp which is dissolved in a closed loop process with the

help of a non-toxic solvent and transformed into a fibre. The eucalyptus tree grows easily and in compact environments and requires little treatment with pesticides or fertilisers. Eucalyptus plantations used by Lenzing are certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC). In addition Tencel is certified by Oeko-Tex standard 100 and the EU Eco Flower, and can be dyed using less water, dyestuffs and sodium.

 **Buy It!** Dutch brand Alchemist has used Tencel in previous collections www.alchemist.cc/en/index.html


Recycled Polyester: Recycled Polyester is based on waste recovery coming either from consumer waste streams - such as plastic bottles and used apparel - or from industrial waste streams i.e. waste occurring during production - such as polymer fibres during yarn production, or fabric from the cutting rooms. Though not suited to all apparel, recycled polyester is now commonly regarded as a sustainable textile as it diverts millions of plastic bottles from landfill. You can find recycled polyester in all sorts of different garments including fleece jackets and other outdoor clothing.

 **Buy It!** US outdoor clothing brand Patagonia is a pioneer in the use of recycled polyester www.patagonia.com

Bamboo viscose: Bamboo viscose is often marketed as sustainable but the extraction process needed to produce it depends largely on the use of toxic chemicals, exactly the same as the ones needed to produce generic viscose. To be truly eco-friendly bamboo viscose would have to be processed in a rigorously clean way, using bamboo from sustainably farmed and certified plantations.

 **Read It!** Chapter 6: Fabrics of the Future, Matilda Lee 'Eco chic - the Savvy Shopper's guide to ethical Fashion

MADE-BY has created an environmental benchmark that provides a straightforward comparison of the environmental credentials of 20 textile fibres³² including conventional and organic cotton, Tencel, recycled and virgin polyester, wool and bamboo viscose.

 Surf it! Visit Green Choices website  Download it! Ethical Consumer's free buyers guides from their website www.ethicalconsumer.org/FreeBuyersGuides/clothing.aspx

Where can I get more information about the different issues along the supply chain?

Production:

PAN UK's Wear Organic site www.wearorganic.org

EJF's Pick Your Cotton Carefully Campaign www.ejfoundation.org/page141.html

Certification:

Organic Exchange organicexchange.org/oecms/Organic-Fiber-Standards.html

Eco-textiles Labelling Guide www.ecotextile.com/news_details.php?id=10126

MADE-BY www.made-by.nl/downloads/BenchmarkSocialStandards0803.pdf

Manufacturing:

Clean Clothes Campaign www.cleanclothes.org

Labour behind the label www.labourbehindthelabel.org

EFF www.ethicalfashionforum.com

Forum for the Future: www.forumforthefuture.org.uk/files/Fashionsustain.pdf

Post consumer:

Well Dressed: The present and future sustainability of clothing and textiles in the United Kingdom

www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/sustainability/projects/mass/UK_textiles.pdf

Notes

[1]Pesticide News 52 p. 12-14. Callisulfan is another name for the commonly used pesticide Endosulfan, which a PAN UK study (Living with Poison) suggests is the most important source of fatal poisoning among cotton farmers in West Africa.

[2]Statistics from Organic Exchange (2006)

[3]Polyester is the most popular fibre for textile production. Yet being made from petroleum it is neither a renewable resource nor biodegradable

[4]Camilla Toulmin From Harvest to High Street in Pesticide News No 74, Dec 2006

[5]Rain-fed: using collected rain water instead of irrigation which diverts water from existing bodies for use in agriculture.

[6]Salinisation is when water used for irrigation does not leach into the ground. It evaporates instead, leaving the salts in the water in the surface which if not washed away can render the soil useless for farming.

[7]Visit EJF's website to learn about the Aral Sea Crisis www.ejfoundation.org/page146.html

[8]Clare Trotter (2006) Dyeing for a change: current conventions and new futures in the textile colour industry p.4

[9]Ecologist at Esthetica 2007 clogging up landfill p.7

[10]The race to the bottom is the term used to explain the behaviour of governments and employers who in order stay competitive and secure major brands as clients offer the cheapest, most flexible labour in the least regulated workplace. FEI Factsheet 4 and Oxfam report cited in Ecologist at Esthetica 2007 why the system stays this way p.11

[11] Matilda Lee (2007) Eco-chic p. 75

[12] Simon Ferrigno, 2003 Senegal Field Trip report cited in Ferrigno et al (2005)

[13] ool: Surf it! Find out more about the crops cotton farmers in West Africa grow from PAN UK's Fibre, Food and Beauty webpage.

[14] September 2002, in Ferrigno et al (2005) p. 8

[15] Tool: Download it! When Organic Means Fair: the case for cotton from PAN UK's website

[16] Quote from Fairtrade Foundation

[17]From the ecologist at esthetical magazine 2007 p.8

[18]The requirements for fair-trade certification are: good labour practices at all stages of production; a fair or living wage and the guaranteed right to freedom of association and collective bargaining – unions.

[19]The first EU standards were set in 1992

[21]GOTS www.global-standard.org

[22]See Chapter 5

[23]FLO www.fairtrade.net

[24]Soil Association consumer guide to organic textile certification www.soilassociation.org

[25]Ecolabel <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel>

[26]OEKO-TEX http://www.oeko-tex.com/OekoTex100_PUBLIC/index.asp?cls=02

[27]PAN UK (2007) When organic means fair: the case of cotton

[28]The WFTO logo is an organisation logo, not a product logo. It proves that the organisation that bears it implements IFAT's standards which cover working conditions, wages, child labour and the environment. www.wfto.com

[29]MSI bring together retailers, trade unions, consumer groups, workers and sometimes governments to establish a code of conduct around the International Labour Organisation's basic labour standards.

[30]MADE-BY is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to improve environmental and social standards in the fashion industry and communicate progress in a way that consumers understand.

[31]Matilda Lee, Eco-chic p.125-126

[32]Ecotextile News (2010) Measuring Up Ecotextile News, February Issue No 31, p.27

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