

A - Z

Azo free dyes

Azo dyes and pigments are commonly used to colour textiles. Some of the by-products, such as chlorinated aromatic amines, are toxic and may be potential carcinogens. The European Commission bans the usage of certain azo dyes for use in any textile or leather product, which comes in "direct or prolonged" contact with the skin or mouth. Azo dyes and pigments resist biodegradation under aerobic conditions, so they are difficult to remove from an ecosystem. It is therefore essential that Azo free dyes are used in organic cotton production.

Bamboo

This is a naturally sustainable fibre. Fabric woven from bamboo yarn is light, almost translucent, and softer than cotton. It has a natural quality that feels like silk, but has the advantage of being machine-washable. This natural fibre is hypoallergenic, absorbent, and fast drying. It is naturally anti-bacterial and will not hold odor. Because of its natural antibacterial properties, no pesticides are used in its cultivation. The environmental benefits of bamboo clothing are numerous. The production of bamboo fabric and clothing therefore has a lower impact on the environment than conventional cotton farming methods.

Cotton in transition

There is a two to three year period for farmers transitioning their land to organic production from conventional production. Cotton in transition, transitional cotton or cotton in conversion, is cotton being grown on land in the transitional period according to the organic standard. In order to best grow the industry, we need to ensure and encourage enough farmers are moving from conventional to organic farming. Crop yields are typically lower and risks higher during the transition, so farmers are at financial risk, we need to support them so that they thrive and survive. Value will be added to the cotton and thus a better price for the farmer if a label can be used to identify that the cotton is transitioning to organic.

Discharge, water-based and plastisol

In order for compliance under guidelines for a printed garment to be certified as organic, GOTS (please see the letter 'G') states that certain inputs are prohibited. These are listed in the full schedule. Allowed are printing methods that are based on water or natural oils only. This rules out the use of most conventional inks, such as plastisols that contain aromatic solvents (white spirit), and discharge ink that contains formaldehyde.

Ethical Trading Initiative

The Ethical Trading Initiative is a ground-breaking initiative which brings together a wide range of organisations from all parts of society. They aim to improve the lives of poor working people around the world. Specifically, they are an alliance of companies, NGOs and trade union organisations working to promote and improve the implementation of corporate codes of practice that cover supply chain working conditions. <http://www.ethicaltrade.org/>

Fairtrade

Fairtrade certification (usually simply Fairtrade or Fair Trade Certified™ in the United States) is a product certification system designed to allow people to identify products which meet agreed environmental, labour and developmental standards. Overseen by a standard-setting body, FLO International, and a certification body, FLO-CERT, the system involves independent auditing of producers to ensure the agreed standards are met. <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

GOTS - Global Organic Textile Standard

GOTS is a voluntary processing standard developed to work towards bringing global uniformity to sustainable textile processing. It is a world-wide recognised requirement that ensures organic status of textiles, from harvesting of the raw materials, through environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing up to labeling in order to provide a credible assurance to the end consumer. The current approved certification bodies are The Soil Association (UK), Control Union (Holland), IMO (Swiss) and Oregon Tilth (USA). <http://www.global-standard.org>

Hemp

Hemp fibre extracted from the hemp plant and produces a sustainable alternative to cotton. With a relatively short growth cycle of 100-120 days, it is an efficient and economical crop for farmers to grow. Because of hemp plant density it chokes out weeds, it grows well without herbicides. It naturally resists attack from bugs and fungi, reducing the need for pesticides and fungicides. In contrast, almost half of all agricultural chemicals used in the U.S. are applied to cotton. It represents an ecologically stable, renewable source of raw materials to make such diverse products as biodiesel, plastics, building materials and food for animals and people.

IMO

IMO is an internationally recognised control body based in Switzerland, the Institute for Marketecology (IMO) has offices in more than 60 countries offering quality control and a wide range of certifications. The Institute has been active in the field of organic certification for over 20 years, and is also expert in the areas of natural textiles, sustainable forestry, and social accountability monitoring. It was the first approved certification body for GOTS. IMO is entitled to perform inspections for Soil Association certifications on the basis of a 'product acceptance agreement'. <http://www.imo.ch/>

Jute

Jute produces a long, soft, shiny fibre that's spun into course strong strands that are ideal for making shopping bags. There is no certifying standard that currently exists for organic Jute, but it is considered to be a sustainable alternative to cotton. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jute>

Katharine Hamnett

The environmental campaigner and fashion icon who started making ethically-conscious clothing as far back as the 60's. She invented the slogan t-shirt with phrases including 'Choose Life' and 'Save the World'. She pioneered many processes used in the fashion today, such as garment dyeing, stone washing and stretch

denim. Her new label Katharine E Hamnett introduced a radically new approach to manufacturing; she closely manages every part of the production to make certain all of her clothes are as ethically and environmentally sounds as possible. <http://www.katharinehamnett.com/>

Labelling

It is essential for all certified organic garments to be labelled. The label should contain information to give full traceability of the finished product. It must contain a reference to organic production and must identify the final manufacturer. The label must confirm that the garment contains at least 95% organic fibres. (The remainder may be non-organic fibre, including regenerated or synthetic fibres. However, they must not be of the same raw material. Accessories are excluded from the calculation.) From 2010 all garments must also identify the country of manufacture.

Mission Statement

Mission statement, a clear and succinct representation of the enterprise's purpose. These days it should incorporate socially meaningful and environmentally aware criteria addressing the moral/ethical position of the enterprise, its public image and its products or services.

Non-renewable resource

A resource that cannot be replaced in the environment (that is, fossil fuels) because it forms at a rate far slower than its consumption.

Organic Exchange

Organic Exchange is a charitable organization committed to expanding organic agriculture, with a specific focus on increasing the production and use of organically grown fibers such as cotton. They bring together brands and retailers with their business partners, farmers and key stakeholders to learn about the social and environmental benefits of organic agriculture,

and to develop new business models and tools that support greater use of organic inputs. In addition, they raise consumer awareness about the value of organic farming and the availability of products containing organic cotton.

<http://www.organicexchange.org/>

PAN

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) is a network of over 600 participating nongovernmental organizations, institutions and individuals in over 90 countries working to replace the use of hazardous pesticides with ecologically sound alternatives. Its projects and campaigns are coordinated by five autonomous Regional Centers. PAN is considered to be at the forefront of organic and ethical cotton agriculture.

Questions to ask your supplier

How can you be sure that your garments are not made in a sweatshop, or using child labour? If your supplier doesn't have the answer, then there is your answer! Only by asking the difficult questions will you get your suppliers to ask themselves the same questions.

Recycled Polyester

Polyester fibres are re-used to make fabrics. Polyethylene terephthalate, (PET) – the polymer used for making drink bottles – is the most common polyester used for textiles. Recycling involves re-melting the PET and extruding it as a new fibre; this saves raw materials as well as reducing energy needs. Recycled polyesters are popular because they are more fire-retardant, easier to clean and inexpensive. They can be blended with almost any other fibre. One square yard of recycled polyester fabric contains plastic of roughly five clear, 2-litre plastic bottles.

Sustainable Cotton Project

Located in the world's most productive agricultural region, California Central Valley, the Sustainable Cotton Project (SCP) focuses on the production and use of cotton, one of the most widely grown and chemical-intensive crops in the world. SCP has developed programmes in the cotton value chain to stimulate the transition to supply and demand of the organic and sustainable cotton industry. The ultimate goal of 'sustainable cotton' is to move to sustainable production, manufacturing and use practices in order to create a healthy and profitable industry for growers, their communities, manufacturers, retailers and users of all cotton products. It is held as a shining example of how sustainable really works.

Triple bottom line

'Planet, people and profit'. Unless 'doing the right thing' can be profitable there will be little meaningful progress towards more ethical and sustainable agriculture, manufacturing and finished products. Fortunately, sustainability can equal profitability; once sustainability is incorporated into your business model you can turn into competitive advantage.

Uzbekistan and the Environmental Justice Foundation

EJF is a registered charity established in 2000 to empower people who suffer most from environmental abuses to find peaceful ways of preventing them. EJF believes that protecting the environment is not just about quality of life, it is a question of life and death for the world's poorest people and believing that environmental security is a human right. They have recently highlighted the huge problems facing the world with cotton grown in the former Soviet Union. EJF is committed to eradicating child labour and the deadliest pesticides from cotton production and promoting organic alternatives. <http://www.ejfoundation.org/>

Vegetable tanned leather

At least 90 percent of leather worldwide is chrome-tanned. Chrome may be carcinogenic and studies have revealed higher than average cancer rates amongst leather industry workers. Vegetable tanned leather, however is an ancient process that makes up only a small percentage of tanned leather at present. Traditionally stiff, it has been used for horse saddles and boots; but current generation vegetable-tanned leather is supple and soft and can be used for clothing and bags.

Wash less, wash cool, line dry

Domestic machine washing and tumble-drying time and time again may contribute up to 80 percent of the energy used by a conventional cotton garment in its lifetime. The solution: encourage your customers to 'wash less, wash cool and line dry'. Also make them aware of eco-friendly detergents; they work well and are better for the environment as they are renewable, have minimal aquatic toxicity and also biodegrade quickly and completely. Conventional cleaning products often exhibit poor biodegradability and can be toxic to aquatic life.

Year of Environmental Awareness 2007

2007 has seen a rapidly growing public and corporate awareness of global environmental issues. Now, a pivotal moment has been reached and the Nobel Peace Prize being awarded to the IPCC for their work on climate change is a testament to this.

Zero carbon footprint

A carbon footprint is the measure given to the amount of greenhouse gases produced by burning fossil fuels, measured in units of carbon dioxide. Businesses and individuals are being encouraged to become as 'carbon neutral' as possible - that is, to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions associated with their business and lifestyle activities - by looking at the way they produce things: for example, by switching to sustainable energy sources, recycling waste products and looking at sustainable alternatives to everyday needs.