



## Sustainable sourcing for fashion designers

Centre for Sustainable Fashion, August 2010

### 1. Sourcing fabrics

Companies make a variety of ethical and eco claims. Some are doing ground-breaking work and are making a real difference, others are more hype than substance. The following companies that claim to supply 'eco-fabrics' have not been vetted. It is up to you to look beyond the marketing and make up your own mind about their ethical and eco credentials.

There are many different interpretations to ethical or eco sourcing. We recommend you spend some time figuring out what is important to both your values and your design process before you begin the process. You may find you cannot source everything you are looking for and need to weigh up what is most important to you.

You may like to consider the following questions when beginning sourcing:

- Have you considered your own personal values and how these may affect your sourcing decisions?
- Is your supply chain traceable enough for you?
- Are certifications important to you? What level of communication do you plan to have with your consumer?
- Are you looking to support local crafts and heritage, or investigate technological innovation for improved performance and fit?
- Have you considered the 'in use' and 'end of life' aspects of your product lifecycle? Does this affect your fabric choices?
- Is your fabric choice and quality in keeping with the market level of your product?
- Are you compromising the final quality of your product in order to use sustainable fabrics?
- Have you considered how you use your fabrics, not just which ones you use? You may want to consider design and manufacture for reduced waste, design for reduced laundering, design for disassembly etc.

### 2. Resources & directories

[Shared Talent India website](#) – a sourcing toolkit for designers looking to work with sustainable Indian suppliers, compiled by the Centre for Sustainable Fashion.

[Ethical Fashion Forum](#) produced a directory of suppliers for their global sourcing market place and have a [fabric sourcing pool](#).

[PAN UK](#) have put together a organic directory of cotton fabrics and yarns.

[TreeHugger](#) have put together a mini directory of green fabrics.

[CLASS](#) works to help create new opportunities, drive sales and provide focused communication for commercially available eco-textiles, yarns, processes, finished products and services. There is a comprehensive materials library in each showroom (London, New York, Milan), available for businesses, designers and buyers. CLASS connects materials producers with designers and retailers, clarifying what's available in the marketplace, where to find it and making the search for eco-friendly materials for fashion, lifestyle and home even easier.

### 3. Forthcoming events

Ethical Fashion Source Expo, this year it will take place alongside the [RITE conference](#) at Central Hall Westminster, on the 6 October 2010.

<http://www.ethicalfashionforum.com/ethical-fashion-source-expo>

### 4. Researching textiles

Book: Kate Fletcher (2007) [Sustainable Fashion and Textiles - Design Journeys](#): This book brings together for the first time information about lifecycle sustainability impacts of fashion and textiles, practical alternatives, design concepts and social innovation.

Publication: [Guidelines - A handbook on the environment for the textile and fashion industry](#). The book examines the responsibility and role of the designer and buyer when they consider sustainability in their work. It includes company case studies, the environmental impact of textiles and checklists, which are intended as a tool for the designer and the buyer to include environmental considerations in their daily routines.

Publication: [Environmental Impact of Textiles](#) - Examines what effects all phases of textile production and use have on the environment, from growing or making fibres to discarding a product after its useful life has ended.

Teaching Resource: [The Real Price of Cotton](#) - a collection of teaching resources that will enable students to explore the ethical and environmental dimensions of the cotton industry.

Report: [Child Bondage Continues in Indian Cotton Supply Chain](#). This report, from the India Committee of the Netherlands, details the plight of the 416,000 mostly female children who are involved in (often bonded) child labour in India's cottonseed fields.

Report: Environmental Justice Foundation's latest report [Slave Nation](#) exposes how cotton production in the Central Asian Republic of Uzbekistan remains one of the most exploitative enterprises in the world.

Report: Environmental Justice Foundation's [The Children behind Our Cotton](#) details the use of child labour in cotton production.

Report: Environmental Justice Foundation's [The Deadly Chemicals in Cotton](#) details the impacts of chemical use in cotton production worldwide.

Report: Environmental Justice Foundation's [White Gold](#) investigates the environmental and social impacts of cotton production in the unique context of Uzbekistan.

Report: WWF's [Cleaner, Greener Cotton: Impacts and better management practices](#), shows how WWF is working to address the key environmental and social issues associated with cotton farming, focusing on making cotton more sustainable, which in turn, helps keep the environment it depends on healthy.

Report: University of Cambridge's [Well Dressed](#) offers a comprehensive round up of the environmental impacts of clothing and textiles.

Film: [The Dollar a Day Dress](#) - BBC's Panorama travelled the world to create a dollar a day dress - a symbol of how the global garment industry can harm poor countries.

Website: [Eco-textile News](#) - The magazine for sustainable textiles and clothing. Also produces the [Eco-Textile Labelling Guide](#) which breaks down the different certifications available for textiles.

Website: [Wear Organic](#) is a project from Pesticide Action Network UK aiming to reduce the problems from pesticides used in cotton, particularly by promoting organic and fair alternatives.

Website: [KateFletcher.com](#) - 'the eco textiles and fashion filter with its roots in diversity, creativity and ecological awareness'.

Website: [Traid](#) - aims to help the environment both in the UK and abroad by reducing the amount of textile waste sent to landfill and providing a stylish alternative to buying new.

Website: [Textile Environment Design](#) - Research Centre at Chelsea College of Art and Design: The main aim of TED is to look at the role that the designer can play in creating textiles that have a reduced impact on the environment and to provide a toolbox of designer-centred solutions.

Website: [Business & Biodiversity Initiative](#) - In May 2008, Germany hosted the 9th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity - CoP 9. The conference was attended by more than 5.000 delegates from about 190 signatory states and sent strong signals concerning the collaboration with the private sector. On this account the Business and Biodiversity Initiative 'Biodiversity in Good Company' was established as an international). This initiative aims to intensify the engagement of the private sector in achieving the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity by encouraging:

- Companies to incorporate the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity into their management systems by signing and implementing the Leadership Declaration.
- Companies to publish their best practices.
- Companies to actively take part in the 10th Conference of Parties in Nagoya/Japan in 2010.
- To broaden the international profile of the initiative

Website: [Crem](#) - CREM wishes to contribute to economic, social and ecological sustainability at the local, national and global level, by conducting research, consulting and performing process management for international organisations, governmental bodies, multinational companies, non-governmental organisations and certifying bodies. Fields of Work section on website gives details of completed projects covering subjects such as CSR, biodiversity, codes of conduct, child labour and sustainable supply chains.

Website: [Better Cotton Initiative](#) - The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) exists in order to respond to the current impacts of cotton production worldwide. BCI aims to promote measurable improvements in the key environmental and social impacts of cotton cultivation worldwide to make it more economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. For the last two years, the BCI has been working with organisations from across the cotton supply chain and interested stakeholders to facilitate a solution for the mainstream cotton sector. The BCI's philosophy is to develop a market for a new mainstream commodity: 'Better Cotton' and thereby transform the cotton commodity to bring long-term benefits for the environment, farmers and other people dependent on cotton for their livelihood.

Website: [Sustainable cotton initiative](#) - The initiative focuses on some of the globally most important cotton producing areas where cotton production severely threatens high value aquatic ecosystems (e. g. Australia, Pakistan, India and Central Asia). The Sustainable Cotton Initiative is aimed at the reduction of water extraction for irrigation of cotton to an extent not negatively affecting the aquatic ecosystems anymore but at the same time, safeguarding the livelihood of the local farmers. As such, the project will contribute to the biological, economic and social sustainability of these focal regions. The project is crucial to help overcome the threatening global water crisis, benefiting natural biodiversity and the livelihood and health of millions of farmer families in some of the poorest regions of the world.

Website: [Australian BMP Cotton](#) – Australian initiative supporting cotton industry to offer auditing and traceable supply chains for improved cotton production. Downloadable factsheets available.

Website: [Cotton made in Africa](#) – Initiative to promote the development and sustainability of the African cotton industry.

Website: [The Sustainable Cotton project](#) - Located in California's Central Valley, the world's most productive agricultural region, 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. Since 1996, SCP has brought farmers, manufacturers, and consumers together. SCP's guiding philosophy of "cooperation for a change" fosters information-sharing among these groups to develop a Cleaner Cotton™ industry.

## 5. Suppliers

[Bishopston Trading Company](#) sells wholesale organic fairly traded hand-woven cotton from India.

[Cloth House](#) sell organic cotton, hemp and peace silk online and in their Soho shops.

[Greenfibres](#) supply a range of organic fabrics, stuffings, hemp and wool yarns.

[Hempfabric](#) sell, yes you guessed it, a range of hemp fabrics!

[Nearsea Naturals](#) have a range of natural and organic fabrics.

[Organic Cotton Plus](#) are based in the USA and sell a range of organic cotton.

[Annie Sherburne](#) sell ecological yarns.

[Denise Bird](#) has a collection of organic cotton, organic pakucho, bamboo and hemp fabric swatches.

[MUMO Fabrics](#) - a selection of silks, cottons, latex, wool, recycled PET and ecological leathers.

[E-leather](#) - sell products composed primarily of a waste product of the leather industry.

[Natureally Organic Leather](#) is produced from British Organic Soil Association certified organic cattle hides using an environmentally friendly non-toxic, 100% chrome-free tanning process, natural finishing and dyeing methods.

[Zameen Organic](#) is a pioneering farmer-owned marketing company for Fairtrade, organic and pesticide-free cotton. Zameen supplies organic and Fairtrade cotton lint, cotton seed, yarn, fabrics, garments and home wear.

## 6. Standards & Certifications

IFOAM (international Federation of Organic Agriculture movements) [www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)

GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) [www.global-standard.org](http://www.global-standard.org)

Fairtrade labelling Organisation <http://www.fairtrade.net/cotton.html>

Pesticide Action Network [www.pan-international.org](http://www.pan-international.org)

Soil Association [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

## **6. Support organisations**

Solidaridad [www.solidaridad.nl](http://www.solidaridad.nl)

Icco [www.icco.nl](http://www.icco.nl)

Organic Exchange [www.organicexchange.org](http://www.organicexchange.org)

Made By [www.MADE-BY.org](http://www.MADE-BY.org)

Helvetas [www.helvetas.org](http://www.helvetas.org)

Max Havelaar Foundation [www.maxhavelaar.nl](http://www.maxhavelaar.nl)

Organic Trade Association [www.ota.com](http://www.ota.com)

Fashioning an Ethical Industry <http://fashioninganethicalindustry.org/>

UK Sustainable Clothing action plan  
<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/business/products/roadmaps/clothing.htm>

*Compiled with thanks to [Fashioning an Ethical Industry](http://fashioninganethicalindustry.org/).*

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[www.sustainable-fashion.com](http://www.sustainable-fashion.com)