

Woolworths reaches sustainable cotton milestone

This summer, all the cotton fibre used in Woolworths' private label clothing and home ranges is 100% responsibly sourced, either via Better Cotton or certified organic cotton. The announcement but the retailer was shared ahead of World Cotton Day, observed today, 7 October.



Source: Supplied

Around half of all textiles in the world are derived from cotton. It's the planet's most profitable non-food crop, and more than 250 million people across the world rely on cotton farming and production for their livelihoods. For consumers, soft, cool and comfortable cotton is a perennial fabric of choice, from jeans and t-shirts to summer dresses.

However, conventionally grown cotton is fraught with environmental concerns. The industry is known for its heavy use of pesticides and the subsequent degradation of waterways and soils with chemical run-off. Cotton is also a notoriously thirsty crop, taking up more than its fair share of freshwater via intensive irrigation. Turning the commodity into clothing further increases its impacts, with an [estimated 2,700 litres of water](#) going into the farming, production and dyeing processes of a single t-shirt.



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Lauren Hartzenberg 23 Apr 2021



"Cotton is the most used fibre in our private label clothing and home products which is why over 15 years ago, we embarked on a responsible sourcing strategy for cotton and are delighted to have reached this milestone. Grown across many of the developing regions of the world, including some provinces in South Africa, cotton has significant potential as a poverty-alleviating crop that can provide sustainable and decent work.

“In terms of its product lifecycle, cotton biodegrades quickly in comparison to synthetic textiles, and it can be easily reused and recycled,” says Lawrence Pillay, group head of sourcing Woolworths’ Fashion, Beauty and Home.

“Most of our cotton is sourced through the Better Cotton Initiative, and also includes a South African-grown component that meets the international standard, with the remainder being certified as organic cotton that complies with the Global Organic Textiles Standard,” confirms Pillay.

Better Cotton Initiative

More than a decade ago, the Better Cotton Initiative, spearheaded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) brought the global industry and civil society together with leading retailers and brands to develop standards for improvements in the growing of cotton and the production of cotton products.

Today, Better Cotton is the world’s leading sustainability initiative for cotton with 2.7 million farmers in 23 countries accounting for 23% of the world’s cotton is certified as grown in line with the Better Cotton Standard, according to the *Better Cotton 2020 Report*.



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The standard fosters thriving cotton communities while protecting and restoring the environment which includes limiting the use of pesticides and herbicides, enhancing water efficiency and soil management, protecting natural habitats in cotton-growing areas and striving for dignified work and fair wages.

This cotton is sourced via mass balance so is not physically traceable to end products. However, the Better Cotton farmers enjoy a variety of benefits from the demand for Better Cotton including much-needed training and resources to adopt sustainable farming practices.

“All these efforts though come to fruition in-store where consumers play a vital role in supporting the brands and retailers offering cotton products that meet these higher standards of caring for the planet and people,” concludes Pillay.

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