

Global coalition calls on apparel industry to increase sustainable cotton sourcing

New guide launched by Cotton 2040 to help brands and retailers fast track sourcing across multiple standards.

London 28 June 2018 – Partners in a global cross-industry collaboration are calling on brands and retailers to radically increase their sourcing of sustainable cotton, and have launched a digital guide to support them with fast tracking their sourcing strategies across multiple standards.

Cotton is the most abundantly produced natural fibre and its production supports the livelihoods of over 350 million men and women. However, cotton production can present significant environmental and social challenges that undermine the sustainability of the apparel sector as a whole. Sourcing more sustainable cotton has the potential to lift millions of farmers out of poverty and reduce the commodity's environment impacts. There are also clear benefits for businesses, such as positioning as responsible brand, increased transparency, long-term security of supply and minimising reputational risk. And yet, even though according to the 2018 Pulse of the Fashion Industry report 75% of fashion companies have improved their environmental and social performance over the past year, uptake of sustainable cotton from the industry is only around 3% of total global cotton supply, or 21% of sustainably produced cotton.

The [*CottonUP*](#) guide to sourcing sustainable cotton seeks to address one of the main barriers for companies looking to start sourcing or increase the amounts of sustainable cotton they source: the time and resource required to research and implement the most appropriate sourcing approach for their organisation's sustainability priorities.

Launched at this week's BCI 2018 Global Cotton Conference, the guide highlights the business case and main sourcing options for sustainable cotton, provides guidance on creating a sourcing strategy and working with suppliers, and shares case studies from companies that have already navigated the complex challenges of sourcing more sustainable cotton.

Sally Uren, CEO at **Forum for the Future**, said: “The apparel sector is under huge pressure to reduce its social and environmental impacts, and increasing demand for more sustainable fibres is key to securing future supply. The *CottonUP guide* addresses a long-standing need in the industry for clarity around cotton sourcing options by providing brands and retailers with the resources to help them go further, faster. It can be a key enabler for systemic change in the industry, and could be a blueprint for other commodities in the future.”

The guide was developed by the Cotton 2040 coalition of leading brands and retailers including M&S, Target and Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Ltd; industry standards Better Cotton Initiative and Cotton Made in Africa (CMiA), organic standards (represented by Textile Exchange), Fairtrade, industry initiatives CottonConnect, IDH – the sustainable trade initiative, Cotton Australia, Proudly made in Africa and Organic Cotton Accelerator as well as MADE-BY and Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion. Sustainability non-profit Forum for the Future led the work, with funding from the C&A Foundation.

Anita Chester, Head of Sustainable Raw Materials at **C&A Foundation**, said: “There is significant work to do to align and harmonise the many sustainability-focused activities across the apparel sector, and to drive production of more sustainable cotton from around 15% to beyond 30% from 2020. Through Cotton 2040 and the *CottonUP guide*, key industry players are making a united effort to pull brands and retailers towards more sustainable cotton and make it easier for them to source across multiple standards.”

Over the coming months, Cotton 2040 partners will be reaching out to individual organisations and the wider industry to encourage greater use of more sustainable cotton and provide support through webinars and other knowledge sharing opportunities.

Phil Townsend, Sustainable Raw Materials Specialist at **M&S**, said: “Today, any company, no matter how large or small, has the opportunity to convert all its products over to a sustainable footing and mainstream more sustainable cotton. The supply and marketing opportunities are both there, and the *CottonUP guide* will make it a lot easier and quicker for brands and retailers to radically increase the amount of sustainable cotton they source than it was for M&S ten years ago.”

Access the *CottonUP guide* at www.cottonupguide.org and register your details to sign up to the Key Steps to Sourcing Sustainable Cotton and hear about these opportunities. To find out more about Cotton 2040, contact Charlene Collison at c.collison@forumforthefuture.org.

-ENDS-

For more information, interviews or comment please contact Ulrike Stein at u.stein@forumforthefuture.org

Notes to editors

References

Global Fashion Agenda: *2018 Pulse of the Fashion Industry*, available at <http://www.globalfashionagenda.com/pulse/>

WWF, Solidaridad, Pesticide Action Network: *Sustainable Cotton Ranking 2017*, available at <http://www.sustainablecottonranking.org/>

Key steps to sourcing sustainable cotton

The *CottonUP* guide and the Cotton 2040 partners can support organisations along the key steps to sourcing sustainable cotton:

1. Understand the importance and benefits of sustainable cotton sourcing
2. Learn from other brands and retailers that are already committed to ambitious sourcing targets
3. Map your company's current cotton sourcing practice
4. Explore sourcing options: use and register on the *CottonUP guide*, and speak to cotton standards and implementing partners who can provide support
5. Create a strategy and set targets
6. Work internally and with suppliers to start or extend sourcing

About Cotton 2040

Cotton 2040 is a unique cross-industry initiative aimed at integrating and accelerating action on critical issues to mainstream sustainably grown cotton, reducing the system's negative impacts and ensuring supply for the future.

Convened by [Forum for the Future](#) with support from the C&A Foundation, Cotton 2040 brings together leading retailers M&S, Target and Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Ltd; industry standards Better Cotton Initiative and Cotton Made in Africa (CMiA), organic standards (represented by Textile Exchange), Fairtrade, industry initiatives CottonConnect, IDH – the sustainable trade initiative, Cotton Australia, Proudly made in Africa and Organic Cotton Accelerator as well as MADE-BY and Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion.

Together the partners have identified four priority areas for collaborative action that have the most significant potential to create a systemic shift in the cotton value chain, including building demand for

sustainable cotton, improving smallholder resilience and making traceability of cotton easier and more comparable. Find out more at <https://beta.forumforthefuture.org/cotton-2040>

About Forum for the Future

Forum for the Future is one of the world's leading sustainability non-profits. For over 20 years we've been working in partnership with business, governments and civil society to accelerate the shift toward a sustainable future.

We specialise in addressing critical global challenges by catalysing change in key systems, from food to apparel, energy to shipping. We do this by convening transformational collaborations to drive change, by partnering with organisations to help them lead by example, and by building a global community of pioneers and change makers.

Together we are reinventing the way the world works. Find out more at <https://beta.forumforthefuture.org/> or by following [@Forum4theFuture](https://twitter.com/Forum4theFuture) on Twitter.