



To find out more about fiber choices and how they relate to the four heaviest environmental impacts in the fashion industry, please see the Clean By Design website: www.nrdc.org/cleanbydesign



Clearing Up Your Choices On Cotton

- About a third of the world's textiles are made from cotton
- Cotton is actually a considerably challenging crop to grow because it is water intensive, (sensitive to drought), temperature sensitive, and readily attacked by various insects
- Cotton is produced in more than 65 countries worldwide, majority of which are developing countries

The Truth About Conventional Cotton

Conventional (non-organic) cotton is grown and harvested using heavy quantities of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides in production to maximize efficiency and output.

- Conventional cotton is one of the most chemically dependent crops, using 16 percent of all insecticides used for global food and fiber production
- It takes 1/3 of a pound of chemicals to produce enough cotton for a t-shirt, and 3/4 of a pound for a pair of jeans
- Three of the 10 most acutely hazardous insecticides are commonly used chemicals to grow cotton
- Conventional cotton also uses an immense amount of water and is often grown in countries with water shortages. (The quantity of water ranges according to growing climate, but can be as much as 29,000 liters/kg cotton.)

Conventional cotton is not a good choice for human health or the environment

Organic Cotton: The Best Alternative, But There Is Just Not Enough

Organic cotton comes from non-genetically modified plants, grown without the use of any synthetic agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers or pesticides.

- Organic cotton methods support biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, improve the quality of soil and can sometimes use less water

Organic cotton is the preferred method for environmental consideration

Unfortunately organic cotton makes up only a tiny percentage (0.33 percent) of world fiber demand and only around 1 percent of the total cotton market

- The main factor limiting the increased use of organic cotton is low growing yield, which causes a limited supply and higher price. Conversion to organic is slow, costly, risky and does not come with a guaranteed premium

A New Cotton Movement: Sustainable or "Better" Cotton

Sustainable Cotton is grown to gain the same yield as conventional cotton, but while conserving water and minimizing, not eliminating, the use of pesticides and fertilizers.

The Sustainable Cotton Project (SCP) in the United States helps move farmers through the changeover from chemically-dependant to more biologically sound approaches

In 2005 the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) took the idea of cleaner cotton to an international level drawing on a global multi-stakeholder consultative process.

- BCI is not a certification system, but rather a market driven system helping farmers reduce the negative international impacts of cotton farming while benefitting socially and/or financially from the BCI's changes
- BCI is currently in their implementation process and hope to have full production and analysis by 2012 (For more information see: www.bettercotton.org)

We recommend using certified organic cotton whenever possible. We also suggest inquiring about the Better Cotton Initiative results, and using Better Cotton as it becomes available.

For detailed information on cotton, please see our in-depth report and citations to research sources.