

Repairwhatyouwear

Cotton:

Cotton is a key fibre, used over 60% of textiles worldwide. Many of its characteristics make it versatile:

- As a natural fibre, it is biodegradable and recyclable.
- It absorbs up to 65% of its weight in water (ideal for towels etc.)
- Cotton is naturally breathable - good for hot climates.
- It's non-static.
- Good durability - strong and abrasion resistant.
- Poor elasticity - it creases easily so some fabrics have anti-crease chemical finishes or are blended.

Common Blends:

- Polyester and other synthetics like polyamide (acrylic).
- Cellulosic fibres such as viscose and modal.
- Elastane for stretch (jeans etc.)

When blended with synthetic fibres, the purpose is often to strengthen the cloth, reduce creasing, and reduce the price.

When blended with Cellulosic fibres, this is often to increase drape, softness and ability to dry more quickly.

Environmental issues:

A 2017 Wrap report stated that the average water footprint for a kilo of cotton (equivalent to one pair of jeans and a shirt) is 10,000-20,000 litres. This has been further quoted as 2,720 litres of water to make a t-shirt, and 10,850 litres to make a pair of jeans.

73% of global cotton harvest comes from irrigated land (WWF report the impact of cotton on freshwater resources and ecosystems 2017).

India and Pakistan are major suppliers of cotton to the UK, but both countries suffer from high levels of water scarcity.

According to Organiccotton.org, cotton is mostly grown in monoculture and is a pesticide-intensive crop. Although it is only grown on 2.5% of the world's agricultural land, it consumes 16% of all the insecticides and 6.8% of all herbicides used worldwide.

Smallholder cotton farmers spend up to 60% of their annual income on pesticides - Pan-org.org.

Slave labour has been linked to 20% of the world's cotton picking and processing, specifically in the Xinjiang province in Western China where Uighur Labour camps have been highlighted. Child labour has been reported in Uzbekistan and parts of Asia.

Organic cotton:

Why is Organic cotton better? Soil association summary: <https://www.soilassociation.org/organic-living/fashion-textiles/organic-cotton/>:

1. Combats climate change

Organic farmers use natural methods to grow cotton - not fossil-fuel based fertilisers. By working with nature, farmers build healthy soils which store carbon and help to combat climate change. Organic cotton emits up to 46% less greenhouse gas than non-organic.

2. Saves precious water

Organic farming creates healthy soils, which act like a sponge, soaking up water during floods and holding it for longer in times of drought. Hazardous synthetic pesticides and fertilisers are banned in organic farming - so rivers, lakes and drinking water are kept cleaner too.

3. Helps farmers feed their families

Organic farmers always grow other crops alongside their cotton. These crops can provide farming families and their communities with a more stable, accessible, abundant and diverse food supply - and another source of income.

4. Gives control to farmers not GM companies

Genetically modified (GM) seeds are banned in organic farming, so farmers are not reliant on a handful of GM companies. Instead, they save their seeds year after year, and work with the environment in a long-term, sustainable way.

5. Eliminates hazardous synthetic pesticides

Organic farmers use natural methods like crop rotation to control pests and diseases, rather than chemical cocktails. Hazardous synthetic pesticides used in non-organic farming can damage ecosystems, poison waterways and endanger workers who can't always afford the safety equipment needed to protect them. Conventional cotton alone is responsible for 16% of all insecticides sold worldwide.

<https://www.soilassociation.org/organic-living/fashion-textiles/organic-cotton/>:

Fairtrade cotton:

Fairtrade attempt to tackle inequalities in pay and market fluctuations that favour larger producers. Many cotton farmers in poor and low income countries have their livelihoods protected through engagement with Fairtrade organisation.

“Through tools like the Fairtrade Minimum Price and an additional Fairtrade Premium and stronger, more democratic organisations, Fairtrade has sought to provide these farmers with an alternative route to trade and higher, more stable incomes.” - statement from [The Fairtrade Organisation](#).