



UniformReuse.co.uk Case Study

Cotton Roots



Key facts:

- Cotton Roots only sources products which are organic, Fairtrade or have other sustainable credentials.
- Garments which are classed as “seconds “ are donated to Africa for reuse through World in Need
- Cotton Roots is ISO14001 accredited and it’s products or fabrics used in products are associated with a number of organisations including:
 - Fairtrade
 - EU Ecolabel
 - Soil Association
 - Öeko-tex
 - Carbon Trust
- Spare fabric and thread is donated to schools or reuse via the online website Freecycle

Background

Based in Milton Keynes, Cotton Roots is the sister company of Impact Trading, suppliers of corporate clothing and workwear including an on-site embroidery service. Cotton Roots offers a range of organic, fairtrade & sustainable corporate and workwear which can also be embroidered with company logos. Its fabrics are sourced from a range of different suppliers: Fairtrade and organic fabric directly from India; some of its certified organic shirt fabric from suppliers in Germany and workwear fabric carrying the EU Ecolabel from Klopman International.

Its products include:

- Polo Shirts
- Hooded tops and sweatshirts
- T-shirts
- Shirts and blouses
- Jackets and fleeces
- Workwear
- Bespoke garments
- Fleece jackets and caps – made from recycled polyester.

Cotton Roots also offers a fulfillment service for its clients and this can be tailored to individual requirements. This is ideal for companies who need a swift service with a purpose-built online ordering system and delivery of products to multiple locations. Its current client base includes Canon (UK) Ltd, Canon Europe, Meter-U, Virgin Media and Circle Britannia.

At the core of the company ethos is the belief that sustainable business is simply good business and Susan Waters, Managing Director is the key driving force behind the goals of Cotton Roots. There is a commitment to sourcing gar-

ments that are sustainable in both environmental and social aspects.

“It can be hard work, but in the long-term I consider this to be a viable business approach.”

Susan Waters, Managing Director of Cotton Roots & Impact Trading

Initiatives

Where possible, each individual product or fabric used in the Cotton Roots range is accredited to one or more international, UK, or EU labelling schemes. This includes certification indicating Fairtrade, organic, EU Ecolabel, and Oeko-tex 100. In addition to this, Cotton Roots products are also accredited using a Carbon Trust pilot scheme to indicate reduction during manufacture of CO2 output. An overview of some of these schemes is provided in the accompanying table.

Cotton Roots supports farmers in India that are classed as ‘organic in conversion’, which helps farmers during the transition phase from producing conventionally grown to organic cotton. Organic cotton is sourced from a growing co-operative of 120 farmers, which includes these ‘organic in conversion’ farmers.



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Cotton Roots has established a partnership with the charity World in Need, which provides aid to people in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the world. This collaboration came about in 2007 when Meter-U, one of Cotton Roots' clients, undertook a rebranding exercise which meant that the current uniforms would be changed. Many of the garments were unused and both parties felt that sending these to landfill would be extremely wasteful.

The outdated garments, which included fleece jackets, caps and polo shirts, were returned to Cotton Roots. Re-using the uniforms within the UK wasn't a viable option due to security issues; Meter-U did not want to risk people obtaining the uniforms to gain access to peoples homes. Therefore it was important that they were re-used overseas and World in Need, based in East Sussex, was able to guarantee that this would happen.

“With just a little time and co-operation it has been possible to arrange a solution that will be of enormous benefit to people who are less fortunate than ourselves. I believe that this is an initiative that could be repeated by other companies who undertake similar rebranding projects and it will certainly be a solution we offer to customers from now on.”

Susan Waters (Company Clothing Sep 07 p42)

Now all spoiled garments are sent to Africa for re-use in this way, although customers can opt out of this scheme if it is felt that this would cause any issues.

Re-use can often be the best environmentally beneficial option, though extensive transport costs overseas can make this less viable. Cotton Roots has recently located a manufacturer of garments who are able to take pre-used corporate fleece jackets and seconds. The fabric from the garment is re-manufactured and made into fleece dog-jackets. Off-cuts of organic fabric are used as part of the design detail. As this is a UK based organisation, there is reduced impact from transport vehicles, yet the embodied energy contained in the product is not lost, as is largely the case with recycling of fabric alone.

Accreditation scheme overview:



Öeko-tex Standard 100

The Öeko-tex Standard 100 was developed in 1992 to limit or exclude the use of certain hazardous substances in textile products. Assessment and certification for the Öeko-tex Standard 100 is undertaken by independent textile research and test institutes in 40 countries worldwide.

In order to obtain the Öeko-tex Standard 100 companies must provide evidence that certain harmful substances are excluded or fall below a certain level. This includes pesticides, formaldehyde, phenols and metals such as cadmium and nickel.

Responsibility for the standard is shared between 17 test institutes which are collectively known as the International Öeko-tex Association.

The Öeko-Tex certificate is issued for a period of one year and can be extended subject to further successful testing.

Klopman was one of the first European textile manufacturers to become eligible to display the standard for polyester and polyester/cotton blends and it is currently accredited to 100% of their production.



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EU Ecolabel

The EU Ecolabel takes into account all aspects of a product's lifecycle, from cradle to grave (production to disposal). Accreditation is only awarded to products and services that have been "officially distinguished as being the most environmentally friendly in their range."

The award of the EU Ecolabel means that specifiers and consumers have the confidence and reassurance of knowing that accredited products are manufactured in an environmentally responsible way.

Products and processes are thoroughly and independently tested according to ecological criteria which take into account all aspects of a product's life, from production right through to end-of-life disposal.

Klopman became the first European polycotton fabric manufacturer to be awarded the European Ecolabel in 2003 and it has been applied to a number of their products including image workwear fabrics, advanced protective wear fabrics and casual wear fabrics.



Fairtrade

The Fairtrade Foundation was established in the UK in 1992. Fairtrade is a strategy to alleviate poverty and aid sustainable development. It aims to create opportunities for producers and workers

who have been economically disadvantaged or marginalized by the conventional trading system.

For a product to be able to display the Fairtrade Mark it must meet international Fairtrade standards which are set by the international certification body Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO).

As well as certifying producers, all of the traders in the supply chain must register with FLO and submit reports on their purchases and sales. Internationally-based importers and exporters report directly to FLO, whose trade auditors also conduct on-site inspections.

Meanwhile UK based importers and manufacturers submit quarterly reports to the Fairtrade Foundation and on-site inspections are carried out annually by an independent professional auditing company. Klopman recently introduced a new range of fabrics produced with Fair Trade certified cotton.

Outcomes

Clothing sent overseas with World in Need may travel to one of a number of destinations. The most recent Cotton Roots collection was sent to Uganda, where one region of work is the Lira area. In this district, millions are homeless or living in Refugee or Displaced People's Camps after more than twenty years of civil war. Local people have been subjected to fears of maiming, child abductions and constant rights abuses. As well as clothing donations, World in Need offer trauma counselling, education and trade training, to help local people bring themselves out of poverty and offer some hope for the future. More information on World in Need's work can be found here.

Websites

Cotton Roots	www.cottonroots.co.uk
Impact Trading	www.impacttrading.co.uk/
Fairtrade	www.fairtrade.org.uk/
EKO	www.skal.com
GOTS	www.global-standard.org
Öeko-tex	www.oeko-tex.com
Soil Association	www.soilassociation.org/
Carbon Trust	www.carbon-label.com/
World in Need	www.worldinneed.co.uk/
Freecycle	www.freecycle.net

Articles:

Company Clothing Sep 07 "Saying no to landfill" p42

For information about Öeko-Tex see the Klopman case study

For contact information please search the Directory on www.uniformreuse.co.uk/ directory

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