

## **NARRATOR**

On the catwalks of the world, eco-friendly fashion is all the rage –as celebrities lead a trend in clothing that could help save the planet. Organic cotton garments and shoes from recycled material, along with eco vehicles are all part of the new green lifestyle.

But is this just a niche market for the wealthy and the environmentally conscious or can Green fashion become more than a passing fad?

This week Earth Report investigates eco-clothes: Is Green the New Black?

Much of the clothing we wear is made of cotton. Most cotton Farmers use polluting chemicals. Cotton farms take up just 2.5% of the world's farmland but use 10% of all pesticides and 22% of all insecticides produced annually, according to the British Government.

This can have an impact on people's health. According to the World Health Organisation, 20,000 people die every year from pesticide poisoning.

But here in Gujarat, in North West India, some farmers are turning away from chemicals and switching to organic cotton production. According to the Gujarati Government 5,000 of the more than 100,000 cotton farmers here are now growing organic cotton. In part they switch because of health concerns but they also get a guaranteed minimum price for their cotton when prices are down.

Khima Sodha and his family of six run a small 5 hectare farm near the town of Rapar in the district of Kutch. Five years ago he stopped using chemicals on his land.

### **Khima Sodha, organic cotton farmer**

5 years ago we farmed using chemicals and in that time we had input costs for chemical pesticides and, also we were not getting a good enough price. Now we are getting great benefit from organic farming.

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Modern organic farming is a combination of traditional and new methods. Instead of synthetic chemicals Khima uses his own natural insecticide with pods from the akkdo cactus which are beaten into a milky pulp then combined with leaves from the Neema tree, cow's urine and buttermilk. All is left to ferment for a couple of weeks and then spread over the crops.

In tandem with this, Khima uses modern pheromone traps to catch bugs. The absence of chemicals attracts natural predators like birds. Here you can tell an organic field by the sound; it's alive with birdsong.

Instead of fertilisers farmers use plenty of manure. In this area of Kutch there are more livestock than people. Trained in modern composting techniques, the muck spreading is more efficient and effective.

It takes 3 years of farming without chemicals before a farm is declared organic.

Agrocel, a commercial company, provides training, advice, marketing, distribution and reinvestment for over 4,000 cotton farmers here in Gujarat as well as 45,000 small farmers throughout India.

The company helps farmers through the transition to organic guaranteeing a minimum fair price for the cotton. They add a fair trade premium of 2 rupees for every kilo produced to help fund community projects like better water supplies.

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For the farmers water is their most precious resource and this newly dug reservoir supports the surrounding farms and three villages.

There's also now a clean water supply, a library for the local school and solar street lighting.

### **Hasmukh Patel, general manager, Agrocel**

Farmers are getting assurance they will get minimum fair trade support price before sowing their crop and at the end whatever they are selling they are getting fair trade premium, that premium will take care of all development of entire society right from the environmental, educational, health and all development of society.

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The question is what are the advantages to the farmer of moving to organic production? The yields from organic cotton farming match those of conventional cotton production when harvests are good according to a recent study.

In leaner times organic farmers tend to produce more. At first the input costs to organic farmers are comparable to non-organic cotton --though they drop over time.

Prices too are similar although organic farmers are guaranteed a minimum of 21 rupees/hectare even if cotton market prices drop to as little as 18 rupees per hectare.

### **Hasmukh Patel**

We recruit more and more farmers, continuously you can say on average we can maintain our 40% growth every year and the last few years I can say more than 100% growth in organic as well as fair trade farming. Future I can say big retailers and small entrepreneurs both are very much interested in our business and I can say the sky is the limit.

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One of Agrocel's long running clients is People Tree. It's been pioneering ecological and fair trade fashion for more than 10 years. Every stage of its supply chain has been established and verified for its organic credentials by the Soil Association and Fair Trade Foundation.

It started in Japan with a flagship store in Tokyo. It is now expanding into Europe sourcing merchandise from 15 developing countries. While it used to supply mostly fair trade shops in the UK it has now broken into the major retailers through Topshop, which hosts its fashion line, and through Timberland.

But eco fashion is not fast, say People Tree; it takes time to turn around new garments.

**Safia Minney, owner, people tree**

I don't think green production can happen overnight. There is a lot of interest clearly from consumers. Buyers are now anxious to find organic cotton. What they need to do is take a long term view, they need to build solid partnerships with farmer's organisations so that farmers themselves can move from conventional cotton growing to organic cotton growing which takes three years. We need to start looking at the long term partnership and fashion is the worst for being short term, we want everything, we want in 2 week's time, 3 week's time maximum, we have to fly it in, we really don't look at the environmental impact or the social impact of the fashion we consume. So what we are looking at is a model of fashion that we will have to be slower and therefore take into consideration the environmental limitations of the planet.

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Not all clothing must have the latest look. Everyday wear like t-shirts can depend on long term orders thereby developing trading relationships.

Marks and Spencers, the British retailer with 450 stores in 30 countries claims 10% of all its cotton products are now ethically sourced. It says it uses one third of all organic cotton worldwide.

Working with the farmers in Gujarat for the last few years M&S have just made their first major order for organic cotton from Agrocetel, which is a third of its annual production capacity.

**Katie Stafford, Marks & Spencer**

We're aware that the rest of our cotton also needs work so we've actually got a commitment to our cotton strategy which is part of our Plan A, that is growing the amount of fair trade cotton, the amount of organic cotton, that we sell but also we've been working with WWF to look at how we can improve the conventional cotton industry so those cotton farmers who can't or don't want to be fair trade or organic, giving them standards in ways to improve the way they use water or pesticides, the way they manage their labour standards so our commitment on cotton is across our whole business. Every single bit of cotton in the future that you buy from M&S will in some way have better environmental or social standards. But we believe at the most ethical end, fair trade and organic, is where our customers want us to grow our business. We see that this has been building over the last few years, there has been a real buzz around eco fashion this year and we believe that it's here to stay. Because once our customers know about it there is no going back, you know, you just want more and more.

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The farmers in India say other big retailers such as Next and C&A are approaching them for organic cotton while some of the major fashion retailers such as Monsoon are expanding their organic range and sponsoring ethical fashion shows in London.

So clothing production may be about to get greener. But what about old clothes? What happens to them?

The ethical fashion show in Paris has expanded year by year as fair trade and ecological clothing booms in popularity both in fashion boutiques and increasingly in shopping centres.

Organic cotton is one way the clothing industry can become more eco-friendly. But it's not the only way. Another is recycling.

Many of these designs are made from recycled cloth, or in this case fur. The throw-away has become must-have. This wedding dress is made completely of white plastic bags ironed together.

It's an extreme way of showing that waste is just another resource.

Accessories at the show included handbags and purses made out of a range of recycled material like old fruit juice cartons, sweet wrappers and canvas from disused street advertising banners.

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One organization, Bottletop, a charity raising awareness about AIDS, takes recycled designs from Africa and Brazil and introduces them to fashion boutiques in the developed world.

These bags are literally made from bottle tops and are being snapped up by fashionable youngsters wanting to be seen to be green.

### **Bag maker**

We have been collecting these bottle tops from restaurants and shops. It's very hard work to collect these things. Then we buy wire, to connect them to make baskets.

### **Cameron Saul, founder, Bottletop**

I would say recycled is the new black, because I would say it's a statement of consciousness. In today's environment we are always being fed messages about the fragility of the environment we're living in, be it on a personal level, just putting your plastic cartons out or your glass bottles, every week you can make a difference and you should be making a difference in a personal way. If you can have the new 'it' bag of the season and it's something that has been recycled from old ring pulls from cans which shows you actually have got your head screwed on about what is happening in the world today then I would say it was double black really.

### **NARRATOR**

Nice but niche products for specialised boutiques. Could this ever be done on a massive scale?

### **Cameron Saul**

Certainly our ambition is to set up production so that it can be ingrained and at the moment there is interest from other markets like from France and from Germany and from Canada so at the moment we will really set out to exploit this opportunity with this bag.

The world cannot afford for recycling products to be just a fad and it is really exciting to be part of a vanguard of organisations really setting to make that it is not just a fad.

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In the UK alone 2 million tonnes of new shoes and clothing is bought every year and according to the British Government about the same amount is thrown away. It's the fastest growing source of waste in British households. It's either destroyed in huge incinerators causing pollution or buried in landfill sites.

Textiles present a particular problem for landfill because the synthetic man-made fibres don't decompose.

One company pioneering industrial scale recycling is Patagonia. In the early nineties the California based company took discarded plastic soda bottles, melted them down and turned them into new high quality fleeces for snow skiing.

### **Jonathan Petty, UK marketing director, Patagonia**

The process is called PCR, which is post-consumer recycling. But effectively you take plastic bottles, you melt those down and you make granules which are then melted down again and re-spun into filament yarn. So you're producing recycled polyester yarn, and from that stage on you can start to spin it and make new fleece.

It takes about 25 to 30 large 2-litre bottles to make an average fleece and so far we have used or diverted 92 million bottles from going effectively to landfill or being incinerated.

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A fleece made from old bottles can be recycled indefinitely and any brand of fleece will do. Patagonia is now expanding its scheme with a new programme called Common Threads. Here shops not only sell new clothes they receive old clothes as well in their recycling bins.

### **Verity Wood, product manager, Countryside Clothing Store**

Yes, that's 100% recycled that one actually. I don't know whether you'd like to try it on?

The reaction to the recycling bin has been very positive but quite surprised, and again in terms of how much product we are bringing in, it's building up year on year so we have had this one here for an entire season and we have managed to fill one and a half boxes now so it's a matter of people remembering to bring their clothing in, but they're very positive about it and quite surprised that such a thing is actually available."

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But will consumers choose their clothing here based on price or on green credentials?

### **Verity Wood**

A lot of this product is premium therefore the price tag reflects that. There is an enormous amount of features, the build quality is second to none. This stuff lasts and lasts and lasts. So, yes to have the extra story of it being made of recyclable material and being recyclable itself is a real plus and some people are prepared to pay for that but we would have to agree that for the bulk of the market, and consumers to want to actually really take the bull by the horns and say yes we demand a greater proportion of recycled product etc, then prices do have to drop across the board in certain brands."

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The clothes from Patagonia's recycling bins are shipped here to a reprocessing plant in Japan. The old fleeces are melted down into pellets from which the new polyester yarn is woven into new clothes and other products.

Polyester is derived from oil and makes up nearly half of all textiles in the world. So recycling polyester means there is less demand on petroleum thereby reducing carbon dioxide emissions and energy consumption.

## **Jonathan Petty**

Patagonia's long term goal regarding recycling is to be completely responsible for all the products we make and for all of them to be using recycled products or organic natural fibres. In fact our owner Yvon Chouinard wants by 2010 all our garments to be using some kind of environmentally friendly fibre, for it to be recycled polyester for example, and for it to be recyclable as well. In terms of the scientific and chemical side of it, that's the biggest challenge is trying to make sure everything can actually be recyclable as well so we can actually close that loop and bring products back and be recycled. And we are now influencing a lot of companies. We have got companies like Marks & Spencers and Walmart who are using or starting to use recycled polyester and we've gone through the growing pain of trying to find out how you do it, who will do it, trying to find manufacturers who will take recycled polyester, so that's one of the things we are most proud of --really influencing other companies to think about their environmental impact and do something about it.

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Marks and Spencer's Autumn range of fleeces, trousers and other products prominently display their recycled credentials, all part, say the company of its commitment to ensure that key raw materials come from the most sustainable sources available.

## **Katie Stafford**

Recycled clothing is really, really important and we've actually put a huge amount of recycled fleece on to our shelf this year for the first time. It's about 360,000 items which equates to about 5 million 2 litre plastic bottles. So, that was a trial, it's worked really well, we've now got it in fleeces, slippers, blankets, kids trousers for school, all sorts of things. We're planning to do about 19 million bottles-worth of recycled polyester next year. So it's really building and that's really important to make that industry for the recycled materials.

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It may be retailers are becoming more eco-friendly, but are there standards the consumer can use to make an informed choice?

What are the standards?

For People Tree, retailers are responding to consumers' demand for eco-friendly clothing. But how do consumers know what they are buying?

## **Safia Minney**

Consumers are beginning to become more savvy about what organic cotton is, what fair trade cotton is. But clearly, what we'd like to see is these ideas main stream. That business

on the British high street adopts fair trade. But clearly we need to have legislation for organic cotton, it's not enough for it only to be fair trade it needs to be organic. We need that the manufacturer also is fair trade throughout the process.

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For the whole world's clothing industry to be sustainable, rather than a small part being eco-chic, there is still a long way to go.

To satisfy the soaring demand for organic cotton, there would need to be a seismic shift of thousands of farmers towards more environmentally-friendly methods. For the Gujarat region of India, the prospect of prosperity through a booming organic cotton trade is a major boost to the rural communities.

And for Khima and his family, green fashion could ensure a brighter future.

**Khima Sodha**

More and more development is needed. If more and more people buy the organic cotton, then more farmers will get the benefit.

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