

UK Fashion & Textiles Sustainable and Ethical Fashion and Textiles

Paul Alger MBE, UK Fashion & Textile Association

The UK Fashion & Textile Association

- Not for profit association set up by industry for industry, 2000+ members
- Representing all parts of the fashion and textiles supply chain from design, manufacturing and skills through to retail
- Works with UK government where our ambitions are aligned
- Lobby government for a level playing field for UK brands
- Supports and encourages sustainable and ethical UK manufacturing, re-shoring and near-shoring
- Creators of www.letsmakeithere.org to support designers and manufacturers to meet and work together

Industry Overview/Drivers

Beyond the statistics – the trends

- An industry of two extremes:
 - The UK High Street imports almost all its goods, often driven by a quest for the cheapest loom/needle, but UK companies have to make Modern Slavery Declarations and Consumer Pressure is mounting.
 - Niche industry producing high value fashion and textile goods, especially for designers/export driven by world class designers and a desire to re-shore
- UK living wage is GBP 10+ per hour
- UK is an open market but there is a push to see that we import goods which meet the same social and environmental standard we set for UK manufacturers – UKFT is leading this charge
- Fossil fuels and Plastics are a major issue
- Brexit FTAs and reciprocity – UK exports to India less than 2% of what we export but can we work together for mutual benefit? Drive standards for a better world?
- Overdependence on China and sharing prosperity

The Scale of the Challenge

- Fashion is the second largest polluting industry
- 1% of all #fastfashion production is still in use after 1 year
- Fashion production costs dropping year on year for the past 15 years
- Retailers are driven by profit and under pressure from consumers and real-estate
- Plastics are in our food and drink chain
- There is no one definition or agreed standard on what makes a product sustainable or ethical – this would be impossible – and some of the issues are incredibly complex
- Consumers have been blissfully unaware that their commercial behaviour has driven policies which destroy the planet and lives – price point sensitivity
- Sustainability is the new buzz word, but what about ethical production?
- Greenwashing is everywhere and at every level
- Fuel and energy challenges – overdependence on Fossil Fuels

Challenges

- Turkeys do vote for Christmas! Falling family income in the West – driving production in the East, greater dependence on fastfashion and other issues
- Need to recognise the real and social cost of fashion/textile production
- Death of multi-brand independents on the high street – use it or lose it!
- Lack of government vision
- Greenwashing is endemic
- Covid-19 has weakened business and family income
- Brexit has weakened the UK's near-shore supply chain
- Most consumers don't care as much as they should and most people in the UK say they cannot afford the goods we produce!

Where do we start?

All production has some impact on the planet, but we should aim to reduce this impact as far as humanly possible:

- Sustainability (Being kind to the planet)
- Ethical Production (Being kind to people)
- Reducing the fashion and textiles carbon footprint, and traceability – including re-shoring and near-shoring
- Clever design and avoiding damaging processes
- A fair playing field for sustainable and ethical producers wherever they are made – looking at the real costs of not manufacturing locally/ethically
- Reduction/elimination of carbon emissions – there is no Planet B!
- Encouraging and promoting UK production and near-shoring
- Engaging the consumer to ensure that he/she understands the issues and feels incentivised to make the right purchasing decisions for the long term

Next steps

- WhoMadeMyClothes www.fashionrevolution.org
- Always read the label! Where is it from? How is it made? Who made it? What fibres are used? Can it be washed at 30 degrees? Does it need to be dry cleaned?
- Become a Conscious Consumer
- Shout out greenwashing wherever you see it
- Always go for long term solutions rather than short term fixes
- Resist the easy route - it is nearly always bad for you in the long term!