



FSC® and fashion: Ensuring that forest-based textiles are sustainable



Forest-based fabrics such as rayon, viscose, modal or lyocell are increasingly being used by the fashion industry, and they can be more environmentally friendly than synthetic textiles or cotton, if the cellulose fibres they are made of come from well-managed forests. However, the Canadian non-profit Canopy has found that cellulose fibres are often sourced from ancient or endangered forests, and there is currently no system to identify whether or not a tree-based textile comes from a sustainably managed forest. This creates a dilemma for the fashion industry and consumers, a growing number of who are concerned about the environmental and social footprint of the clothes they purchase. FSC is consequently engaged in the challenge of ensuring traceability within textile supply chains, an essential step toward labeling clothing made from cellulose fibres sourced from FSC-certified forests.

Countering threats to forests

Though tree-based fibres constitute less than 7% of the global fibre market, demand for them is forecasted to grow by more than 9% between 2016 and 2024. This trend has the potential to benefit responsibly managed productive forests, but it could also lead to the destruction or damage of old-growth forests. According to Canopy, cellulose fibre production consumes approximately 120 million trees per year, and the organization has found that ancient and endangered forests in Brazil, Indonesia and North America have been damaged by logging for the cellulose fibre industry.

Canopy consequently launched a campaign to raise awareness and pressure companies along the textile supply chain to stop sourcing wood from ancient and endangered forests. The campaign has been quite successful, with major clothing brands such as Zara-Inditex, H&M, Marks & Spencer, Arcadia Group, Lindex, Levis Strauss & Co. and various designers committing to not use cellulose fibre from ancient and endangered forests. At the same time, Canopy has engaged the world's top rayon and viscose fibre producers, most of which have committed to stop sourcing raw materials from ancient and endangered forests. FSC is collaborating with Canopy to ensure that the growing demand for forest-based textiles contributes to the sustainable management of forests and the welfare of workers worldwide.

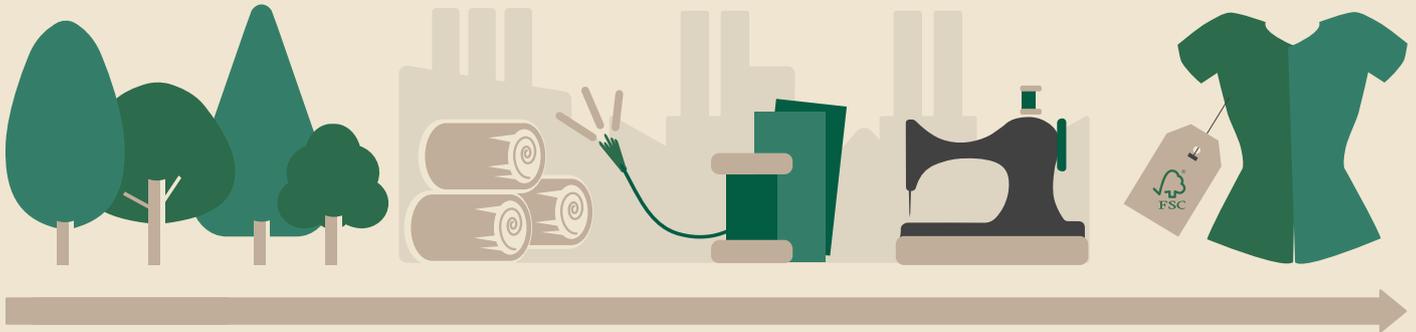
Working toward transparent supply chains

In 2015, executives from Marks & Spencer, H&M, Zara-Inditex, Eileen Fisher and Stella McCartney sent an open letter to FSC's Director General, Kim Carstensen, asking FSC to develop a complete certified textile supply chain that would allow them to sell clothing and other products with the FSC-certified label. Despite the challenges posed by the textile sector's extremely complex global production networks, with different companies involved in milling, dyeing and manufacturing, FSC is currently working with key players in the industry to achieve the first complete certified textile supply chains, showing the FSC is the right tool to ensure traceability from well-managed forests to textile companies.



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Figure 1. A cellulose textile supply chain – from the forest to the consumer



Forest-based textiles have complex supply chains that include logging; turning wood into pulp and fibres; spinning, dyeing, and weaving the fibres into cloth; cutting and sewing cloth into clothing; and retail.

Tapping the potential of forest-friendly fashion

There is great potential for the growing demand for forest-based textiles to contribute to the responsible management of forests. Tree-based textiles sourced from sustainably managed forests have various attributes that should appeal to responsible companies and consumers alike. They are renewable resources, compared to petroleum-based synthetic fibres such as polyester and polypropylene, which constitute the bulk of textiles sold today. While cotton is also a renewable resource, it usually requires large amounts of pesticides and water. As the population grows and demand for clothing increases, an expansion of the area dedicated to cotton would occupy land that could otherwise be used to grow food. And whereas production of cotton and synthetic textiles results in significant greenhouse gas emissions, a sustainably managed productive forest sequesters atmospheric carbon, and thus helps to mitigate climate change.

There are good reasons for consumers and companies to want forest-based textiles that are produced in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. For the fashion industry, there is also a strong business case for establishing greater transparency and sustainability in textile supply chains, since it would help companies to reduce risk, strengthen their corporate social responsibility, and improve their customer relations.

FSC is eager to be part of the solution to problems associated with forest-based textiles, and to tap the potential of the cellulose fibre market to contribute to the sustainable management of the world's forests. By building traceable supply chains for textiles sourced from FSC-certified forests, FSC hopes to help companies and consumers make informed decisions, contribute to a greener economy, and ensure that forest ecosystems meet the needs and rights of current generations without compromising those of future generations.