

Sustainable Fibre Strategies



Company: s.Oliver Group

Project: ECAP

Sector: Apparel and Textiles

Company size: 6,400 employees

European Market Share: 0.8%*

*s.Oliver Group Revenues 2017/EU textile industry turnover according to Euratex Annual Report 2018

Highlights:

- Adopted a Group-wide strategy for sustainable product development including targets for sustainable cotton, recycled fibres and eco-friendly processing
- Celebrated the first birthday of our Sustainable Product Development Team
- Already achieved our 2019 cotton target to use 5% BCI or CmiA, from 0% last year.
- Launch of sustainable denim collection. The collection will be in stores from January 2020.

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Case study

Ambition

What was your motivation to start sourcing more sustainable fibres and, as part of that, join ECAP?

At s.Oliver we were further developing our sustainability strategy, as there was increasing demand from our customers for sustainable product lines. For a number of years we had focused on the responsible management of social standards and conditions of our supply chain, as well as compliance and safety of products – but we did not use this as a prominent selling point to the brand.

The ECAP framework came to our attention at this time, where we wanted to be focusing on producing sustainable products, that also included the environmental aspect that consumers were becoming more aware of. ECAP was helpful as we were starting out on setting a sustainable fibre strategy, and provided guidance on breaking down the complexities of the topic.

The ECAP tools also gave us the footprint data we needed as a baseline, for our strategy and for the German Textile Partnership.

What are your targets and priorities in relation to more sustainable fibres?

Three pillars of our sustainable fibre strategy, each with targets:

- Sustainable Cotton (BCI or Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA))
 - 2019 5% ; 2023 50% ; 2030 100%
- Recycled polyester (GRS or RCS), we have set our internal teams targets to encourage their exploration of recycled polyesters, and understand what alternatives are available and what the impact of those would be.
- We are committed to using more mulesing-free wool, and set internal targets for this with the aim of 100% mulesing-free wool in flatknit.

We also have internal targets regarding the environmental impacts of our denim finishes, and have an internal expert who is working with our suppliers directly to improve technology and processes.

What impact are you aiming to achieve through your sustainable fibre strategy?

Reduce our water consumption, use of chemicals and pesticides, energy use and as a result emissions.

Improve supply chain workers' health and safety, and the working and living conditions for farmers and manufacturers.

We have developed priority areas for each key fibre to help us focus our efforts.

We expect our overall aims will evolve as we build out some relevant KPIs in order to measure the progress of our strategy in a quantitative way.

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Astrid Schödel, Global Head of Quality Management and Sustainability

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Project supported by LIFE funding

Achievements and Learnings

Key achievements or breakthroughs celebrated so far on your journey to source fibres more sustainably?

- Adopted a Group-wide strategy for sustainable product development including targets for sustainable cotton, recycled fibres and eco-friendly processing.
- Celebrated the first birthday of our Sustainable Product Development Team – which comprises ambassadors across our internal functions.
- Already achieved our 2019 cotton target to use 5% BCI or CmiA, from 0% last year.
- Launch of sustainable denim collection (pre-consumer recycled cotton/BCI cotton, recycled polyester and more sustainable processing). The collection will be in stores from January 2020. The response from the market and stakeholders at our launch was really positive.

“We have adopted a Group-wide strategy for sustainable product development including targets for sustainable cotton, recycled fibres and eco-friendly processing”.

Astrid Schödel, Global Head of Quality Management and Sustainability

Main challenges faced whilst trying to switch to more sustainable fibres?

- Issues around price and the availability of certified alternative fibres, that were of the quality we expect for our products.
- Upskilling internally and building IT systems to track progress, collect certification etc.
- Supporting suppliers to track and provide certification to us, using technology.
- Managing change processes internally, with no additional staff so we really had to get the buy in of our internal teams to make them take this responsibility on as part of their day to day role.
- Managing expectations internally about how quickly communicating our progress with external stakeholders; as the topic is so complex, we wanted to make sure to be confident in our claims.
- Having the support of senior management has helped us overcome some of the challenges around cost and investments required.

Key learnings as a result of being part of the ECAP programme?

- How complex moving to more sustainable fibres could be – it is a cross-functional issue so many stakeholders involved and different dependences which are not always clear from the outset.
- Its been a continuous learning journey for everybody involved.

If you were starting your sustainable fibre sourcing journey again, what would you do differently?

- Start a lot earlier
- Start directly with clear project strategy, with 3 or 4 priorities – rather than more general awareness building and discussions with all those involved. Don't take on too many different fibres/products at once.

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Were there any surprising outcomes that you were not expecting, for example, in your wider business operations, amongst customers or within your supply chain?

When we went public with our sustainability strategy and ambitions, we were surprised about the positive reactions of our partners. The market is really asking for this development. So far, also the reactions of customers were mainly positive.

For others not yet sourcing more sustainable fibres, have you any advice for them regarding how they can get started on the topic and what steps they can take in the early days of their journey to source more sustainable fibre?

At the outset, integrate your strategy for sustainable fibres into your wider sustainability strategy and set clear priorities and roles and responsibilities.

Engage with senior management from the beginning to have their support, to help them understand the challenges/risks/investments required by the business in order to progress on the topic.

Set mandatory targets for internal teams (these don't need to be public), and provide incentives for implementation, particularly for the sourcing/purchasing teams.

Integrate into day-to-day business from collection planning and design stages.

With external stakeholders it helped to be transparent on our progress even at the beginning, and also be clear with suppliers that we only want more sustainable alternatives.

What barriers from your perspective exist today in order for the textile sector to move to a more circular fibre system?

The industry is really only at the beginning of really closing the loop.

Barriers include:

- legal restrictions regarding the global transportation of textile waste.
- need for innovation in textile recycling technology, and to significantly upscale the infrastructure.
- fast fashion continues to grow
- many regions of the world are not ready for take back and recycling of textiles due to lack of infrastructure

What's next for you? What are you working on in 2019/20?

- Further increase our targets, and set targets for other materials.
- Launch our sustainable product label!

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ECAP is €3.6 million EU LIFE funded project which aims to reduce clothing waste across Europe and embed a circular economy approach.

ECAP mission

Cutting the environmental impact of clothing across the supply chain. Generating value for business through collaboration, measuring and sharing best practice

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Case studies were generated as a result of pilots carried out for ECAP by WRAP and the named organisations from 2016 to 2019.