

A sustainable supply chain, from the ground up: a case study of CCI

Cotton Council International (CCI) is a global non-profit organisation, which promotes US cotton using their COTTON USA™ brand. While they have participated at previous editions of Intertextile, in 2019 they took part in Yarn Expo for the first time. Messe Frankfurt had a chance to sit down with Ms Karin Malmström, Director of CCI China & Northeast Asia, to discuss the benefits of using a sustainable raw material throughout the entire supply chain.

Messe Frankfurt: Thank you for meeting with us, Ms Malmström! Could you tell us more about what Cotton Council International represents?

Ms Karin Malmström: CCI's main purpose is to promote the US cotton industry to overseas markets – like a matchmaking service. The US cotton industry is really one entity, because it is so strictly governed by the United States Department of Agriculture. We have 18,500 different farmers but only one set of standards for the whole country. This helps to set a benchmark for the best practices in sustainable cotton growth. Any of our farmers can be audited at any time, and if they don't pass, they can't sell their cotton, so the quality of US cotton is ensured and completely traceable.

MF: What made you decide to join Yarn Expo Spring this year?

KM: We want to share our sustainability efforts with people, so we are exhibiting at Yarn Expo because it's the beginning of the supply chain. If you don't get it right at the beginning, you'll never get it right at the end. Your finished product is as good as the material you put into it. It's that simple! We really start from the ground up. We have been working with Field to Market, who are a neutral third party, to measure our sustainability efforts over the last 35 years. Finally the results are out, and the US cotton industry has reduced its water usage by 82% and soil loss by 44%, which is amazing. We have goals to keep reducing environmental impact, and we use technology to achieve this. Some of our farmers use sensors, drones – all the equipment in the tool box.

One exciting thing we've just established this year is the US Cotton Trust Protocol, which will be our signature sustainability programme from now on. We're here to give

people a preview – it's ready to roll out officially next year, in 2020. It's a stringent system of checks and balances; independently, we can trace and test every single bale. In terms of environmental impact, this system makes sure that every bale of US cotton is traceable, transparent and measurable.

MF: And what kind of response have you had throughout the supply chain?

KM: Our partners are hearing clear messages from their customers. They are demanding traceability. So the beautiful advantage of using traceable cotton is that it's easier for the brands and retailers to do their due diligence, by starting right from the origin. It also makes sense for business. You can reduce your costs when cotton is contamination-free, because the running is smoother, there's less breakage; it really makes a difference at every single stage. We have the technical expertise now to help mills upgrade and improve their capabilities. So that's really exciting now. And of course, at the end of the day, having a higher quality product means you can command a higher premium at retail. Everybody benefits, throughout the whole supply chain.

MF: Could you tell us more about consumers who look out for high-quality materials?

KM: There is more awareness of the environmental damage caused by microfibres. The world is overproducing synthetics, and only a tiny fraction is recycled. The rest ends up in landfill, or is burned, or contributes to plastic pollution in the oceans just through laundry alone. Cotton presents a naturally biodegradable alternative that can be produced with renewable energy.

People are consciously shopping and impulse-buying is declining, depending on demographics. Millennials in particular are really starting to see fast fashion, especially if synthetic, as completely unsustainable. They are becoming more interested in higher quality products that last longer and are more environmentally-friendly – and they are willing to pay more and proudly wear it often, like a statement. It's the opposite of a trend. It's a conscious lifestyle choice.

MF: Earlier you described your role as a matchmaker. What do you think is the key to building partnerships, and does exhibiting at Yarn Expo help?

KM: CCI has had very good response both here at Yarn Expo and at Intertextile. We

don't just sit at our booth, we have team members going out to connect with fellow exhibitors and look for potential partners – maybe we can help them to improve their business and upgrade their products. We can also connect with our existing accounts at this fair, because we always have new industry updates to offer.

Building partnerships is really about sharing industry intelligence, and we are a valuable source of information that covers the entire supply chain across the world. We feel very confident about our partnerships in China, because over many years we've built great relationships face-to-face. This is key to doing business in China, and you can do that here.

MF: It's great to see passion for sustainability in the industry. Thank you for taking the time to speak to us!

Yarn Expo overview

Yarn Expo Spring 2019 was held concurrently with Intertextile Shanghai Apparel Fabrics – Spring Edition, Intertextile Shanghai Home Textiles – Spring Edition, PH Value and the China International Fashion Fair (CHIC) from 12 – 14 March 2019, and featured 468 exhibitors and 28,302 trade buyers. The fair is organised by Messe Frankfurt (HK) Ltd and the Sub-Council of Textile Industry, CCPIT.

The next edition of Yarn Expo Autumn will take place from 25 – 27 September 2019, once again at the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai).