

» By Akiko Nicholls

Nothing woolly about certified organic textiles

How can textiles be “organic”? What does “organic” mean with regards to textiles? How can the consumer determine organic garments are genuinely “organic”?

Organic textiles can be made from cotton or wool and even bamboo or hemp. In order to achieve organic certification, the fibre must be of certified organic origin. Simply put, a cotton farm has to have been managed in accordance with the organic standards (no prohibited chemicals used) for more than 3 years. Wool must come from certified organic sheep (no prohibited chemicals used on the land for more than 3 years and the animal also raised in accordance with the standards).

Spinning, yarning, dyeing and garmenting are also required to be certified organic if the final product (e.g. t-shirt, socks etc) is to wear a “certified organic” label. Apart from the issue of needing a certified organic factory in order to maintain the certified status, generally, the most challenging part to gaining certification is the dyeing process. What would you, as a consumer, expect with regards to dye materials used in organic textiles? Plant-derived natural dyes? A dye that is made from 100% plants, in fact, may not be realistic. 100% plant-extracted handcrafted dye colours could be used locally in small

quantities, but such products may not be sold at a highly commercial level because of issues with obtaining the quantity required and also quality (not always being stable).

The Australian Organic Standard (AOS) generally permits natural and naturally produced dye products. Otherwise, we assess the dyes on a case by case basis to ensure that the dye is not toxic to the environment or to humans (i.e. not a known allergy source etc).

If the garments are imported from overseas and already carry a widely known organic certification in another country, ACO assesses the international organic requirements and confirms whether it is up to standard with our own.

“Made with certified organic fibre”

You may not have seen “certified organic” garments very often, but have seen many garments claiming, to be “made with organic cotton/wool”. This is because, as mentioned earlier, achieving organic certification for garments can be challenging and sometimes become a time consuming and costly process. How do you know if products that claim, “made with organic cotton/wool”, really source “certified organic” cotton or wool?



Garments being created individually at Hatakeyama Meriyasu.

That is why ACO established a verification program called “**made with certified organic fibre**”. This is a verification program whereby ACO can confirm the claim “made with...” is genuine by reviewing the stage processes of the production flow chart and traceability documents. We have trialed this program with Target since the end of 2007 and have verified various products such as jeans, baby clothes and underwear are “made with organic fibre”.

Below is a logo that can be seen on products that are verified and approved by ACO through this verification program.

ACO believes this verification program could also help some operators as the first step to producing fully “certified organic” garments in the future. The verification program guarantees the products’ traceability system and confirms the products’ claim (“made with organic cotton/wool”) is genuine.

Target says they joined the Made with Organic Fibre program because they wanted to advise their customers of the benefits of organic products and ensure customers could buy their genuine organic products with confidence.

“The organic trail is subject to much interpretation, documentation control and detailed traceability. It was important to us to have an independent organisation to



ABOVE Toaboshoku is a wool spinning and yarn manufacturing company established 1922 in Japan and has been certified for around four years with Australian Certified Organic.



validate the process... Validation from Australian Certified Organic brings a high level of credibility to our organic products.

"We will continue to have our products verified by Australian Certified Organic to give customers the confidence that Target is a credible destination for genuine organic products."

Japan becomes Australian Certified Organic for textiles

Toaboshoku is a Japanese wool spinning and yarn manufacturing company (established 1922) which sources organic wool from Australia and is a long-term certified client with ACO. Toaboshoku has always worked on environmentally friendly projects such as recycling woollen products prior to becoming certified organic. They decided to become certified about 7 years ago in order to differentiate their work from their competitors' and also to award themselves with a premium for what they do. Mr. Ito, Marketing Manager, says "We would like to see the organic status extended further, to not only cover our woollen yarns, but also the end product.



"More and more organic cotton products are out there in the marketplace, but you don't see too many woollen products. The Japanese organic industry is still in its infancy compared with the EU and US. However, interest in environmental and health issues by the Japanese consumer is increasing and it looks like the organic industry will continue to

develop in the future.

ABOVE Garments being created individually at Hatakeyama Meriyasu.

"The main problem in the organic textile industry is that the price difference between organic and non-organic materials is significant."

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"Our challenge is how to bring the cost of organic materials down in the future."

Hatakeyama Meriyasu, a second Japan-based company, buys organic woollen yarn from Toaboshoku and produces garments. Hatakeyama Meriyasu is a family own company, established in 1963 and started handling organic materials in 2004. They became certified organic with ACO in 2006 to verify to others that their products and operations are genuinely organic, and to provide differentiation in the marketplace. Mr. Hatakeyama, Manager, says "We are proud to be certified with ACO and of our traceability system which guarantees consumers the authenticity of the products. We believe that the organic textiles industry will develop as it continues to receive increased attention from Japanese consumers." ◀▶



Cottoning onto organic

From branded promo products to baby clothes and toys

COTTON PRODUCTS traditionally have a quality image with materials being sourced from a natural fibre, yet being natural does not mean naturally produced. Apart from the often less than environmentally-friendly growing practices, conventionally-produced cotton products can contain dyes, dye carriers and chemicals used in production and processing that have implications for the health of production workers, consumers and the environment.

Due to the decline in the Australian organic cotton industry, manufacturers and retailers are servicing the growing consumer demand with organic textiles from India, Egypt and Turkey.

Sanjay Gill, importer of *Purebaby* organic cotton baby clothes, laments the lack of a thriving Australian organic cotton industry but says that Indian organic cotton production is accelerating.

"Organic cotton production in India started as an export industry to Germany and Europe and most is still grown for export. Since then a lot of NGOs have helped merge farms into co-operatives, keeping them viable, rather than the hereditary system of dividing farms between sons."

Purebaby, carries Netherlands' organic cotton certification and the MADE-BY label, a global initiative that guarantees environmentally-friendly materials and optimum working conditions for staff.

Sanjay attributes his company's success and worldwide distribution in part to the quality of the garments and in part to

parents' increasing concern about what their babies and toddlers wear.

Marty Dillon's *3Fish* is a company specialising in sourcing ethical textiles, with a focus on Fairtrade, carbon-neutral production and organic certification.

"The Indian factories we deal with specialise in organic cotton," says Marty. "The huge monsoon rainfall there is ideal for cotton growing. Fairtrade ensures we pay a fair price to these small organic cotton farmers, helping them break the poverty cycle and helping communities achieve self-sufficiency."

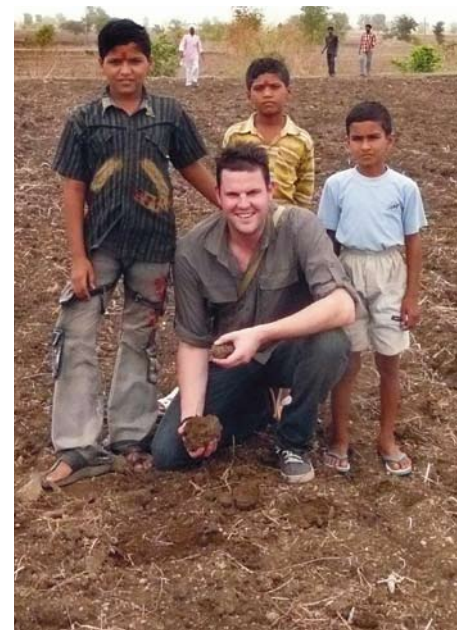
Marty says that corporate branded promotional products is an AUS \$2 billion pa business, and that *3Fish*, through tapping into ethically-minded businesses, has seen an increasing demand for its caps, t-shirts, polo tops, "hoodies" and tote bags.

"We expect demand to grow, even if there is a higher price tag, as more people come to understand the environmental cost of conventional cotton products," he says.

3 Fish has achieved ACO certification. "We could have applied for Global Organic Textile Standard certification but this certification is not well-known or respected in Australia, so we opted for ACO which seems to be the market leader in Australia."

3 Fish sells to business, retailers and will sell direct to consumers via their website, a soon-to-be extended product range.

ACO is the certification choice of several organic fabric companies, including multi-award winner *Organic Embrace*, which also sources its material from India and retails adult and children's clothing, manchester,



Marty Dillon from 3Fish inspecting the soil quality at an organic cotton farm in the state of Maharashtra, India.

toys and yoga products. In addition, *Bambury*, an Australia-based homewares wholesaler boasts a collection of over 3,000 products that retail worldwide, and now supplies a range of certified organic cotton towels and sheets and kimono robes through its brand name Temple.

- www.3fish.com.au
- www.bambury.com.au
- www.organicembrace.com.au
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