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The Industry Puts its Stamp On Compliance



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Keeping It Real

Welcome to the age of transparency

BY JENNIFER MARKS

COMPLIANT

The team from WestPoint Home was meeting with a major account not long ago when a question arose about GOTS-certified organic cotton and Oeko-Tex-certified home textiles. How long would it take, the retailer's product developers wanted to know, for WestPoint to earn those certifications and then ship product labelled as such?

"We told them we're already doing it," recalled Norman Savaria, WestPoint Home, ceo. "We're already certified. All they have to do is put it on the label and start communicating it to their customer."

Therein lays the conundrum — and the opportunity — for the U.S. home textiles market in the age of product transparency. Many manufacturers supplying the U.S. have been certified under Oeko-Tex or other standards specific to their product categories for years, especially those doing business in Europe.

Those certifications just haven't been of any interest to most U.S. retailers in an competitive environment dominated by never-ending price cuts. And as for consumer-facing statements? Meh.

That is starting to change. Spring catalogs dropping from Pottery Barn and West Elm are calling out organic cotton and Oeko-Tex certified products. And Target's very public effort to boost organic food and sustainable products is expected to spill over into the home department.

Launched in 1992, more than 150,000 Oeko-Tex certificates have been issued across 98 countries. Interest from retailers in the United States has been stirring over the past two years, said Anna Czerwinska, marketing & communication manager for the International Oeko-Tex Association.

"Consumers, particularly in Europe, know and understand that the Oeko-Tex Standard 100 label means the garment, towel, sheet,

etc., has been tested and certified as free from harmful levels of more than 300 substances," said Czerwinska.

"We are particularly excited about the launch of Made in Green by Oeko-Tex, which is a consumer-facing label focused on traceability," she said, adding that the tag will begin rolling out at some major U.S. retailers "very soon."

Incorporating a QR code on every hang tag, products awarded the Made In Green label have the ability to transparently show the end consumer where their product was produced and that it has been certified by the Oeko-Tex Standard 100.

The Global Organic Cotton Standard, or GOTS, is also seeing a change in attitude. Rather than pursuing potential partners, the U.S. office is now on the receiving end of calls.

"Starting last year in U.S. in particular," said Sandra Marquardt, North America GOTS representative. "The kinds of companies getting involved now are real leaders."

For many years, the organization's work in the U.S. concentrated on tracking down falsely labeled products — and that work continues. "The key to anyone overseas is to be aware of the USDA memo regarding the things they can say about their product. They can't expect to waltz in here and claim something is organic when it's not," said Marquardt.

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The United States Department of Agriculture's 2011 National Organic Program (NOP) Policy Memorandum clarifies that only textiles produced in full compliance with NOP regulations may be labeled as NOP-certified organic. However, because most of the permitted inputs are not applicable to textiles processing, NOP labeling is unachievable for most garments and textile products. That's where the GOTS standard steps in.

GOTS recently reached an out-of-court settlement with a group of mattress producers it had accused of trademark infringement. Serta-Simmons Bedding, Delta Enterprises Corp. and Dreamwell, Ltd. consented to judgment and a permanent injunction prohibiting unauthorized uses of the GOTS certification trademark.

"We always try to use a velvet glove approach first. We're going to talk first and sue only when necessary," said Marquardt. "Almost everyone I talk to changes their language, takes it off the product or gets certified."

The New Kids in Town

While long-standing certification organizations are making headway in the U.S. market, new certifications are being developed to provide retailers and consumers with assurances of product claims and traceability.

In the down & feather market, there are now two: RDS (the Responsible Down Standard) and the Global TDS (Traceable Down Standard).

RDS ensures the ethical treatment of all animals in the down supply chain, protecting animals from live plucking, confinement in tight spaces and force feeding. The comprehensive criteria in TDS go one step further, requiring the mother animal to be treated under the same rules.

Allied Feather & Down, a major fill supplier to the apparel and home textiles industries, is certified for both.

"If you walk down the street and ask random consumers about it, nine of out 10 would probably say it's not important. But all it takes is one old video of geese being mistreated to surface and those nine people are going to care now," said Matthew Betcher, Allied Feather vp of sales.

Before working with the outdoor apparel industry to develop the certifications, Allied relied on local veterinarians to ensure the supply chain was free of forced fed birds and live plucking. "What we realized was the need for an independent standard that was completely objective," said Betcher.

Outerwear brand The North Face used Allied's supply chain to pilot the program. RDS officially launched in 2014. "From the outset our goal was to gift it to the industry," he added. Over 500 million birds are now certified for RDS, he said. Global TDS was developed in conjunction with outerwear brand Patagonia.

With two standards available, how does Allied decide which one to use?

"Our goal is provide all partners with all the best options for the brand, for the partner or for the retailer. In some cases, partners chose to go with their own standard. Then we will certify the process through a third party," said Betcher.

The RDS includes a consumer-facing Track My Down program, which allows end users to go

is interested in learning where stuff comes from," said David Greenstein, ceo, Himatsingka America

"It started with the pledge of staying away from certain countries with dodgy labor practices," he added. "Then it started to dawn on the industry that simple paperwork is not enough. You need to make a bigger effort."

The Pimacott program tagged 5 million pounds of Pima in the San Joaquin Valley in 2014. In 2015, it tagged 30 million pounds in three regions, said Greenstein. It has grown from two family farms to 11, and now includes five spinners and two manufacturers.

The first products with consumer-facing labelling are due to arrive at retail in late 2016/early 2017.

The Pimacott standard is not yet open to the broader home textiles industry and may first expand into the apparel side of the business. "It just takes one bad apple," said Greenstein, "so we need to be careful how we proceed."

A Slate of Options

Outside the industry, several consumer associations and not-for-profit organizations are working to educate consumers on the topic of sustainable cotton. Applicable certifications under that metric include Fair

Trade, CmiA (Cotton Made in Africa) and the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI).

"They are also regarded as trustworthy both in terms of the content of the standard and because they are underpinned by systems that regulate how the standard is implemented, assessed and governed," said Isabelle Roger, senior manager/cotton program, Solidaridad.

Founded in 1969, the Netherlands-based NGO partners with commercial organizations to invest in good business practices and commit to higher standards of sustainability. It recently co-sponsored research that found 83% of products made with sustainable cotton do not advertise that fact on their packaging or labels.

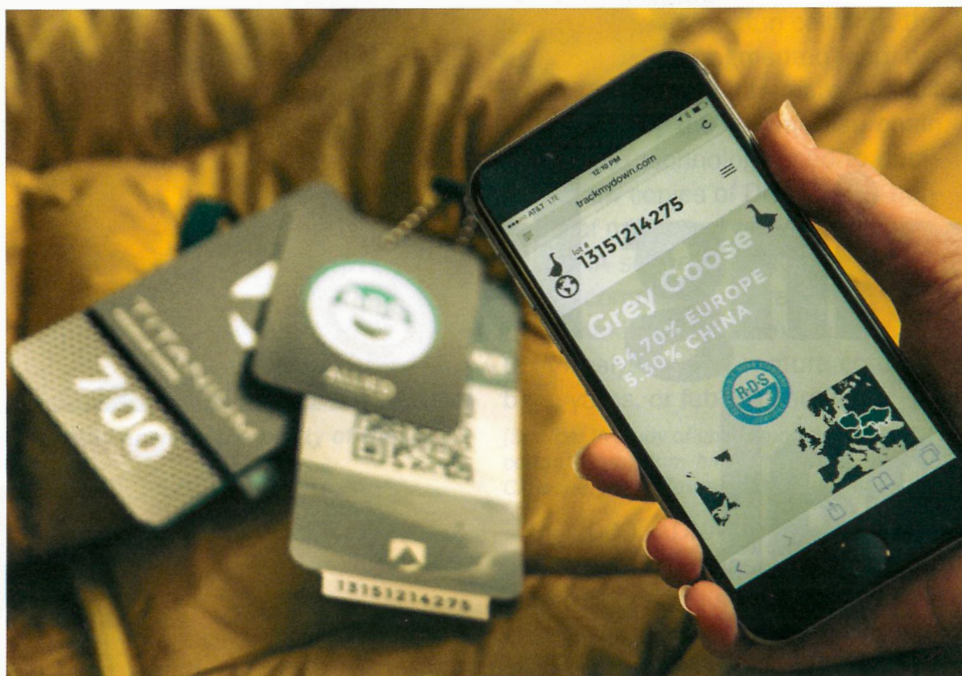
"Within the industry, brands and retailers have a key role to play in raising awareness among consumers about sustainable cotton as they are the best placed to communicate with consumers," said Rogers.

"They have direct access to them, know how to best do it and have the financial means to do it."

Goodweave, which certifies that rugs are made without child labor or forced labor as well as at a fair wage, has seen the rug industry come a long way, according to Nina Smith, founding executive director. Roughly 9% of all rugs traded around the world are now Goodweave certified, she added.

In the United States, Smith sees more companies stepping up. "Part of it is new laws on the books about supply chain transparency, especially in California," she said.

The organization is also working on the



Show me. Programs like Track My Down put transparency at consumers' fingertips..

online and trace how and where the fill was handled throughout the supply chain. "It's all about making informed decisions," he added.

On the cotton side of the business, the new Pimacott initiative uses DNA technology to mark and track Pima cotton to authenticate its purity from farm to finished product. It was developed by a supply chain coalition that includes Applied DNA Sciences (ADNAS), global cotton trader the Louis Dreyfus Company, and home furnishings supplier Himatsingka America working with Pima farmers.

The process uses patented SigNature DNA technology created by ADNAS to tag Pima fibers at the source.

"Our lab is certified as ISO17025. It's a crime lab standard," said Dr. Jim Hayward, chairman, president and ceo of Applied DNA Sciences. ADNAS's genotyping platform — patented as fiberTyping — can track each specific batch of cotton through the supply chain.

"The issue [of transparency]" is coming to the forefront. People are reacting to the fact that the customer



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