



# Sustainable Clothing

By Edeline Anne Goh

**W**hat matters to you when it comes to fashion? Is it the labels or brands? How it makes you look? Or the damage to your wallet? How about looking beyond to see how your fashion choices impact millions of people around the world?



Mr Tan Cheng Woi



The choices that we make to define ourselves when it comes to our appearance depend very much on the way we feel. Brand loyalty, quality, comfort, price: these are just some of the factors that influence our purchases.

But what if you were told that the trousers you purchased recently were made from cotton fibre that was harvested by a farmer who recently died from cancer due to the effect of pesticides, leaving his wife and 10 children to suffer in poverty?

Did you know that every 30 minutes, a cotton farmer in India attempts suicide due to the inability to yield sufficient crops, which lands him with overwhelming debts? Perhaps it is time to rethink our fashion options and include sustainability as a consideration for purchase.

## FASHION WITH A CONSCIENCE

Cotton is the most popular clothing material, as it is soft and comfortable. Yet, many factors come into play where cotton is involved, says Tan Cheng Woi, CEO of Nukleus, Malaysia's very own organic cotton apparel and innerwear line. These include the environment, health and socio-economic elements.

The US National Cotton Council statistics shows that cotton dominates close to 50% of the global textile industry. Four out of the top five countries producing cotton are developing countries, where farmers from developing and third world countries strive to eke out a living trying to grow cotton.

As cotton trees are vulnerable to pest and insects, farmers are forced to spend a lot on pest control. Many fork out more than they can afford to enhance production, ending up with huge debts. Not only are these pesticides costly, they also cause serious environmental damage.

"Up to 16% of pesticides in the world are used for cotton farming," says Tan. Pesticides harm the environment by increasing the carbon footprint, polluting air quality and causing water pollution. It also creates acid rain, which

damages crops and creates various health problems.

As a result of these effects, several notable fashion companies have been supporting organic farming, with the aim of creating environmental awareness and promoting sustainable clothing.

More cotton farmers can switch to organic farming methods if there is sufficient demand for organic cotton. "Organic cotton farming refers to the prohibited use of synthetic chemicals such as pesticides as well as the use of genetically modified (GMO) cotton seeds," explains Tan, who describes it as 'being fashionable with a conscience'.

## YOUR HEALTH CALL

Environmental concerns aside, your decision to support organic products are also very much health-related. "It is almost impossible to eliminate 100% of the pesticides absorbed by the cotton thread," says Tan.

He explains that non-organic cotton apparels contain pesticides used during the production process. These harmful chemicals can enter our bodies through our pores, especially at intimate and sensitive areas. If you had to choose just one apparel that is organic, make it your undergarments, which have the closest contact with your skin.

Pesticides also affect our food cycle. Cotton seed oil make up to 8% of vegetable oil which is consumed by most people. These pesticide-ridden cotton seeds are then made into cotton seed meal which are fed to livestock and once again, consumed by people around the world. In the bigger picture, going organic has a bigger impact than we imagine.

## REVOLUTIONISE WHAT YOU WEAR!

Fashion is more than just labels, it is about being responsible to the environment and the farmers. Since 2009, the Copenhagen Fashion Summit has managed to set the international agenda with regards to sustainable fashion or eco clothing.

Part of Nukleus' profits is channeled to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in Malaysia and Hong Kong for conservation efforts. For more information, log on to [www.nukleusshop.com](http://www.nukleusshop.com).

