

Sustainable Fibre Strategies



Company: House of Dagmar

Project: ECAP

Sector: Apparel and Textiles

Company size: 25

European Market share: <0.1%

Highlights:

- To connect our sustainable goals to wider global issues seemed to connect emotionally with a lot of people internally and an effective driver for some individuals to drive interest in the programme.
- Working towards 100% sustainable fibres 2025.
- The use of recycled fibres will give a great reduction of the carbon footprint as well as the reduction in water use.
- A circular business model will give new opportunities as well as supporting our sustainable goals.

"To inspire and educate the consumer will be a key factor for a real change and a more sustainable future."

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Case study

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Ambition

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

Since the start of our company, quality and longevity have been our main brand pillars. Along the way we became more aware of the environmental impacts of the fashion industry and decided to make a radical change to become a 100% sustainable brand.

Through the ECAP programme we hoped to gain knowledge on our impact and guidance on how to take action to decrease our footprint.

The starting point of this journey was a workshop we had in Stockholm with ECAP, which really engaged all of our staff. After the first analysis of our footprint we could set a goal and a strategy of how to reach it.

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

Our first fibre footprint analysis showed that viscose was the fibre that we used the most, followed by wool and cotton. As a result, we created a strategy to decrease the impact on these three main fibres, by aiming to use more sustainable viscose, Organic cotton and recycled wool.

Our goal is to offer 100% more sustainable fibre collections by 2025, focusing on recycled fibres where these meet our quality standards, and if not fibres that have the least negative impact on the environment.

As a business we would like to be 'climate neutral', and we are trying to understand how we could reach this as part of the additional support under ECAP.

This is closely connected with our work as part of STICA, where we are starting to measure all carbon emissions throughout our entire value chain (raw material processing > store) in order to set science based targets to reduce our emissions so that they do not exceed the 1.5 deg C scenario outlined by the IPCC.

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

As part of our work with STICA, we are focusing our efforts on reducing our carbon emissions, water and waste both from our fibre selection process but also through processing, manufacturing and distribution.

As a result of engagement in the programme, we were able to understand the importance of educating and inspiring the end-consumer to act 'climate smart' and so this is another key area for us to make impact.

"The ambition is to create responsible collections that does not damage the eco system, we work actively to inspire our customers to invest in high quality pieces that have a longer lifespan than the average clothing item. The longevity of a garment paired with the least negative impact on the environment are the parameters for our decisions."

Kristina Tjäder, Founder
House of Dagmar AB

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Achievements and Learnings

What are the key achievements or breakthroughs celebrated so far on your journey to source fibres more sustainably?

- Our first results from 2017 showed that we used 7% sustainable fibres. In only 2 years we have increased the use of sustainable fibres to 25 %.
- Our understanding of the impacts of wool in particular has increased significantly. We first thought that wool would have a lower impact than other fibres, but we have learnt so much about the different issues around wool and as a result have focused on recycled wool.
- As a result of the first fibre footprint analysis we launched a new hangtag called “Good Choice” for our sustainable items so that the consumers can make better informed decisions for themselves.
- We have started partnerships with other brands, like Re:newCell where we aim to develop regenerated fibres that can be used in the market and we are participating in Skogens Tyg (Fabric of the Forest) to support the development of a new form of yarn from Swedish cellulose.

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

- Invest time to fully understand the footprint of our business as the baseline, and then start to map where the most impact is and focus on how to address that.
- Allow a team to fully focus on the sustainability so that they will have time to plan and work out existing internal processes and connections, to understand the varied impact of the changes we want to make.
- Keep awareness of the brand strategy and make sure that the commercial strategy for the business as well as the sustainability strategy are aligned.

“The use of recycled wool versus virgin wool will give an estimated 95% reduction in carbon and 85% reduction in water use.”

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

- The change process for internal systems and teams required a clear message from senior management, to communicate the business decision. There was also expected concerns about increased costs for goods.
- It's a challenge to collect and secure all data, especially around certificates etc, with our current business model. An external company might be needed to support our team.
- Understanding the impact of wool, and how the increase of recycled wool will have great reductions in the carbon footprint, as well as the use of water.
- It has been clear for us that a circular business model will both give new business opportunities and support our sustainable goals.
- Communicating with our customers is important – our customers do not yet seem to understand what choices they should make.

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

- In an effort to improve the sustainable attributes of our fibre mix, we started to use more viscose, then moved to more organic cotton. However, we found that organic cotton used more water than viscose. Understanding the trade offs between more sustainable alternatives has been a key challenge, that requires us to constantly learn more to overcome. This was also the case with wool and silk, where the issues are complex and its not as simple as one alternative product meeting all of our criteria in terms of sustainability.
- It continues to be challenging to find more sustainable alternatives that are suitable for high quality, luxurious goods. We found this particularly difficult with silk, where recycled alternatives are not currently good enough.
- With the challenges on knowing what trade offs to make in terms of more sustainable fibres, it was difficult to source because we needed to tell our suppliers what we were looking for, and this evolved over time as we learnt more.

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Impact and Reflections

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

The social impacts of the sustainable fibre choices seemed to engage a lot of people emotionally. Connecting our sustainable fibre choice to global issues made some individuals understand the importance of our goals.

It was important to engage the management team and to talk about the business opportunities that come with a circular business model, and to be sure our sustainability strategy is aligned with our brand strategy.

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?

- Understand current impact – start measuring and learning about your baseline.
- Get management on board early on, and make them see that having a sustainable ethos as a brand is important to employees, as individuals who fully understand the impacts of the industry. It was our employees which really drove the work we have done on sustainable fibres to date, rather than our customers.

“As a business we would like to be “climate neutral”; we are now trying to understand how we can reach this”

Kristina Tjäder, Founder
House of Dagmar AB

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

- House of Dagmar see shift to a circular economy as an opportunity. High street retailers have faced challenges in recent years. We really believe in stores, as a meeting point and bringing the circular economy to life in a store is a good way to create an in-store experience for our customers.
- We are hoping to do this via our Dagmar Decades store, which we currently run online only. Having a physical store where customers can purchase vintage and previous Dagmar collections, alongside new products, and also make use of our repair services is a focus for us. However, finding that initial investment for a store is always difficult.
- The resource required to keep on top of all the issues around more sustainable fibres, especially as more come on to the market.
- Truly understanding how design decisions impact the overall footprint of the product. We are holding a workshop later this year on design which will focus specifically on designing so that our products are suitable for recycling. This will not only include what we can do as designers, but also how we can communicate with textile recyclers about how to recycle our products.

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

- We hope to open a physical Dagmar Decades store, where we will encourage our customers to resell their unwanted clothes as well as to buy second hand clothes. This will be a great way for us to communicate with our customers about our sustainability story.
- Next year we are we are planning to open a “green” flagship store where we will offer a repair service.
- Continue our partnerships with Re:newCell and Skogens Tyg (Fabric of the Forest) in developing new more sustainable fibres, and hopefully launch our first Re:newcell products.
- Make progress with our commitment as part of STICA, where we have a real challenge to measure our carbon emissions throughout the value chain.

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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.

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