

Sustainable Fibre Strategies



Company: OVS

Project: ECAP

Sector: Apparel and Textiles

Company size: 1747 stores

Net Sales (2017):€1,415.1M

Highlights:

- Strong senior management awareness of the importance of sustainability in good business practices and in sparking innovation.
- Being part of the ECAP project has helped OVS further understand the sustainable fibres landscape, and confirmed their focus on cotton as a priority.
- As part of their #WeCare manifesto, OVS has a commitment to source only more sustainable cotton by 2020.
- Through the ECAP project, OVS has also highlighted sustainability impacts and alternatives for other fibres.
- Collaboration with peers across the sector is at the heart of making positive change throughout the supply chain.

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Case study

OVS

Ambition

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

A variety of factors. One of the most important reasons is a growing awareness within senior management of the importance of sustainability to our “social license to operate”. More and more the fashion world is realising good sustainability performance is a condition of survival: If we don’t move towards a more sustainable way of operating we can’t survive.

Also, sustainability is vital to innovation. Innovation cannot exist if it’s not sustainable, and innovation must be sustainable to be considered new.

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

As part of our #WeCare manifesto, we have a commitment to source only more sustainable cotton by 2020, regardless of whether it is organic, Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) or recycled. Cotton is a key material: we buy 25 thousand tons of cotton every year and more than 70% of our products are cotton-made, so sourcing sustainably is very important to us.

We are the first Italian retailer to join the BCI. Furthermore, we support organic cotton. It’s our preferred material for kids garments. For 2016 collections, we produced more than 8 million garments with cotton coming from certified organic farming.

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

To further reduce the impact of our activities and give value to end-of-life materials, we actively support the choice for recycled materials. We largely use them in denim, where we succeed in reducing the impact of our products without compromising their quality. We are also developing solutions for the large-scale use of recycled cotton also for knitwear.

Our involvement in ECAP has been part of researching and understanding the sustainable fibres landscape. Doing the ECAP fibre footprint has confirmed our focus on cotton as a priority and highlighted impact and alternatives for other fibres.

“By using new sustainable fibres we can tell a story that influences how consumers view their clothing choices - we can help them to make good sustainability decisions.”

Simone Columbo, Head of Corporate Sustainability, OVS

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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 sustainable cotton sourcing is a key achievement. We have worked hard with our supply chain partners, and we are now sourcing 75% sustainable cotton. We are on target for 100% sustainable cotton by 2020.

We are also working hard to increase the use of recycled fibres, not just in terms of cotton, but also recycled polyester. We started by converting to recycled polyester with our polar fleeces, and then moved on to other garments and items (such as linings etc).

What challenges have you faced?

Firstly, cost. The commercial reality is that when you first start changing fibres, there will be additional cost: your supply chain will need to switch processes and sourcing. But once it is embedded and you have alignment, the upcharge will reduce.

Secondly, availability. We can find sustainable fibres, but not all the suppliers are credible. Sometimes the supplier doesn't know how to source sustainable materials. Upskilling the supply chain to enhance their knowledge is key to ensuring availability.

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

We have made good progress on sustainable fibres, but it is certainly an area where you learn as you go along.

Collaboration is certainly something we would like to do more of – we would look to collaborate with peers. Learning from each other is so important in enhancing sustainability for all of us.

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

Being involved in ECAP and doing our fibre footprint has enhanced our understanding of the impacts associated with the consumer use phase. It has really brought home the double impact that we can have through engaging consumers on both the lifecycle impact of the garment and on the consumer. As a result we have decided to make consumer communications a prominent part of our communications campaigns.



OVS Organic cotton hoodie and sweat pants

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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?

- Focus on your main materials. In order to be credible, the materials you use most should be the initial focus of your efforts. This is where knowing your fibre footprint can be so useful.
- Look for collaboration with other peers. If possible, make a joint sourcing programme. It's the key for allowing the smaller brands, as well as larger, to have access to sustainable raw materials. Sustainability is a pre-competitive arena.
- Following on from this, different brands and retailers ask different things of their suppliers - in different ways, at different times, via different initiatives or certifications. This can be confusing for suppliers and is not the best way to get the step-change we need. A coordinated "ask" to the supplier is very beneficial.

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

As mentioned before, the need for collaboration is the key barrier. Taking the right action together is key. We need to bring together sustainability directors and product managers from across the industry to discuss the realities, not just set up steering committees.

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

We will continue to enhance our sustainability aims and set new targets to incorporate sustainability. Right now, we are working on our summer 2020 range, for which the majority of the products in the range will have sustainability at their heart.

"There is great power in collaboration. If we approach the same suppliers with the same request in the same way we will make progress."

Simone Columbo, Head of Corporate Sustainability, OVS

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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.