

Cotton of the Carolinas History

Cotton of the Carolinas™ (CotC) began as an examination of how to increase the value in the products produced at TS Designs, Inc. This was a part of TSD's strategic mandate of "Printing T-Shirts for Good"; "Good" being defined as creating "triple-bottom-line" values defined by Profits, People and Planet.

The majority of TSD's products for the last several years have been certified Oeko-Tex 100, "Organic" cotton, Rehance™ printed, garment-dyed T-shirts. Examining this supply chain, the positive aspects are:

- Organically grown fiber is used.
- Local production is used from fabric manufacturing to final product, which includes knitting, finishing, cut and sew, dyeing and printing.

However, the major negative aspect is:

- The certified organic cotton yarn being used, due to a lack of local or national supply, comes mostly from foreign sources and includes thousands of miles of travel with no local economic benefits.

Examined through a sustainability lens, the use of foreign grown and spun yarns lacks alignment with the firm's long-term goals of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Discussions began to take place to add a secondary cotton fiber to TSD's existing "organic cotton" line. The goal was to create a regional virtuous supply chain for cotton apparel that is local from the farm to the shirt, and transparent to the consumer, allowing for the forging of connections between the consumer of the shirt and the farmer, spinner, fabricator, dyer, and printer. The consumer must "get to know" the people and places connected to their garments.

In 2008, TSD convened a meeting at Cotton Inc., which included farmers, professors from the NCSU School of Textiles, and other stakeholders, to discuss the viability of reinventing a Carolina's-based textile network for production of local cotton apparel. From this meeting a plan evolved and "Cotton of the Carolinas" has emerged.

“Cotton of the Carolinas” and its tag line: “Grown, Made, Sold, Here” is envisioned as a new approach to create products designed in the Carolinas for customers in the southeastern USA. It is an idea that is virtuous in the sense that the miles a CotC garment travels during all phases of its production are limited, therefore providing economic, environmental and social benefits to all stakeholders in the process due to this efficiency.

As TS Designs conceptualized Cotton of the Carolinas, it determined a list of short-term objectives and long-term goals for the project.

The short-term objectives are to:

- Produce an excellent, high quality garment.
- Demonstrate the present value and economic viability of a locally grown and produced cotton apparel supply chain.
- Reduce the carbon footprint and travel miles from field to consumer.
- Increase local employment in all stages of the supply chain.
- Offer a fully transparent view of the supply chain and the chemicals and processes it uses.

The long-term goals are to:

- Incentivize more sustainable agricultural practices, thereby reducing the ecological footprint of cotton production in the southeast.
- Design specialized garments and apparel that are highly functional for southeastern climates in order to create a region-specific product to promote local growth of the program.
- Become a highly competitive supply chain for cotton apparel due to the ultimate efficiency of the Cotton of Carolinas supply chain.

As TSD determined these goals, it was clear that this could not be accomplished without a strong stakeholder network that included agriculture, textile manufacturing, and retail sectors. It was also apparent that the US textile industry had lost many of the traditional links between these sectors within the supply chain. These connections needed to be reestablished.

Cotton of the Carolinas' Product Fact Sheet

Year One Supply Chain

Harvest '08's transportation footprint from field to printed/dyed shirt will be approximately 715 miles. By comparison, a globally-sourced t-shirt can travel more than 16,000 miles before being sold (U.S. cotton shipped to China for manufacturing, back to the U.S. for sale). The entire supply chain is mapped out below:

- Farm Thurman Burleson & Sons Farm – New London
- Gin Rolling Hills Gin – New London
- Spin Patrick Yarns – Kings Mountain
- Knit Mortex Apparel – Spring Hope
- Finish MoCaro Dyeing and Finishing – Statesville
- Cut Mortex Apparel – Wendell
- Sew Mortex Apparel – Middlesex
- Print TS Designs – Burlington
- Dye TS Designs – Burlington

Year One Shirt Contents

Due to the climate-related difficulties of growing certified organic cotton in the Carolinas, Harvest '08's cotton will be conventionally-grown from Roundup Ready GMO cotton seeds. In future years of the program, after volume has increased, the feasibility of Carolina organic cotton will be researched more fully.

Transparency of the growing and manufacturing processes will be documented at www.cottonofthecarolinas.com as information is gathered from the supply chain members.