

Consumers willing to buy sustainable US cotton, researchers find

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As the interest in environmentally responsible business practices grows globally, researchers are interested in how that interest translates into consumer sales. Researchers from the University of Missouri have found that United States consumers are more willing to buy clothing made from sustainably grown U.S. cotton than apparel produced using conventional practices in an unknown location. Jung Ha-Brookshire, an assistant professor in the textile and apparel management department in the College of Human Environmental Sciences at MU, says transparency is the key.

"It is important for the [apparel industry](#) to remain transparent about its products, especially if they are produced in a sustainable manner," Ha-Brookshire said. "We have shown that consumers want to know where their clothes come from and would rather buy sustainably produced clothes. Many apparel companies use [sustainable practices](#); however, they don't promote them very well."

Ha-Brookshire and fellow researcher Pamela Norum, an associate professor and director of graduate studies in the textile and apparel management department at MU, define sustainable cotton-growing practices as using fewer pesticides and less water, land, and energy compared to traditional practices, which result in a decreased environmental impact.

For their research, Ha-Brookshire and Norum surveyed 500 respondents nationwide. They found that not only were consumers more willing to

buy sustainably produced cotton apparel grown in the U.S. over nonspecific cotton apparel, but consumers were willing to pay up to five dollars (16.7 percent) more for a \$30 cotton shirt produced sustainably in the U.S.

Norum believes these results show how important it is for U.S. cotton growers and apparel companies to promote themselves.

"The apparel industry and specifically U.S. cotton farmers are missing a big opportunity to promote their brand," Norum said. "Consumers want to buy sustainably produced cotton and they want to buy U.S. cotton. Many U.S. cotton farmers are using these sustainable practices but aren't communicating that fact well enough to the public. If they would increase transparency about [cotton](#) production [consumers](#) would be more likely to buy their products."

The studies by Ha-Brookshire and Norum were published in the *Journal of Consumer Marketing* and *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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