

New brands, awareness surges demand for green tees

With growing awareness, Indian consumers are willing to pay extra for organic products today. Realising the market potential, many new brands have entered the fray. Going forward, innovations will hold the key for future growth; write **Piasi Sinha** and **Ajay Goswami**



Consumers across the world are now aware about the impact of harmful chemicals both on human body and on environment. Sustainability has become the buzzword today. Hence, organic is fast becoming a natural choice. In everyday fashion, organic textiles are gaining prominence across markets. While in global fashion it is already becoming a phenomenon, India is still taking baby steps towards it.

Organic cotton farming is much cleaner than conventional farming of the crop. There is no use of pesticides and synthetic fertilisers. "Organic farming saves farmers' families from carcinogenic pesticides. Moreover, farmers can save the seeds after harvest. So, unlike GM seeds, they don't have to buy them every season. Furthermore, Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) takes care of hazardous chemicals in dyes/chemicals as well as processed textiles. Therefore, the products are safe for skin. The wastewater is treated before being discharged. Social issues like child labor, bonded labor, gender discrimination, etc, are taken care of," explains Sumit Gupta, Deputy Director Standards Development & Quality Assurance, Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS).

- **There is a growing awareness about organic products in India**
- **India is the largest exporter of organic textiles**
- **Organic brands are witnessing almost 80 per cent sales in metros; 20 per cent in Tier II cities**
- **Organic knits are more in demand in kids' wear**
- **Effective storytelling by brands and retailers is important to boost demand**

Organic is an added advantage as it reduces the eco footprint of the product. It is important to understand that GOTS label includes environment and social compliance, besides using minimum 70 per cent organic fibers. Therefore, customers can be sure that the products are safe for skin, while workers have received fair remuneration and safe working conditions.

INNOVATIONS WITH ORGANIC FIBERS

India is the largest exporter of organic textiles. What's more, India is also the country with the highest number of GOTS certified facilities the process flow includes sourcing of organic cotton directly from seed

to the farmer and goes all the way to the end product where it is certified by GOTS. GOTS accepts organic fibers that are certified to organic production (farming) standards like NPOP in India. This includes natural fibers like cotton, silk, wool, linen and so on. "Many innovations are happening with new kind of fibers/fabrics like aloe-Vera, lotus, banana, pineapple etc. However, one has to be careful with organic claims with these kinds of fibers/fabrics and must ask for valid 'Transaction Certificates'." adds Gupta.

NEW GEN BRANDS MAKING A MARK

"With growing consciousness about organic textiles and clothing, more brands are



Sumit Gupta,

Deputy Director - Standards Development & Quality Assurance, Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS)

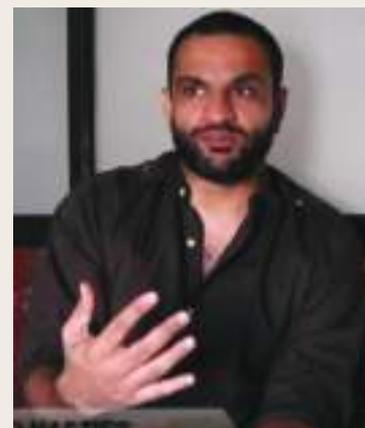
“The response from retail is encouraging. Brands still have to invest in design, quality and trends, as usual. T shirts category is growing rapidly in India, and significant demand is from kids’ wear segment as young parents are sensitive towards the safety of their clothing. In T-shirts, baby wear and kids’ wear are the most promising right now.

entering this space. We are optimistic about the future,” says Apurva Kothari, Founder of No Nasties. Besides high growth in exports, domestic market for organic textile and brands is also set to grow in coming years. As per a GPNi survey, almost 21 per cent Indian consumers are aware about ‘organic, recycled’ textiles and are willing to spend more on organic fashion. “They are beginning to understand it more and more as there is media coverage and a number of products on offer. Although cost is a factor but the Indian consumer has enough purchasing power now and costs should not be a huge issue for the middle and upper classes,” Kothari opines.

To cater to growing export and domestic market, brands are implementing strict quality control measures along with innovations in design and technology. “We only make organic and fair trade clothing and it’s not been that difficult for us, as we don’t have lofty plans. We are happy being a small niche brand,” Kothari observes. “Organic means: No genetically modified seeds; no carcinogenic pesticides; no toxic dyes; no farmer suicides. That’s what our brand is all about,” Kothari says. No Nasties is among the largest exporter of organic knits.

‘Do You Speak Green?’, is another well known brand in this category which boasts of its quality and variety. “Organic cotton tees are made without the use of toxic pesticides and fertilisers or genetically engineered seeds and has a low impact

on the environment. Organic production systems replenish and maintain soil fertility, reduce the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilisers, build biologically diverse agriculture and promote balance of ecosystems,” explains Shishir Goenka,



Apurva Kothari, Founder, No Nasties

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Director, Do You Speak Green?

RCM a newbie in this space is also witnessing growing online demand for organic fashion and plans to spread awareness about the category more aggressively. “Indian consumer understands organic food now for which they are already willing to pay extra. Our motive is to educate the Indian consumer about organic clothing as well. The premium is not that much that the consumer won’t pay. Moreover, our products are not just organic but also fashionable at the same time. Hence, the consumer should not have a problem at all,” points out Rajat Jaipuria, Managing Director, RCM.

The one season old brand is organic, fair-trade certified and limited to the fabrics only. “This in itself is challenging because we are in a space where the conventional garment maker can come up with a lot of varieties and play with fabrics but we limit ourselves. On the flip side, we can get organic fabric which the conventional garment maker cannot. Hence, it becomes our strength and with the help of the certification the end consumer responds well to organic,” adds Jaipuria.

Niharika Verma, Director, Bonorganik another organics brand says, “Being ethical is the need of the hour and Bonorganik, like



any other fashion house believes in offering best quality fashion clothing for all.” She goes on to say “The market is growing and people have huge respect for ethical brands. If price points are not high, and products are trendy, people are willing to buy and continue buying organic products irrespective of their beliefs. As compared to a normal cotton T-shirt, an organic T-shirt has a soft feel, is easier on the environment and is better for baby’s skin. The organic concept has extended to almost all fabrics. Chiffon, silk, rayon, crepe, anything is possible. Organic is a route each brand has to take sooner or later. It will be like a certification required to set up a brand. So the future is organic.”

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Apart from a promising export market, the domestic retail, the market for organic fashion



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“Currently, organic clothing is a huge hit in the West, which is why we feel the segment will come up well in India too. A lot of brands are doing organic lines. The future is bright for organic clothing.”

looks positive. However, brands still have to bring in more variation and innovations to cater to the discerning customer. “The response from retail is encouraging. Brands still need to invest in design, quality and trends, as usual. T shirts category is growing rapidly in India, and significant demand is from kids’ wear segment as young parents are sensitive towards the safety of their clothing. In T-shirts, baby wear and kids’ wear are the most promising right now. Buying GOTS certified organic means the product has a clean footprint for both environment and social domains. This means higher consumer satisfaction. While the product is safe for the consumer, it also comes from a cleaner process chain.” adds Gupta.

Jaipuria adds, “Currently, organic clothing is a huge hit in the West, which is why we feel the segment will come up well in India too. A lot of brands are doing organic lines. The future is bright for organic clothing.” With increasing disposable income among the Indian middle class and growing in awareness about sustainability, the organic textiles market in India is set to touch higher levels. However, Gupta feels effective storytelling by brands and retailers are important to send across the right message. “In India, lack of information about certifications and eco-labels for organic is an issue. Therefore, we see several self-claims in the field of organic and sustainability.” adds Gupta. Currently, organic brands are witnessing almost 80 per cent sales in metros and 20 per cent in Tier II cities.