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MARKET INTELLIGENCE

April 2019

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COMPANY



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This month, we examine the value of being green and how the wool industry fits within the global movement of consumers' apparent movement towards buying products with greater green credentials.

With many in the wool supply chain now focussed on issues such as traceability, sustainability, welfare and regenerative farming, many producers are in turn asking, "Given I produce the primary product in this long chain, what's in it for me?"

To adhere to the modern standards that are expected from mainly retailers and consumers of textiles, it is highly probable that the cost of production on-farm for these issues will increase, hence the question. Well, the simple answer appears to be nothing apart from keeping the market.

The article below, derived from a recent survey by consulting firm AT Kearney of 1,200 consumers in the US, indicates quite succinctly that consumers, in that market at least, are trending to the purchasing of credible green products, but they expect the extra costs to be absorbed by the participants further down the chain. In short, a higher standard is now expected at no additional cost.

More than 70 per cent of those surveyed state they consider their impact on the environment when shopping, and apparel is likely to be a major beneficiary with almost 50 per cent of respondents stating they intended to shift their apparel purchasing behaviours to be greener into the future. This survey has evidenced a significant increase, given 38 per cent of US consumers purchased green apparel last year.

Even as topics like climate change continue to make headlines, only 52 per cent have already shifted their purchase decisions—although this is improving, with 66 per cent intending to shift within the year. The report stated that while nearly 80 per cent of respondents would consider delayed delivery if the environmental benefit was clearly articulated, they are unlikely to settle for higher costs in exchange for environmental benefits. Almost half of all respondents, across all income levels, note cost as the primary obstacle to purchasing 'green'.

What the AT Kearney survey also found was that consumers tend to hold the private sector to a higher standard than they do the public sector. More than 65 per cent of consumers believe companies should exceed government sustainability standards. The survey indicated 80 per cent of respondents believe changing their personal everyday decisions is the most effective path to improving environmental outcomes whereas only 20 per cent of consumers believe supporting non-Government organisations (NGOs) and government is a more effective path.

Consumers are also sceptical when it comes to evaluating 'green' claims. Nearly 80 per cent of consumers look to supporting evidence or independent certification to evaluate the credibility of benefit claims. Fewer than 25 per cent of consumers ranked 'intangible' claims—such as undefined statements about energy reduction or water quality improvement—among their top three purchase decision influencers. Benefit claims such as

recycling that are more immediate, i.e. easily experienced by the shopper, were found to be more impactful than remote benefit claims or claims that were out of consumers' control or beyond their visibility, such as changes in production processes.

"What we see in these findings is that consumer market may be more receptive to buying green products than they were in years past," said Greg Portell, an AT Kearney partner involved in the study, "but, they don't want to sacrifice quality or pay higher prices to benefit the environment. Additionally, two other things are clear. One being that credibility, authenticity, and communications are critical to selling any benefits, and the second being consumers expect manufacturers and retailers to bear their fair share of the cost."

As a truly biodegradable, renewable, natural fibre, wool has a wonderful story to tell but any claims made have to be backed by verifiable facts. To this end, The Woolmark Company has created a series of factsheets clearly outlining the claims around our natural fibre and the benefits it offers the planet. They are used in key markets across the world to help tell the great story we have to share.

See them at www.woolmark.com/about-wool/factsheets/

Content for this market intelligence report is from www.wtin.com and www.fibre2fashion.com

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