

# *Sewing* **Green**

## What does it mean for retailers?

by Freelance Contributor Dianne Giancola

Open any magazine or catalog, and you're bound to see "green products" for sale. What does that mean for you and your business? Just like grocery stores have an "organic section," have you thought about merchandising "green or environmentally-friendly" products together or highlighting them with a "green" sign or starburst? Are your customers aware of the green movement, and do they care? More importantly, are they willing to pay the higher prices associated with green products?

What are "green products?" The term "green" can be misleading and means many different things. If something is labeled "certified organic cotton," it means that the crop standards were set by the USDA. This only applies to the growing process. Some "certified organic cotton" may also have the GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard) label, which means the cotton has been processed according to the highest worldwide standards. (Visit the Web sites listed at the end of this article to learn more.) However, many of the new fibers, such as bamboo, corn and soy, are not labeled "certified organic," but they are considered "eco-friendly" and totally biodegradable. And, finally some green products are produced from renewable or sustainable resources or recycled products that help protect and preserve our environment. Some manufacturers are moving toward these green products in an effort to reduce their dependency on petroleum-based products.

As an independent retailer, the green movement gives you an opportunity to give back to your community and project a positive image that may ultimately lead to increased sales.

This article highlights some of the sewing notions and fabrics available for "sewing green." There may be companies not listed that have been manufacturing in a responsible environmentally-friendly manner, but do not have products they consider green.

### Sewing Thread

**YLI**, one of the leading thread manufacturers in the world, has recently introduced a thread made from "100% Certified Organic Cotton." This thread is being produced in conjunction with Fiberactive Organics, LLC, which is a producer of organic textile products. The YLI Organic Cotton Thread is available in two weights: a Multi-Purpose 29/2 ply Tex 40 and a Topstitching 24/3 ply Tex 60. Both threads are currently offered in white, natural and black. The Multi-Purpose thread is ideal for general sewing and for use in sergers. The Topstitching thread is thicker so it adds greater definition to topstitching and machine quilting. It's also stronger so it can be used for general sewing on heavier fabrics, such as denim. These threads are available for domestic and industrial applications and are the only source for U.S. manufacturers to purchase thread made from "100 percent Certified Organic Cotton."

Julie Mulin, an industrial designer and manufacturer of home products, was the driving force behind this new thread. Julie was concerned about the fiber



*New YLI thread is made from "100 percent Certified Organic Cotton," available in multi-purpose and topstitching weights, 500 yd. & 3,000 yd. cones.*

particles coming off the thread while sewing and the harm they could be doing to her and the environment. The YLI “100 percent Certified Organic Cotton” threads are produced according to the crop standards set by the USDA. One of the many standards for this designation is that the cotton plants must have been grown in fields that are free of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, insecticides and chemical defoliant for three previous years. In addition, the YLI Organic Cotton Thread is spun and finished in North Carolina according to the GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard), which includes the practice of water conservation, no use of formaldehydes and no use of toxic mordants to set the dyes.

According to the Organic Trade Association, “Conventionally grown cotton consumes approximately 25 percent of the insecticides and more than 10 percent of the pesticides used in the world.” Organic farming techniques build the soil and promote a healthy environment.

**Sulky Rayon Thread** is made exclusively of 100 percent viscose rayon which originates from the cellulose coming from wood pulp production. Cellulose is the natural building material needed by plants and trees to form their cellular walls. In most cases, pine or spruce wood or even well selected deciduous tree types are used to manufacture Sulky viscose rayon coming from the Enka Germany plant. These cultivated trees are grown in carefully controlled plantations that permanently regenerate every 20 years. So the entire growing process is sustainable and environmentally friendly. No tropical woods or rainforests are ever utilized. Enka viscose is produced in accordance with the highest European health, safety and environmental standards. Sulky Rayon Thread is available in a wide range of sizes and colors and consistently offers the highest quality rayon threads.



*Sulky Rayon Thread is manufactured from pine or spruce trees that utilize a sustainable growing process.*

### **Battings & Fiberfill**

Bamboo is a natural cellulose and eco-friendly fiber which is 100 percent biodegradable and replenishable. **Fairfield Processing** has selected to use it in a new line of Nature-Fil™ Bamboo batting, pillow forms and fiberfill to lessen their dependency on petroleum-based products and help the environment.

Bamboo is the fastest growing timber plant on Earth, requires no fertilizers to grow and thrives naturally without using pesticides. Plus, it benefits the atmosphere because it absorbs two-thirds more carbon dioxide and releases two-thirds more oxygen. If one plant is cut down, two will grow in its place so it regenerates quickly with a short harvesting cycle. Bamboo fiber is soft and luxurious to the touch, often compared to a cross between cashmere and silk.

Bamboo batting is ideal for machine quilting; the space between quilting can go up to 8” intervals. When laundering and ironing, use a low heat setting because bamboo can be heat sensitive. The Nature-Fil Bamboo Batting is a blend of 50 percent bamboo and 50 percent organic cotton, available in a 60” square art quilt/generous crib and a 100” x 116” generous queen. The 100 percent bamboo fiberfill is available in a 12 oz. bag, and the pillow forms are available in 18” and 24” home décor sizes.



*Fairfield Processing introduces Nature-Fil™ Bamboo batting, pillow forms and fiberfill.*

**Mountain Mist**, a well-known name for quilt battings and fiberfill, has decided to go with Eco-Friendly™ fiber made from corn for its new collection of Ecocraft™ Eco-Friendly™ fiberfill, batting and pillow forms. Corn is grown domestically, and the polylactide fibers made from corn are totally biodegradable so they are safe for the planet and your family.



*“Calming Bamboo” quilt designed by Cindy Walters using Nature-Fil™ Bamboo Batting by Fairfield.*

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*Eco-Friendly™ fiber made from corn is the basis of the new Ecocraft™ collection of fiberfill, batting and pillow forms by Mountain Mist.*

Poly lactide (PLA) fibers are formed from lactic acid derived from natural corn sugar. This fiber will not attract insects and performs very much like polyester, but is more breathable. The Eco-Friendly™ PLA fibers are also hypoallergenic and offer a natural resilience with superior softness. Quilters test results show that the poly lactide battings hand and machine needle better than polyester.

The Ecocraft™ EcoFriendly™ batting, which is a blend of 50 percent PLA and 50 percent cotton, provides more durability for longarm quilters and is available in crib, twin, full and queen sizes on 96" and 120" wide rolls. The EcoFriendly™ fiberfill (100 percent PLA) is available in 12 oz. bags and a new three-pound box for professional crafters. The pillow forms are available in 14", 16", 18" and 20" squares.



*Warm & Safe™ is a new eco-friendly naturally fire retardant batting from The Warm Company, available in a crib size and on 45" and 90" wide bolts.*

In response to requests to manufacture a fire retardant batting that did not contain chemical additives, which can be hazardous to the environment, **The Warm Company** teamed up with the Sateri Company to develop a naturally fire-retardant batting. The batting is made from Visil fiber, which is manufactured from wood pulp that comes from a blend of sustainable plantation trees, primarily eucalyptus trees. The process is similar to making rayon. The Visil fiber is manufactured with a high silica content to give it natural, built-in fire retardant characteristics. Warm & Safe will not melt, flow or emit toxic gases when exposed to heat and flame. It's soft and silky to the touch and biodegradable when it goes back to the Earth.

### Spray Adhesives & Stabilizers

What about all the spray adhesives and stabilizers we use? What impact do they have on our environment?

#### **Sulky KK2000**



*Sulky's Temporary Spray Adhesive is non-toxic, odorless and ozone friendly with no CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons) or HCFC's (hydrocarbon fluorocarbons). The can is aluminum and recyclable, and the propellant used to activate the spray is a non-flammable compressed gas.*

#### **J. T. Trading**



*J.T. Trading is well known for their Spray and Fix products (202, 404, 505, 606). Although their products bear a flammable caution on the label, they consider them green because the dried adhesives are acid free, inert, non-toxic and contain no CFC's (chlorofluorocarbons) that can harm the ozone layer.*

#### **RNK Distributing**



*RNK Distributing has recently introduced two new "eco-friendly" stabilizers by Jenny Haskins. One is a Light Tearaway Magic Stabilizer, which is perfect for foundation piecing, and the other is a Light Tearaway Fusible, which is ideal when stitching dense embroidery on lightweight cottons. Both are considered "green" because the stabilizers are made up of individual fibers that break down in water as soon as they are agitated, with no clumping.*

## Buttons & Ribbons



### **Tagua Buttons**

*Tagua Buttons are made from the nuts of native palm trees found in Ecuador's rainforests. In 1990, Conservation International began work to save the rainforests and market these beautiful buttons to companies, such as the Gap, Patagonia and One World Button Supply.*

### **Schiff Ribbons**

Looking for the perfect accent for organic cotton fabrics? Try 100 percent Organic Cotton Ribbon or a Cotton/Hemp Ribbon (55 percent Organic Cotton, 45 percent Hemp), both 7/8" wide, natural only.

## Sewing with Green Fabrics

There have never been so many choices for sewing enthusiasts, quilters and crafters to sew with environmentally-friendly fabrics. Space will not allow an in-depth review of the selection available, but a brief description and, in some cases, a photograph will send you to their Web sites for more information.

### **Kunin Felt**

All Kunin craft felt is now made of Ecospun, which is manufactured by the Foss Manufacturing Company in Hampton, NH. Kunin felt products look like fabric and are available in a wide range of prints, embossed surfaces, shaggy and plush fur-like textures, low pile velour and a new tote bag felt.



*Believe it or not, Kunin Ecospun felt is made from 100 percent certified recycled PET (polyethylene terephthalate) beverage bottles. Two million plastic bottles are used in the U.S. every 10 minutes. It takes 10 certified beverage bottles to make one pound of polyester fiber.*

### **Marcus Fabrics**

*Oasis Canvas by Marcus Fabrics is a 100 percent certified organic cotton in a classic linen-weave, home décor weight, available in 12 earth-tone colors. Oasis Canvas is yarn-dyed for increased color penetration, light fastness and durability.*



### **Michael Miller Fabrics**



*Michael Miller Organics is a new line of certified cotton organic fabrics, gingham bias trim, ruffle rac and Ecospun felt, available in soft, natural colors. This collection is designed for those who want the safest possible fabrics next to their infants and children.*

### **Robert Kaufman**

Committed to the planet Earth, Robert Kaufman has introduced a collection of environmentally-friendly fabrics that also includes: Panda, a poplin made of 60 percent cotton, 40 percent bamboo; Bermuda, 100 percent Bamboo dobby yarn-dyed textured fabric; Kona, a 100 percent organically grown cotton; and Sea-Tiva, made of 75 percent cotton and 25 percent SeaCell, which is a cellulosic fiber incorporated with active substances of seaweed that has been proven to protect the skin and have anti-inflammatory properties.



*Bamboo steps into corduroy in this new Panda Cord (55 percent cotton, 45 percent bamboo), part of the GreenStyle collection of eco-friendly fabrics from Robert Kaufman. It's so soft to the touch!*

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### Hoffman California Fabrics

*The Hoffman Fabrics Eco-Friendly collection (65 percent bamboo, 35 percent cotton) interprets a modern woodland theme. Hoffman first introduced bamboo fabrics to Aloha shirt manufacturers due to its breathability, anti-bacterial properties, high absorbency, and environmental qualities.*



### Symphony Fabrics

Bambino is the name of a knit fabric (97 percent Bamboo, 3 percent Spandex) made by Symphony Fabrics, The Pago Group. This luxurious knit is available in 14 colors and has become very popular with fashion designers for use in loungewear and dresses because it drapes beautifully and is very lightweight.

### Andover Fabrics

*Kathy Hall has created a new line of Vegetable-Dyed Cottons for Andover Fabrics. The fabrics are block printed by hand using natural vegetable dyes, made from materials such as bark, walnut shells and carrots. No synthetic dyes are used that may pollute the environment. This traditional method of block printing is known as kalamkari. The entire printing process takes 75 days.*

### Exotic Silk

Soy is a fiber made from a by-product of soybean oil production. It is a sustainable and renewable fiber that is being blended with other fibers. Exotic Silk has a Silk/Soy Satin fabric (53 percent silk, 47 percent soy), available in white only, which is primarily used by fiber artists for dyeing and painting.

### Télio Fabrics

This Canadian based company is a leading textile importer and has an extensive collection of 100 percent bamboo fabrics in denim, voile and heavy weight cotton twill.

They also offer a Hemp Canvas, which is a blend of 55 percent hemp, 25 percent linen, and 20 percent cotton. Hemp is another fiber that's considered eco-friendly because it's highly pest resistant and grows quickly and densely, eliminating the need for herbicides and artificial fertilizers.

### Going Green

Think about your customers. What are their needs and interests?

Going green is a business decision that requires some careful thinking and preparation. ☺

### Web site Resources

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| <a href="http://www.ylicorp.com">www.ylicorp.com</a>                         | <a href="http://www.michaelmillerfabrics.com">www.michaelmillerfabrics.com</a>                   |
| <a href="http://www.fiberactiveorganics.com">www.fiberactiveorganics.com</a> | <a href="http://www.marcusfabrics.com">www.marcusfabrics.com</a>                                 |
| <a href="http://www.sulky.com">www.sulky.com</a>                             | <a href="http://www.robertkaufman.com">www.robertkaufman.com</a>                                 |
| <a href="http://www.poly-fil.com">www.poly-fil.com</a>                       | <a href="http://www.hoffmanfabrics.com">www.hoffmanfabrics.com</a>                               |
| <a href="http://www.mountainmistlpp.com">www.mountainmistlpp.com</a>         | <a href="http://www.pagoFabrics.com">www.pagoFabrics.com</a>                                     |
| <a href="http://www.warmcompany.com">www.warmcompany.com</a>                 | <a href="http://www.andoverfabrics.com">www.andoverfabrics.com</a>                               |
| <a href="http://www.sateri.com">www.sateri.com</a>                           | <a href="http://www.thaisilks.com">www.thaisilks.com</a>   |
| <a href="http://www.sprayandfix.com">www.sprayandfix.com</a>                 | <a href="http://www.ota.com">www.ota.com</a> (Organic Trade Association)                         |
| <a href="http://www.rnkdistributing.com">www.rnkdistributing.com</a>         | <a href="http://www.theorganicreport.com">www.theorganicreport.com</a> (OTA's consumer Web site) |
| <a href="http://www.oneworldbuttons.com">www.oneworldbuttons.com</a>         | <a href="http://www.organicexchange.org">www.organicexchange.org</a> (Organic Exchange)          |
| <a href="http://www.schiffribbons.com">www.schiffribbons.com</a>             | <a href="http://www.telio.com">www.telio.com</a>   |
| <a href="http://www.kuninfelt.com">www.kuninfelt.com</a>                     |  |