

ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATION WITHIN COTTON

ELEANOR AND EDY

The article we read discussed an environmental movement within the fashion industry specific to cotton and dyeing. Published in Vogue on April 22, 2024, the article is titled, Sally Fox's Cotton Has the Power to Change the Fashion Industry. However, the message of the title does not necessarily reflect the atmosphere of the article, in which the legitimacy of different sustainable alternatives to our existing industry is discussed. Sally Fox's development of cotton demonstrates the ability to venture into less harmful ways of producing, but also how these methods are not usually adopted on a larger scale. Therefore, as environmental innovation will continue to influence the fashion industry, it may be on a smaller scale, and will take more time to change the methods of production, as well as consumption habits, as a whole.

Sally Fox grew up with a passion for textiles, but because of financial limitations, pursued biology and entomology, working with insects while in school. She continued to incorporate textiles into her life through spinning and weaving, and learned through teaching about a student's mother who had passed away from exposure to chemicals from dyeing fabric. She then swore off using unnatural dye, "I'm not anti-color," she says, "[but] can't we use colors responsibly, where, when we dye things, we clean them up?". After school, she ended up learning how to breed pesticide-resistant crops without the use of genetic modification, later using this knowledge to develop naturally colored cotton with the same properties as white cotton. "By the mid-1990s, Fox was operating the largest-scale colored cotton farm in the world, and helping the United States government determine its organic cotton standards. She was breeding cotton that ranged from camel to seafoam green. "We were at 5,000 certified organic acres and 3,000 transitional certified transitional organic acreage in Arizona". However, then production moved overseas.

The dyeing process within the apparel industry is one of the most pollutive of the entire process, using harmful chemicals and tons of water. When production moved overseas to countries with less strict laws and less enforcement, cleaning the polluted water used to dye textiles was and is still often forgone, as it is an expensive process. Her business was purchased by an investor who believed in what she was doing, but the progress seemed to halt. She is quoted as saying, “If I had a wish, it would be that I was funded by some foundations somewhere, that I could do the microbiological work of identifying how to get these colors to shift.” She had the knowledge and the passion, but lacked the resources to actually create the naturally colored cotton.

This exemplifies the current environment of our industry, in which there is not enough money put into actually developing solutions, in order to preserve the cheap, quick consumption that our society has grown accustomed to. It is possible that with growing technology, adopting sustainable methods of production will become easier, but until that point, it does not seem as though the fashion industry can make these changes, though we are hopefully moving in that direction. As the article states, “Fox doesn’t necessarily see her cotton changing the world of high fashion. She likens couture to a rose—her cotton is the soil that allows the flower to bloom. “But I do see [my cotton] playing the role as the sheets you sleep in, your underwear, the things that are closest to your body and give you, and your body, and your soul substance.” The article’s title has some validity, as her cotton does have the power to change the fashion industry. The question is, therefore, is the industry willing to make the necessary changes that people like Fox can put forth?

SOURCE

Jackson, Hannah , "Sally Fox's Cotton Has the Power to Change the Fashion Industry", April 22, 2024

<https://www.vogue.com/article/sally-fox-cotton-breeder-profile>