Textile Exchange

Sector: Garments and Textile
Region: Based in United States, operates globally

Textile Exchange works closely with its members to accelerate sustainable practices in the textile value chain. The standards work to support the integrity of product claims by providing verification from an independent third-party.

Textile Exchange's sustainability claim analyzed here is the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS), which is a voluntary global tool created in 2016 that aims to ensure that wool comes from sheep that have been treated responsibly, and from farms that consistently strive to improve methods of land management, for example through protecting soil, preventing erosion, and helping restore land health over time. The main goal of the Responsible Wool Standard is to provide the industry with a tool to recognize the best practices of farmers; ensuring that wool comes from farms with a progressive approach to managing their land, and from sheep that have been treated responsibly.

Mindset

Life Cycle Thinking: The claim focuses only on addressing impacts at the farm stage of wool production. The certification ensures that wool from certified farms is properly identified and tracked through the supply chain.

Hotspots Analysis Approach: Textile Exchange did not conduct a comprehensive hotspots analysis but, based on peer review, the International Working Group responsible for developing the standard identified land management and animal welfare as important contributors to the sustainability of the production of wool at the farm level. The RWS does not address impacts of wool processing.

Mainstreaming Sustainability: Through its standards, Textile Exchange encourages actors in the textile industry to lead real and meaningful change towards sustainability. The RWS has put a special focus on providing tools and resources for farmers to help them comply with the standard. The standard's requirements on animal welfare apply to the whole farm level and farmers are asked to progressively improve methods of land management over time.

Principle 1: Reliability

Data used to inform the development of requirements and establishment of thresholds of the RWS Standard is based on primarily peer reviewed scientific research. Decisions are also informed by the expert inputs of an International Working Group that was established to develop the standard.

> The Standard Setting, Standard Assurance and Monitoring and Evaluation systems in place behind the RWS Standard contribute to meeting the requirements of this principle. Multiple external certification bodies are approved to certify against the RWS (SCS Global Services, Control Union, NSF International, AsureQuality, LETIS, OIA, ICEA, LSQA).

Principle 2: Relevance

Based on peer reviewed scientific research, land health and animal welfare were defined by the RWS International Working Group and the Technical Guidance Committee as the two key sustainability issues associated with wool production. Issues that are outside of the direct scope and control of the farmer have been excluded from the standard, including commercial slaughter practices and live export for example.

> The RWS claim highlights two relevant issues. Most often, the requirements of the RWS exceed national legislative requirements on farms, although this does vary geographically. Legislation in some countries recognizes animal welfare as important and subsequently contains animal welfare principles, but in other countries there is a slower realisation of the need to protect animals in industry at a national level.

Example of correct product-specific claim available in the RWS Logo Use and Claims Guide.

Principle 3: Clarity

The RWS Logo Use and Claims Guide sets out requirements for both product and general marketing claims, with examples of correct product-specific claims. These are intended to ensure that RWS claims cannot be made on non-certified products. The website ResponsibleWool.org, which is both a business-facing and consumer-facing website, includes technical and basic information about the standard.

Only products with 100% RWS certified wool may be labeled with the RWS logo. There is a direct link between the sustainability claim and the product, so that consumers are able to differentiate between product and brand information. The information on the logo (the blue logo with the text and image) is explicit and easy to understand. The logo might also include the website address, which is optional. One challenge is the presentation of contextual information (such as number of sheep certified on farms), but this is planned to be done in the future and will possibily involve including such information on the website.

Principle 4: Transparency

Clear explanation on the multi-stakeholder process is shared on the website, as well as information on the certification process. Consumers can view the names and information of certified farm sites and request information regarding the validity of a claim: they can verify product claims with the certification numbers that appear on tags by contacting Textile Exchange or the certification body, the name of which also appears on the product labels of product-specific claims.

The RWS aims to provide a means for brands and consumers to have the certainty that the wool products they buy and sell are in line with their values. On the website, consumers can also see the number of brands who are committed to using the standard, suppliers who supply RWS certified wool, and a list of all certified farm sites.

Principle 5: Accessibility

Consumers can easily find further information on the RWS website (the address of which is included on the RWS tag attached to the product), Facebook and Twitter pages.

The RWS Logo Use and Claims Guide sets size, color, and font specifications and application do's and don'ts for logo use, which help ensure the claim is clearly visible for consumers at the point of purchase. Further information is available online and by request.

Principle 6: Three Dimensions of Sustainability

Environmental: The focus is on animal welfare and land health.

Social: The scope of the standard may be extended in the future to include the social dimension, for example labour and working conditions on farms. Decisions regarding the scope of the standard are made through the standard development and revision procedures, which follow the ISEAL principles for stakeholder engagement.

This claim focuses on the environmental dimension of sustainability. Social aspects might be included in the future.

Principle 7: Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact

Research has shown that the main consumer concern with regards to wool is animal welfare, followed by impact on land from grazing. The RWS standard facilitates informed purchasing decisions by offering substantive information, but does not currently engage end user consumers in changing their behaviour.

> The RWS claim encourages consumers to consider the welfare of animals and the land they graze on, but does not engage them in further action. This is a potential area for development.

Principle 8: Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach

The organization has a website and makes use of social media (Facebook and Twitter).
It also works indirectly by supporting brands in their communication efforts with their customers. Consumers have the possibility to interact with Textile Exchange via social media and e-mails, besides having access to the website address available on the tags of products.

> Textile Exchange's primary focus at the moment is on engaging the industry since the standard is still new and being adopted (the standard was launched in June 2016). In the future, it would be interesting to connect with consumers in more diverse ways.

Principle 9: Collaboration

The RWS was developed with the input of farmers, animal welfare experts, land conservation experts, brands and retailers from all parts of the globe. The standard was developed by an International Working Group through an open and transparent process. Its highest priorities were to include representation from all potential stakeholders and to create a tool that balances effective requirements with realistic auditable criteria.

> Prior to the development of the RWS, a review was carried out by the International Working Group to identify all existing animal welfare and land management standards for sheep farms. RWS followed the ISEAL Standard Setting principles and was developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Principle 10: Comparability

Product comparisons are not used in this claim; however, the Fiber & Materials team at Textile Exchange offers information about other preferred wools (such as organic), which was recently released in the Preferred Fiber & Materials Market Report.

> Consumers may have access to additional information for comparison through Textile Exchange, but not directly through this claim.

Textile Exchange
11 October 2018

Brand and Supplier Commitment to our #ResponsibleWool Standard Grows! Eileen Fisher, Marks & Spencer and ARKET lead the way for transparent wool supply chains. Learn more here and also at #TextileExchange18 http://ow.ly/KwlR30mbAi6

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An example of a post on RSW Facebook page, in which Textile Exchange showcases certified brands' commitments.

> In addition to the Responsible Wool Standard (RWS), Textile Exchange has developed several industry standards, including the Organic Content Standard (OCS), the Responsible Down Standard (RDS), the Recycled Claim Standard (RCS), and the Global Recycled Standard (GRS).

TextileExchange
Creating Material Change