

Ethical fashion

The well-known British retailer, Marks and Spencer, is launching a range of Fairtrade clothing. Will more companies join the move towards ethical fashion?

1 Which expression below does **not** form a collocation with the word ethical? Create example sentences with the other expressions.

ETHICAL	trading	behaviour	products	issues
	consumers	textiles	shopping	spending

ethical [adj] : involving the principles used in deciding what is right and wrong
 Definition from: *Macmillan English Dictionary* Text © Bloomsbury Publishing Plc 2002.

2 Scan the article and underline expressions with the word 'ethical'.

Ethical fashion: the latest trend?

The British market for ethical clothes is now around £43 million. Recently released figures show sales of ethical products grew by more than 50% in 2004. *Marks & Spencer* has chosen this month – the month of Fairtrade Fortnight – to begin selling Fairtrade clothing. The aim of the Fairtrade movement is to ensure farmers in developing countries receive fair prices for their products, such as food, tea and coffee, cotton and so on. So, does the fact that a major retailer is joining the move towards ethical trading signal a big change in the fashion industry? What is 'ethical fashion'?

Eco-fashion involves producing clothes in a socially-conscious way. It uses for example, organic cotton, which is softer. Supporters want clothing manufacturers and suppliers to provide safe working conditions as well as fair wages for their employees. The 'Look behind the label' campaign aims to inform shoppers of the way products are sourced. Typically, companies in this group aim to protect animal welfare and use recycled packaging. They are concerned about the conditions in 'sweat shops' and whether children are used in making goods.

Marketing experts now speak of the 'conscience consumer'. 33% of consumers consider themselves as caring, thinking shoppers. A survey on ethical spending found that 54% of people believe that, as a consumer, they make a difference to how responsibly a company behaves. The number of ethical companies is increasing. *People Tree* is an 'ethical label'. It sources its clothes from Fairtrade groups in a number of developing countries. *American Apparel* makes high quality t-shirts – also, ethically made. *Enamore* creates clothing from organic textiles and recycled textiles.

Critics point out that less than 1% of the world's cotton production is organic. They say this will only ever be a niche area, and that eco-fashion is too expensive to have widespread appeal. Only 5% of people who shop believe that ethics are crucial. Most people still have no real interest in changing their habits to shop ethically. One reason for low commitment is that people do not know enough about ethical consumerism. In Fairtrade Fortnight, is this all about to change?

3 Read the whole article. Which two viewpoints are outlined in the article?

4 Create collocations by matching a word from box 1 to any word from box 2. How many can you create?

(1) developing	animal	recycled
organic	conscience	fashion

(2) packaging	countries	welfare	cotton
textiles	consumer	industry	

5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Be ready to report your ideas to the class.

- (a) Do you buy Fairtrade or organic articles, such as coffee / tea, food or clothes?
- (b) Do you believe that your shopping decisions can change a company's behaviour? Give an example.
- (c) How well does your company score in the area of ethical practice? Can it improve in some ways?