

Global Shippers Unite

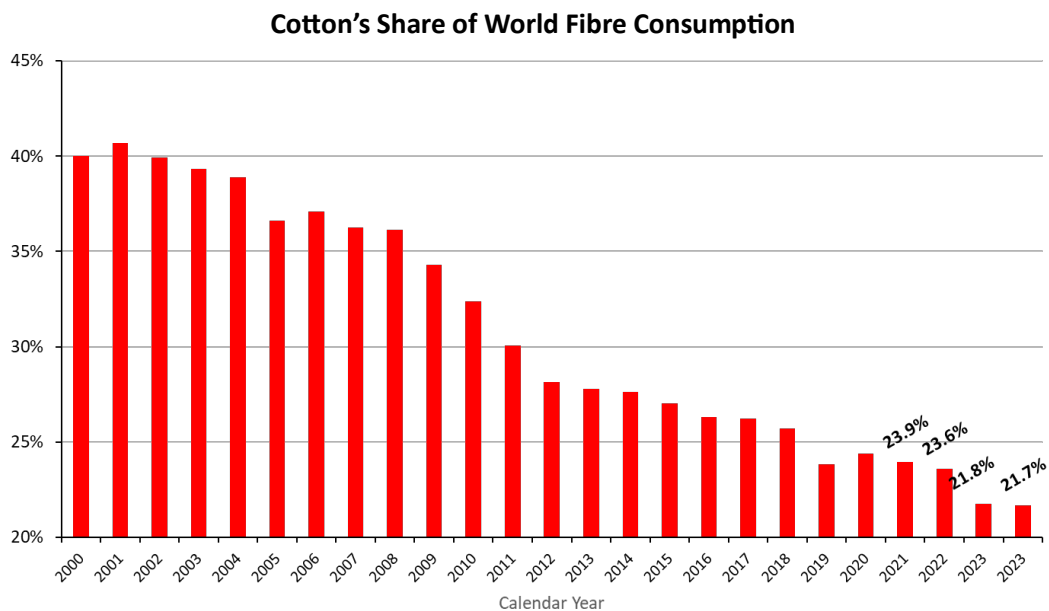
by Tony Geitz, Australian Cotton Shippers Association

The Australian Cotton Shippers Association was honored to be invited to attend the American Cotton Shippers Association's Centennial Convention in Scottsdale, Phoenix last month. Aside from what was a fantastic convention, it is indeed rare to see an industry body that is as relevant today as when it was formed.

During the convention there was an historic signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the American, Brazilian and Australian Cotton Shippers Associations that focused on some key initiatives, the first being to assure the long term economic and social vitality of cotton production in each of these countries; seeking to strengthen the dialogue and capabilities to support mutual interests and promote better awareness amongst consumers and policymakers about the positive contributions and impacts of cotton production.

All three organisations are acutely aware of the challenges of manmade fibre and cotton's loss of market share to this plastic fibre. The three organisations will lend their combined weight in the fight to shore up the use of natural fibres.

Textile demand is an important global economic barometer and in 2023 we saw cotton's share of total fibre demand fall to an all-time low of 21.7%. Despite all the bad news stories around micro-fibre pollution in our waterways and oceans, consumers continue their love affair with garments made from manmade fibres – and cotton and other natural fibres continue to lose market share.



Source: ICAC World Textile Demand

As we approach the United Nations' globally mandated climate change targets of 2030 (and then a further target in 2050), a lot is changing. All industry segments are looking at their supply chains and many non-governments organisations (NGOs) around the world are driving agendas around what is good and what is bad. NGOs are playing a critical role in driving consumer sentiment and the risk around misinformation is high.

Two such NGOs as an example, building a perspective on what is going on in the murky world of what is good and what is bad in our march to net zero emissions.

The Higg Index - an apparel and footwear industry self-assessment standard to rate environmental and social sustainability throughout the supply chain.

Make the Label Count - an international coalition of organisations representing a wide range of natural fibre producers and environmental groups - all working to ensure that sustainability claims for textiles in the EU are fair and credible.

Both organisations epitomize the struggle that is going to ensure the consumer is environmentally informed about apparel product choices. In very simple terms the Higg Index proposes polyester or synthetics made from purified terephthalic acid (PTA) have a lower environmental impact than cotton because they ignore the manufacturing process of PTA. (PTA is manufactured by the catalytic liquid phase oxidation of paraxylene in acetic acid, in the presence of air. The process uses manganese or cobalt acetate as a catalyst. Paraxylene is an aromatic hydrocarbon.)

One of the reasons why Make the Label Count has come into existence is to counter the arguments around textile ratings proposed by organisations such as the Higg Index.

How can we have such a paradoxical situation arise where manmade fibres come into existence as a consequence of a major industrial chemical manufacturing process be proposed as a superior environmental textile preference to a natural fibre such as cotton.? It's preposterous, lacks logic, and it doesn't meet the pub test. Accepting such a standard demonstrates that the consumer is more removed from the production and supply chain than they have ever been, particularly in regard to agricultural products.

Right now cotton is losing the battle with MMFs – assisted by some NGOs that are influencing consumer outcomes. Unless something changes around consumer sentiment, we will continue to lose market share to MMFs – or more drastically, as cotton producers we are legislated out of our industry.

The American, Brazilian and Australian Cotton Shippers Associations don't propose they have the magic wand to resolve this dilemma, but it is important to be united in the fight. The world needs many more voices - unite and make noise!

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