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Ireland's employers urged to ditch fast fashion and use Fairtrade uniforms

- **Irish businesses urged to use Fairtrade cotton clothing and join movement against fast fashion**

IRELAND'S workplace chiefs are being urged to use work clothes made using Fairtrade cotton.

The Fairtrade at Work campaign is asking people to ditch fast fashion and buy sustainable high quality clothing instead, like aprons, shirts, hoodies and office wear.

The initiative, which was launched this week as part of Fashion Revolution Week, also encourages retailers to sell more clothes made ethically by farmers who are paid fairly.

The campaign was launched at the national centre for the circular economy, the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, Dublin, where staff have been provided with Fairtrade cotton polo shirts.

Their Fairtrade cotton clothing supplier, Gerard Whelan of the Tipperary based [SustainableWorkwear.ie](https://www.sustainableworkwear.ie), said it is now "simple for companies and supporters to outfit their teams responsibly whilst creating positive change for people and planet."

"We are empowering Irish businesses to choose stylish, organic workwear that supports the growers and environmental integrity," said Mr Whelan.

Fairtrade Ireland said buying sustainable clothing also supports the environment by reducing the fashion industry's reliance on synthetic fibres like polyester and nylon, which are derived from petroleum.

"We're hoping to see organic Fairtrade cotton clothing being as common in workplaces as Fairtrade coffee," said Fairtrade Ireland's Executive Director, Peter Gaynor.

"Imagine, working people wearing clothes or uniforms made using organic textiles like cotton grown with non-toxic fertilisers and by farmers who get paid fairly.

"Cotton is like gold to those who farm it. They depend on it. It is one of the world's biggest crops and yet so many of those who work to farm it get very little in return and that's before it's brought to the textile factories.

"Farmers who produce Fairtrade cotton get a decent price so they can provide for themselves and their families and in return they produce a higher quality product."

The Programme Director at the Rediscovery Centre, Roger Warburton, said they have noticed a lot more interest from people of all ages wanting to buy ethically sourced goods, including clothes.

"Many people want to know that the items they buy have not been produced in a way that hurt anyone and they also don't want something that is hurting the environment," he said.

“As the national centre for the circular economy, we strive toward a society that is fair, inclusive and that thrives within natural resource limits.

“We think Fairtrade cotton deserves to be on every workplace’s shopping list when they are purchasing workwear. The Rediscovery Centre is also proud to be among the places where the public can also source Fairtrade teas, coffees and chocolates in our café.”

Fairtrade Ireland said Fairtrade cotton is grown by around 41,000 farmers worldwide and in 2023, Fairtrade certified cotton production reached 48,000 metric tonnes – which is still less than one per cent of the 25 million tonnes of cotton grown annually.

Companies and organisations that want to make their work places more ethical by using Fairtrade cotton clothing and other products are urged to go to <https://www.fairtrade.ie/get-involved/fairtrade-at-work/> or to contact info@fairtrade.ie.

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For more information or interview requests please contact Fairtrade Ireland Executive Director Peter Gaynor on 01 475 3515 or at peter@fairtrade.ie.

And

Gerard Whelan, Founder of Sustainable Workwear, 087 9871311. info@sustainableworkwear.ie

Notes to editor:

Links to websites where people can buy clothes that use Fairtrade cotton:

<https://www.sustainableworkwear.ie/>
<https://www.ethicalsuperstore.com/>
<https://www.cws.com/en-IE/workwear>
<https://littlegreenradicals.com/en-ie>

Links to campaign websites:

<https://www.fairtrade.ie/get-involved/fairtrade-at-work/>
<https://www.fashionrevolution.org/>
www.rediscoverycentre.ie

Story of Fairtrade Cotton video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkZDqRq0GTg>

Panel about cotton:

Cotton is a natural fibre derived from the cotton plant, known for its softness, absorbency and versatility. It's used in a wide range of products, including clothing, textiles and it even some industrial applications like in the making of cash.

It is primarily grown in warm, temperate climates with major producing countries including India, China, the USA, Uzbekistan and Pakistan. Other countries in West Africa find it difficult to compete with subsidised cotton from the bigger producers.

It is believed that cotton use dates back 8,000 years. The industry is worth around \$50 billion a year, but there are challenges for the small-scale farmers behind this crop and for the environment.

Many cotton farmers depend on the middlemen who buy their cotton, often at prices below the cost of production. There are also issues with the environment and use of chemicals in the growing process. The incorrect handling of these hazardous chemicals among farmers and workers can result in major health issues. Child labour is also an issue.

The Fairtrade 'minimum price' provides a safety net in times of price volatility, while a Fairtrade premium is paid on top of the selling price to help improve pay and conditions.

Fairtrade farmers are also encouraged to adopt sustainable cotton production with protection for the environment.

A lot of Fairtrade cotton is also organic, which helps to protect land, soil and biodiversity.

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