



Growing Alternatives to Pricy Cotton

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As cotton prices surge, companies are trying harder to duplicate the feel of the commodity with cheaper, durable fabrics.

The latest: Naturally Advanced Technologies.

It just inked a ten-year deal with Hanesbrands to supply them with flax fibers.

Flax, often hailed as a "super food," is emerging as a leading alternative to cotton.

Naturally Advanced Technology developed a process to make flax more attractive to the fashion world by its patented CRAiLAR process. It makes flax's stiff fibers, which is also the source for linen, softer.

"Flax can be used in every application where cotton is currently used. It has the same hand feel as cotton," said Ken Barker, Naturally Advanced Technologies CEO. "It is stronger than cotton is, reduces shrinkage by 50 percent and keeps you cooler."

We're talking jeans, shirts, socks—pretty much everything but undies. Barker says unlike cotton, flax fibers create a heavier yarn and isn't viable for intimates or finer shirts.

Major retailers such as Lucky and Banana Republic, are selling flax-cotton blends this season. At Banana Republic, you can pick up a 65 percent flax, 35 percent cotton woman's shirt for \$59.90.

But, will adding more flax to the fashion diet give it a little roughage?

Wall Street Strategies Equity Research Analyst Brian Sozzi said, "I think the product and process certainly has merit considering how far and how fast cotton prices have run. The introduction of alternatives defines what a marketplace is, and over time the use of technologically engineered clothing should help mitigate cost pressures borne from the depletion of natural resources."

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