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Horse Play At Kelly Hosiery (page 12)

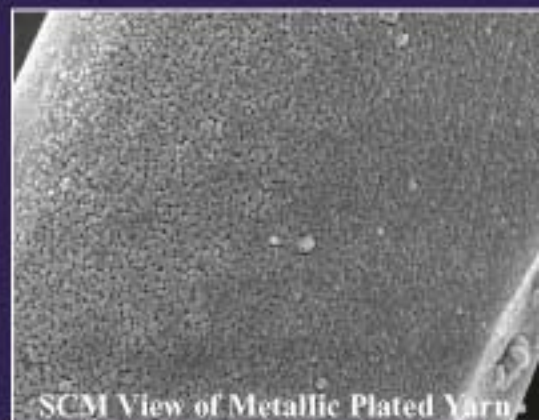
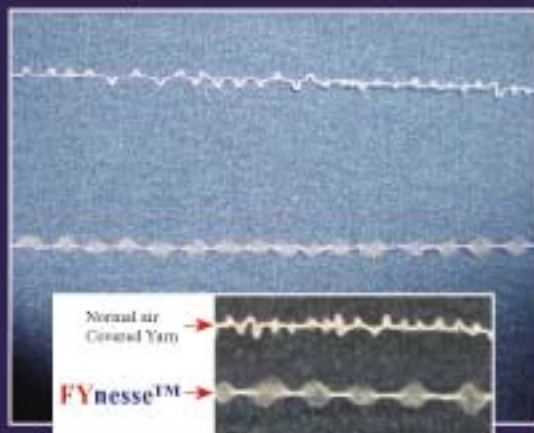
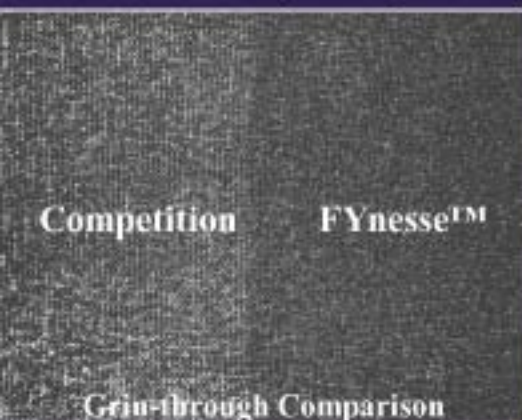
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*The ONLY monthly magazine
dedicated to the hosiery industry*

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legislative column

by PAUL FOGLEMAN, Director, Hosiery Governmental Affairs Council

If nanotechnology is going to create a new world for the U.S. textiles industry, Greensboro, N.C., wants to be its capitol.

Thanks to a collaborative effort involving the University of North Carolina-Greensboro and North Carolina A&T State University, nanotechnology will have a specialized education and research center. It promises to bring international attention to the state's Piedmont Triad.

The Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering, also called the Nanotechnology School, is being developed in a new Gateway University Research Park. It will connect researchers, businesses, students and community members.

General Assembly's wisest investments.

♦♦♦

Two of the Senate's top leaders will be wrapping up their careers in the Chamber. Appropriations Co-chairs Walter Dalton and Kay Hagan have set their sights on bigger jobs. Hagan is working to unseat U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole and Dalton is hoping to be the next lieutenant governor. Sen. Linda Garrou of Winston-Salem, the third co-chair, is running unopposed.

Hagan has been a strong force in the Legislature. She helped pushed for funds to launch the Nanotechnology School. Reps. Maggie Jeffus and

Alma Adams, both of Greensboro and both House appropriations chairs, also put their weight behind the school.

Sen. John Kerr of Goldsboro, co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee, is retiring. He comes from a family with deep roots in state government, with his father serving in the

Senate in the 1950s. Sen. David Hoyle, a pro-business Democrat and Finance Co-chair, is seeking re-election. Hoyle is credited with strengthening the funding for the hosiery and textiles centers.

♦♦♦

At the close of the upcoming short session, Sen. Fred Smith will be cleaning out his office. The Johnston County Republican is working hard for the GOP gubernatorial nomination. His biggest hurdle is defeating Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory who leads in polls despite entering the race at the last minutes.

On the Democratic side, polls show Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue and Treasurer Richard Moore in a virtual tie. Moore's ads holding Perdue responsible for past tax increases and budget problems have had an impact on TV viewers.

Hosiery executives know Perdue. She spoke at a Carolina Hosiery Association Dinner in 2000 and helped engineer funding for the Hosiery Technology Center. She has the backing of influential groups representing business, education, healthcare and law enforcement. ■

Building on the successful strategies of the Hosiery Technology Center, CEMS will also embrace trends having an impact on furniture, packaging, and foodservice.

Thanks to the involvement of business leaders in the Triad and influential legislators from the region, the North Carolina General Assembly in 2007 appropriated \$5 million for the school. The legislators signed off on \$58 million to follow.

The first candidates for master's degrees are to enroll this fall. Doctorate candidates are expected to be admitted in fall 2009.

The school is an example of a vision to capitalize on trends sweeping through manufacturing. Another example is the Center for Emerging Manufacturing Solutions (CEMS) at Catawba Valley Community College in Hickory. Building on the successful strategies of the Hosiery Technology Center, CEMS will also embrace trends having an impact on furniture, packaging, and foodservice. Dan St. Louis, the founding director of the Hosiery Technology Center, is participating in the organization of CEMS.

The Nanotechnology School, CEMS and the Textile Technology Center at Gaston College are embracing a new era for manufacturing. That era entails the flow of new ideas, focused research, and leadership in quality. They represent some of the

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The Hosiery Technology Center at the new Center for Emerging Manufacturing Solutions (CEMS) is supporting companies

with research and development, testing and sourcing, marketing and sales. From production to retailing, the center is engaged in supply chain services. That includes training and lean manufacturing strategies.

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Hosiery States' Legislators Face Taxing Decisions



Businesses should be watching their state legislatures more closely than ever this spring. That includes those in North Carolina and Alabama, home to major textiles companies and about 90 percent of hosiery operations.

It's budget time. With the U.S. economy probably in recession, lawmakers will be looking under every stone for revenue and opportunities to cut services. The constitutions of North Carolina and Alabama prohibit the borrowing of money to balance a budget. And that is a good thing.

Also, this is a major election year. Members of both political parties will be posturing, looking at their own political futures as they cast votes.

The end of the first half of Alabama's fiscal year began April 1 – April Fool's Day. It also marked the start of the second half of the Legislature's 2008 session. By constitution, the chambers must go home by May 19.

Both states are looking at declining sales taxes and flat revenue from income taxes.

At the same time,

population growth and larger elderly numbers are requiring more facilities and services. In urban areas such as Raleigh, Charlotte, Birmingham and Montgomery, student enrollment increases equate to scores of new schools each year.

Medicaid costs far outpace inflation. Then, as the U.S. economy changes, community colleges are trying to re-train thousands of people for 21st century employment.

The budget submitted by Alabama Gov.

Bob Riley proposes no increase over 2007 spending. This amounts to a 3 percent cut for K-12 schools and 13 percent cut for universities.

The Alabama General Fund budget is facing a \$40 million shortfall after the Legislature killed a proposed governor's bill to raise tax oil companies pay on natural gas from wells drilled off the Gulf Coast. Opponents argued such tax would discourage further investments. Gov. Riley, a Republican, said the legislature put the "interest of big oil over the interest of the people of Alabama."

Alabama state employees already have been guaranteed a 3.5 percent pay hike effective October 1. This is another hundred million dollar issue for the budget.

As the Alabama lawmakers prepare to go home, the North Carolina General Assembly will be getting ready for the "short session" which begins May 13 – one week after the primaries. Political tensions will be high.

North Carolina will be refining a \$21 billion budget which involves services for over 9 million residents. Wake County and Raleigh alone gained over 47,000 new residents in 2007. As a result of the primaries and announced retirements, the

House and Senate will have "lame duck" members who could cast unexpected votes outside party lines. This could be crucial with budget votes.

North Carolina, too, will be subject to hold-the-line spending. Business lobbying will be looking for specialized tax proposals that purport to "close loopholes."

With national conventions on the horizon, North Carolina legislators are expected to go adjourn by mid-July.

Beyond taxes, businesses will be looking at how the lawmakers address immigration. Environmental clean-up costs also an issue. Trying to simplify the maze of regulatory agencies again will be on the business agenda.

The costs of government continue to grow as does the cost of doing business. But the hosiery and textiles executives often think about the words of the late U.S. Sen. Russell Long of Louisiana. As chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Long said he constantly heard from lobbyists:

"Don't tax him. Don't tax me. Tax that guy behind the tree." ■

While it's difficult – if not impossible – to turn back the clock, politicians are trying to push the pendulum away from U.S. free trade agreements.

The raucous Democratic presidential primary campaigns have created divisions in Congress and cost one high-profile consultant his job. All over the cost of open-door trade to the U.S. economy.

Mark Penn, chief strategist for the campaign of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, was forced to resign because he met with officials from Columbia to promote their efforts for a free trade pact with the U.S. Penn was representing his public relations firm which was paid \$300,000 a year to lobby Congress. Then, following the ensuing furor, Columbia fired Penn's firm.

It was a bad weekend for Penn and the Clinton campaign. But did it signal a new climate in the nation's capitol?

The Columbian agreement has been pushed by the Bush administration. The apparent GOP nominee Sen. John McCain also favors a continuation of free-trade agreements. But both Sen. Barack Obama and Mrs. Clinton have criticized NAFTA and CAFTA. They insist they would demand "renegotiation" of the treaties if elected.

Mrs. Clinton especially has spotlighted the NAFTA agreement in blue-collar states, dancing around the fact it was adopted under her husband's administration.

Senate Finance Chairman Max Baucus (D-Montana) recently chastised business and labor leaders and Washington policy makers for ignoring "hard truths" on trade and helping create political gridlock.

Sen. Baucus's appeal for reconciliation was heard before the Mark Penn episode. It was timed to set the tone for a hearing on the Columbian pact which is expected to come up for a vote this summer. Sen. Baucus, whose committee has initial jurisdiction on trade, will urge action to rebuild consensus on the issue, beginning with more straightforward dialogue – and costs – that have come with lowering barriers to investment and trade, and more tightly integrating the U.S. into the global economy.

At this time, the Colombia deal faces a difficult road on Capitol Hill. Some Democrats complain little has been done to stem violence against labor organizers in Columbia. They also accuse the White House of foot dragging on measures that would help U.S. workers whose jobs are at

risk because of increased foreign competition.

Opposition is especially high in the House where trade unease boils. Alabama Rep. Robert Aderholt and N.C. Congressman Howard Coble have worked behind the scenes to head off agreements that hurt domestic hosiery and textiles producers.

In addition to Columbia, deals with Panama and South Korea face large hurdles. Top is the opposition of Sens. Obama and Clinton who for months have tried to capitalize on public concern that U.S. workers are getting a fair shake in the global marketplace. The announcement that the U.S. lost 80,000 jobs during March has raised concerns.



Baucus is pressing for compromises that would widen support for trade pacts. He wants legislation that would expand benefits to workers who lose their jobs because of foreign competition.

"To posit trade as against the American worker is neither fair nor true," Baucus asserts. He says U.S. policy makers must "resist quick and easy answers" when discussing trade and said U.S. trading partners should stop playing the "victim game" in trade disputes. He stresses the need to end the "us-versus-them mentality" in trade.

"Trade is either something you are for, or something you are against," he concludes. "You either wear the pro-trade mantle or you wear the scarlet letter of protectionism." ■

Congress Feels Heat Of Trade Fired By Campaign Rhetoric

Hosiery Products Enjoy Steady Sales During Economic Slowdown

by Charlene H. Carpenter
Assistant Editor

As consumer confidence sinks to an all-time low, hosiery manufacturers say they have yet to see a significant decline in their sales and that they don't expect legwear sales to take as big of a hit as sales of larger ticket items.

The Reason:

"People want to spend money, and socks are an inexpensive way to get something new and add some

say manufacturers polled by Trends.

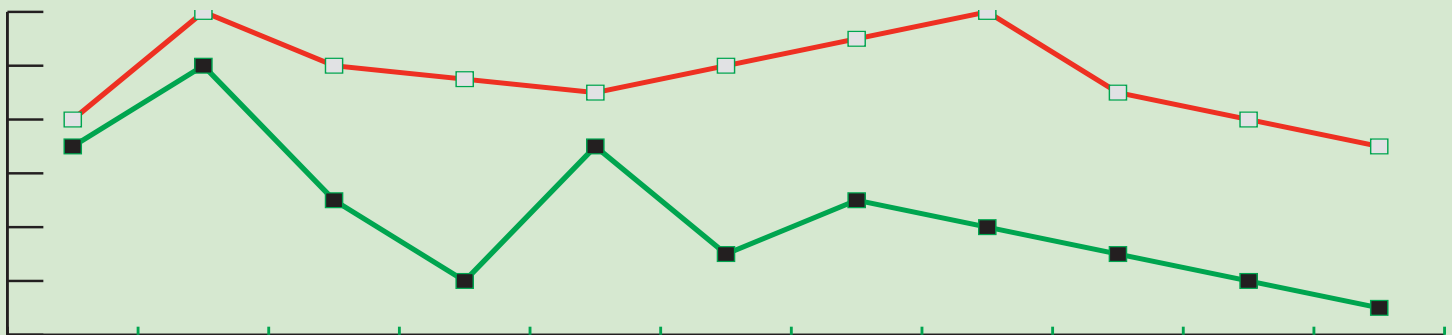
"Several retailers—Wal-Mart and Costco—are doing well while others are seeing some degree of slide in performance, and that results in them being a little conservative on the buying side," says Bill Redding, president of Acme-McCrary Corporation in Asheboro, N.C. "And, we are feeling their reaction to that market. For us, that translates that we are still fairly busy and still ahead of last year, but we are aware

says Redding.

"It will affect us somewhat, but we are not going to see double digit decreases like other fashion categories," adds Noreen Ewald, national director of sales and marketing for Mayo Knitting Mills of Tarboro, N.C. "Socks in general don't have huge swings like sheer hosiery because they are still a necessity that people will buy."

Wells Hosiery in Asheboro, expects a good year.

"Our sales have really grown



spice to their wardrobes. You don't have to buy a new suit. You can buy socks and spruce up an outfit. They can almost make an old pair of shoes feel new again," explains Ric Cabot of Cabot Hosiery in Northfield, Vt.

"Are sales going to go through the ceiling? No, I think everyone is going to be cautious in general," adds Brenda Tillman, director of design and merchandising for Commonwealth Hosiery in Randleman, N.C. "But, I think the economy would be a lot less likely to affect any accessory item than it would some other items."

The first part of 2007 has been very good for legwear sales, but retailers are buying conservatively,

that it will be through yearend before we see any change."

Adds Jon Shugart, president of W.Y. Shugart & Sons of Ft. Payne, Ala.: "I think the slow economy is slowing all of retail sales down. The retail sales figures projected growth rates have been adjusted back. During the last quarter of last year, we saw a downturn but we have been relatively busy since the beginning of the year."

With most retailers feeling the pinch, hosiery sales are bound to reflect it, but most manufacturers don't expect it to be that severe.

"My guess is that since hosiery had a little better last year and a little better this year than planned, that it will probably translate into a flat rather than a negative year,"

in the last several months, and looking at our forecasts, it will be a phenomenal year for hosiery," says Linda Measmer, director of design, research and development.

Lisa Elliott, vice president of Fine Line Hosiery in Randleman, N.C. says her company has had the best year it has had in three or four years, even though the economy is bad.

"Some of it is because we are acquiring work back that had been taken overseas. Some of it may be because the lines we are working on are ones people can better afford."

Adds Tillman: "I think we should be grateful that we are in a classification that doesn't tend to suffer as much as some others." ■

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World's Largest Retailer Puts Major Thrust Behind Sustainability

The nation's largest retailer has determined that environmental issues matter to U.S. consumers.


Wal-Mart is expanding Earth Day – officially April 22 – into a month-long marketing event, with major investments in print, TV, radio and online advertising. The theme: sustainability.

The campaign is extended to include in-store point-of-sale displays.

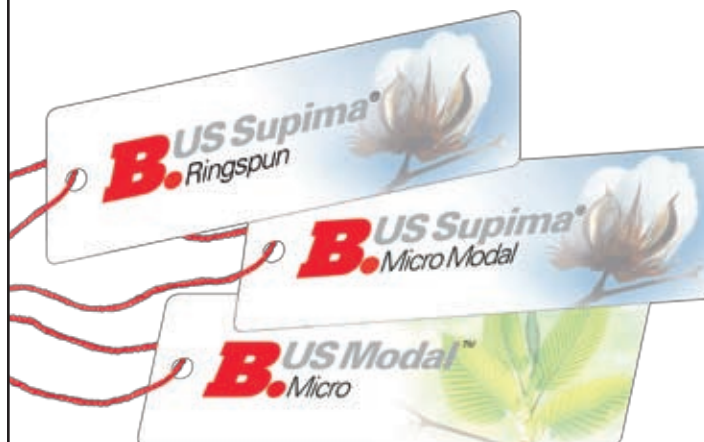
Joe Alexander, senior vice president of the Martin Agency which handles the Wal-Mart account, said the campaign is a business opportunity to “bring sustainability to the people.”

He added that while sustainability has been a big issue in larger American cities, it hasn't taken on the same importance in smaller communities and rural areas. With this campaign, “Wal-Mart is bringing sustainability to a place where it hasn't had a big impact,” Alexander asserted.

The Earth Month campaign is just the latest in a series of steps by Wal-Mart to bolster its sustainability program. The company has been testing more environmentally friendly stores in various location over the past few years. It also has a growing list of private label products in this area, among them compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Lee Scott, Wal-Mart president, has announced that Wal-Mart operations will adapt to alternative energy sources, including wind-powered turbines in the future. 

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Horse Play At Kelly Hosiery Makes Money In Niche Market

by Paul Fogleman
Editor

Twentieth century hosiery manufacturing produced a legacy of craftsmen.

Starting as apprentices in family-run companies, they developed the skills to make the highest quality of socks and hosiery in the world. They are still around and among them is Kelly Watts of Kelly Hosiery Mill near Hickory N.C.

Today Kelly and his wife, LaVonda, are shipping up to 2,500 dozens in 132-needle and 84-needle goods to vertical customers each week. But unlike most other greige suppliers, he has developed very specialized niche products. Socks for horses are among them. So are thigh-high 84-needle legwarmers for motorcycle riders.

The leg coverings for horses was a concept developed by Raymond Petterson, owner of Sox For Horses Inc. Petterson contacted Dan St. Louis, director of the Hosiery Technology Center, who brought Watts to the table. The “Whinny Warmers™” were created on 84-needle Bentley Komets and now are being marketed on the internet.

Petterson says the Whinny Warmers were in development for six years. He created some leg warmers for a mare he had rescued from auction. She suffered old bone, tendon and other connective tissue issues from a tough earlier life. He observed her discomfort with movement the first winter and searched for a drug free solution. After leg warmers were applied, the horse began walking out into the pasture. “She kicked up her heels and moved into nearly a graceful, fluid trot,” Petterson noted.

Added to the line are Summer Whinnys™. They are a lighter sock which protect horses from summer flies. He plans to roll out IttyBitty Whinnys™ for miniature horses. The yarn from Hickory Throwing Company is made in America from recycled cloth – mainly T shirts. “My company won’t be another reason for American jobs going off to China,” Petterson allows.

Watts is not bothered by the low



Folded sock, ready to pull over hoof



LaVonda and Kelly Watts

volume of Whinny Warmer shipments. He does not discount possibilities for niche markets.

Kelly and LaVonda also have developed Kelly Riders, a line that includes socks for motorcyclists. They are available as over-the-knee, mid-thigh, and thigh-high in an assortment of colors. In addition to website offerings, Kelly Riders are sold at festivals and motorcycle rallies. They also are sold to equestrians.

The Kelly Riders program includes 132-needle and 84-needle socks made on Uniplet Angles for skiing, bicycling, and



snowmobiling. They are produced with acrylic and polyester yarns.

Watts, like his father, Joe Watts, was raised in the atmosphere of a hosiery mill. He wants to stay in the industry for the long term: "It's what I know." It also is a livelihood for him, his wife, and their two employees. Like other contract knitting and finishing companies, Kelly Hosiery depends on orders from large vertical mills and has developed strong relations with his customers.

Still he wonders about the future of globalization. He has approached large companies who acknowledge U.S. mills can be price-competitive. But they want to source goods from Asian companies capable of large volume.

As a small company with low overhead he can weather the ups and downs. He also has an incentive to work with



entrepreneurs who are creating niche products. History has shown that some become highly successful, especially in sports.

St. Louis says people like Watts have an important role for the future of U.S. hosiery. "They can take new ideas and turn them into a reality. It is not feasible for larger mills to do this." ■

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At Retail

They Mean Green In Shopping Lingo

Gen Y and Millennials – the under 28 shoppers – are still buying while the economy continues to lose traction. But they have requirements for their purchases of apparel:

They Want It Fashionable. And They Want It Green.

Green is gorgeous. High end designers such as Linda Loudermilk and Stella McCartney and mass marketers like Nike and Levi Strauss are moving to environmentally friendly clothing. Add to the list trend-setting retailers including Nau and H&M. Even Wal-Mart is touting a line of T-shirts “made from old soda pop bottles” i.e. polyester.

The Gen Y and Millennials driving the trend represent about \$520 billion in buying power and they are willing to pay more for organic and fair-trade goods, according to pollsters.

Retail consumer strategist firm Iconoculture reports younger women especially are tuned into the green movement. The consultant has identified four distinct shopping types:

Living Green consumers who have embraced the whole concept of the environmental lifestyle and is driven by dedication, purity and awareness. She’s buying clothes made of recycled fabrics.

Core fashionistas “who are looking to build up the green in their fashion portfolio.” She’s not looking for the hemp dress or tire-retread sandals. She is picking and choosing.

Walking Green consumers: trend followers want to belong to a greater community.

Spending Green, the shoppers who buy green clothes because that senses of exclusivity and entitlement are important to her. For her buying green represents a luxury, not any kind of sacrifice.

Banana Republic Touts Green Collection

Banana Republic has joined national chain retailers pushing a “green” image.

But the question is how green? Light green? Emerald?

Banana Republic touts a new Green Collection made with sustainable materials such as organic cotton, soy silk and bamboo – and spandex. A halter dress, for example, has braided hemp straps, but it also has bra-like pads sewn in the bodice made of rubber.

A knit tank top is made of fabric that is just 5 percent soy silk. Call it diet green.

Other U.S. retailers also are taking baby steps into the green movement. Being perceived as environmentally correct is just as important as being dark green, consumers seem to conclude. Especially if fashion and price are correct.

NRF Supports U.S.-Columbia Trade Agreement

The National Retail Federation has urged Congress and President Bush to work together to enact legislation implementing the U.S.-Columbia Free Trade Agreement.

“The agreement would ensure that U.S. economic policy can continue to focus on opening foreign markets and providing Americans the clear benefits that come from expanding commerce with other countries,” a spokesman from NRF said.

President Bush signed a letter in early April formally transmitting the Columbia Free Trade Agreement to Congress. Under “fast track” rules on trade agreements, lawmakers have 90 days to approve or reject the legislation without amendments.

Retailers Spring Sales All Wet

With one exception, the nation’s leading retailers reported March sales were down. An early Easter and storms over most of the country didn’t help.

Highlighting the weakness was Gap Inc. where same store sales were off 18 percent, more than double what was expected. Old Navy, a Gap division, was off 27 percent.

Wal-Mart Stores reported a 4 percent increase in same stores sales, the lone major retailer to show increases. J.C. Penney, Macy’s, and Nordstrom all were in negative territory.

Coke Launches Trash-2-Tees

“Rehash Your Trash” and “Make Your Plastic Fantastic” are two of the slogans that can be found on a new line of T-shirts made of recycled plastic bottles and cotton. Wal-Mart has teamed up with Coca-Cola. to launch the sustainable shirts for men and women.

The label inside each shirt will tell consumers how many bottles were recycled to make it. The men’s label says “4-Inside,” and the women’s label reads “3-Inside.” The tees are part of Coca-Cola’s “rPet” (recycled PET) branded sustainable-apparel and accessories collection launched last year.





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