

# Cotton On

why Fairtrade Matters

**Liz Earle**  
*Wellbeing*



Today we're slipping between the sheets to learn about the importance of organic cotton - for ourselves, the farmers who produce it, and the environment at large. I'm delighted to be joined by Rebecca Winckworth, co-founder of Irish organic cotton brand White & Green.

### **What got you into organic cotton, and what makes it so important?**

My first profession was as a singer and I travelled all over the world, mostly to Asia. I started to question why some countries had developed so much more quickly than others and in particular why resource-rich countries were economically poor and vice versa. International systems are quite unequal between developing and developed worlds. So I parked the singing career to go and study development. Through that I became very interested in the textiles industry and in particular cotton. It's the world's most important non-food crop - we use over 24 million tons annually - but it's also a highly polluting crop. As I learnt more, I started to think about how my behaviour as a consumer was contributing to the environmentally damaging industry. It's also an industry known for child labour, unsafe working conditions, and slavery because the greatest producers are based in developing countries. So I decided that if I was going to go into development, I wanted it to be in cotton, so together with my mother and sister, we created a beautiful brand selling cotton bed sheets without the misleading marketing ploys such as 'thread count' - which is not in itself an indicator of quality. It truly is about the quality of the cotton used in the first place that matters most. We use the finest, hand-picked organic cotton creating luxuriously soft sheets that wash and iron beautifully.

### **What are the implications for the communities farming non-organic cotton and for the environment in general?**

From seed to factory, our cotton is 100 per cent organic GOTS certified. This means no harmful chemicals or dyes are used in the process. Not only is this better for us, but it truly changes the lives of our farmers. Conventionally grown cotton accounts for 25 per cent of global pesticide use. An estimated 25 to 77 million agricultural workers suffer from acute pesticide poisoning causing rashes, cancer and even death. Our organic farmers enjoy a happier, healthier life along with better crop growth year on year.

### **Why is it so important to make sure the cotton we are buying is Fairtrade?**

It's about better prices and safe working conditions so our producers can plan for their futures. With Fairtrade, we have the power to change the world every day! We believe there are no excuses for inhumane practices. We simply pay a fair wage for fair work. In fact, our workers are paid the highest wages of all local textile factories. They receive pensions, medical insurance for their entire family, rent allowance, and sponsored meals. We also pay them a Fairtrade premium, which they spend on community projects. That's the way it should be: pure, chemical-free, and fair.

Find White & Green here - <https://www.whiteandgreen.ie/>