



Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future
Topical Lunch Summary

Title: Sustainable Fashion- The Threads of Transparency, Environment & Health, and Business Strategy

Hosts: Howard Chong (hc757) and Tasha L. Lewis (tll28)

Date: March 19, 2014

Attendees:

Allen, Eliza
Colvin, Alex
DiSalvo, Frank
Giebelhausen, Michael
Haith, Douglas
Kim, Hyosook
Lee, Hyun Young
Newell, Autumn
Ochshorn, Jonathan
Strebel, Paul
Touesnard, Monica
Travis, Alex
Trejo, Nidia
Verma, Rohit
Zhang, Yuxiao

This topical lunch featured a brief slide presentation prepared by hosts Tasha Lewis and Howard Chong in order to facilitate discussion related to the various aspects of the fashion supply chain impacting sustainability. The presentation began with dispelling the widely-held perception of the fashion industry as frivolous and not a serious area of consideration for sustainable issues. This was followed by statistics to demonstrate how significant the fashion industry is in terms of economic contribution, global trade, agriculture, and labor issues. These topics also tied fashion to larger sustainability issues and were presented as areas of opportunity to consider for sustainable research. Areas included the cultivation of organic cotton, the toxic chemical content of apparel, the importance of work in the apparel industry for developing nations, and the accumulation of post-consumer textile waste. To conclude the presentation, Prof. Lewis presented information to demonstrate the zeitgeist of the fashion industry in terms of sustainable issues – this included consumer data to highlight the consumer’s desire for a sustainable rating index for apparel, as well as major efforts made by fashion brands to support sustainability in their supply chains.

After the presentation, the discussion started off with a question about the impact of secondhand clothing exported from the United States on the economies of developing



Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future
Topical Lunch Summary

countries. Discussion followed regarding projects that some attendees are conducting in African nations, including textile and apparel manufacturing in Lesotho and cotton production in Zambia. Topics from this portion of the discussion included the possible exposure of textile and apparel workers in Lesotho to toxic chemicals and the impact that higher (and often unstable) global cotton prices have on food insecurity in Zambia when farmers convert from food to cotton cultivation. The group also moved into a discussion of the viability of organic cotton versus other fibers, how to manage textile waste as an energy source and the need for overall systemic change in the fashion supply chain, particularly the role and value of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and its Higg Index. There was also a brief discussion related to domestic textile and apparel production in New York State. Due to the presence of a major international fashion city, as well as numerous fiber farms through the state, it was suggested that linkages could be made to support local economies.