Most big users failing on cotton sustainability

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Most companies using cotton do nearly nothing to improve environmental sustainability in its supply, environmental groups said on Tuesday, citing a report by an online green consumer site.

Traditional farming of cotton, the second-biggest raw material for textile, makes heavy use of pesticides and water.

Research by Rank a Brand showed 29 of the estimated 37 biggest cotton users scored red in the survey of policy, sourcing, use and traceability, the report commissioners the World Wildlife Fund, Solidaridad and Pesticide Action network UK said in a joint statement.

The world's biggest furniture retailer IKEA was the only company scoring green with 12 of a maximum 19.5 points, followed by apparel retailers H&M and C&A with nine points.

The commissioners said around 13 percent of cotton production can be classed as more sustainable, but less than a fifth of it is actually sold as more sustainable. The rest is sold as conventional cotton due to lack of demand.

"Reasons for low uptake given by companies include low consumer demand, complexity of their supply chains and additional costs," they said. "Low uptake risks demotivating farmers and hindering lasting change in the textile sector."

Several sustainable cotton standards have been developed in recent decades. In the Rank a Brand report, standards judged sustainable were Better Cotton, Cotton made in Africa, Organic, and Fairtrade. Only publicly available information was used in scoring company performance, the environmental groups said.

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