WHERE FASHION + FIBER MEET

THE MISSING LINK

GRACE WEIR
Fashion Design

University of Cincinnati’s College of Design Art Architecture and Planning
As the fashion industry begins to see more clearly the effect they have on the environment, many designers are taking strides to become more sustainable in their production methods. While these efforts are important, many fail to consider the origins of the “eco-friendly” natural fiber options that brands are quickly adopting. Thus, placing less value on farming and equality for the stewards of our land. This research strives to examine the relationship between fashion designer and fiber farmer and the gaps that may exist.
Where does the gap between fiber farmer and fashion designer exist?

How do we evaluate what inequities exist between fiber farmers and fashion designers?

Where are there opportunities to create connections and help close this gap?
Interviews with Farmers, Fashion Designers, and Sustainability Experts

Brittany Dickenson
- Fashion Designer
- Sustainability Advocate

Angela Damman
- Fashion Designer & Owner of Angela Damman Yucatan
- Henequen & Sansevieria Farmer

Max Holden
- Flax & Natural Dye Farmer

Geana Sieburger
- Fashion Designer & Owner of GDS Cloth Goods
- Sustainability Advocate

Liz Ricketts
- Fashion Designer
- Hemp Farmer
- Founder of The OR Foundation

Sandy Fisher
- Flax Farmer
- Weaver

Jess Boeke
- Founder of The Rust Belt Fibershed
- Natural Dyer & Owner of Drift Lab Textile Co.
What does your textile/fiber/farming/design education look like?

What have your interactions with farmers/designers looked like?

In what ways does fiber inform your final product?

What is the most difficult aspect of farming/designing?

What is the most rewarding aspect of farming/designing?

In what ways do you practice sustainability in your work?

What do you wish the general public knew about farming/designing?

What do you feel inhibits farmers and designers from having a more connected and direct relationship?
**Comparisons of Fashion Companies Website’s Approaches to Fiber**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANY NAME</th>
<th>MENTIONS SUSTAINABILITY</th>
<th>MENTIONS FIBER</th>
<th>MENTIONS FARMER (SPECIFICALLY)</th>
<th>MENTIONS FARMING PRACTICES</th>
<th>MENTIONS FARMS (GENERALY)</th>
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**Primary Investigation: Company Comparisons**
COMPANY COMPARISONS:

APPROACHES TO FIBER

FEW INTRODUCE THE FARMER

MANY TALK ABOUT FIBER

SOME ADMIT THEY HAVE NO IDEA OF THE ORIGIN OF THEIR FIBER
SECONDARY RESOURCES:

* 2020 Fibershed Annual Report
* USDA Economic Research Service Reports
* Ellen MacArthur Foundation Publications
* Textile Exchange’s *Preferred Fiber and Materials: Market Report 2020*
* *Sustainable Fashion & Textiles* by Kate Fletcher
* *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* by Sven Beckert
* *A Stitch in Time: The Cleveland Garment Industry* by Sean Martin
* *Special Crops in Ohio Before 1850* by Robert Leslie Jones
Connecting with farmers was challenging during this research. This was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and limited scope of my own network.

I was able to use past connections and local community members to gather resources for the Fashion Meets Fiber Flax Program and connect with potential interviewees.

Social distancing and travel restrictions made visiting farms and conducting in-person interviews impossible. Inability to gain hands on research and knowledge was a limitation of this preliminary investigation.

I was able to connect with more people outside of my immediate area due to the virtual nature of the interviews.

My inability to travel allowed for a much broader scope in types of research, such as the website comparisons.
FINDINGS

※ There exists a clear gap between farmer and designer and often little to no direct communication between the two groups.

※ There is a lack of education amongst fashion designers about fiber, farmer, and even textile.

※ Farmers rarely gain acknowledgement or are only abstractly mentioned by fashion companies.

※ Fashion companies are beginning to put more pressure on fiber farms to transition to more sustainable methods, but they fail to consider both the financial expense of that venture and that there are few widely dispersed resources to cultivate that transition making it feel impossible for many farmers.

※ For designers, discovering who farmed the fiber that makes up any given textile can also often prove to be an impossible task.

※ To understand, relate to, or empathize with someone's life can add value to their life, your life and your products.

※ It is clear that education and providing local connections can help close both the information and social gaps that exist between the two groups.
FROM HERE:
FASHION MEETS FIBER FLAX PROGRAM

Summer 2021
A program designed to connect fashion students to the origins of their textiles
With the support of the Rust Belt Fibershed
Participants will experience planting, harvesting, processing, spinning and weaving
Provide opportunities to connect with regional farmers and farms
**METHODS + APPROACH**

* **FIBERSHED**
  - Regional Fiber Economies
  - Soil to Soil

* **CIRCULAR FASHION**

* **DESIGN IN PLACE**
Aims

Our hope is that students who participate gain more knowledge about the fibers that they interact with daily and about the lives of farmers who cultivate these fibers.

- A better understanding of natural fibers
- A better understanding of the lives of farmers
- A better understanding of the history of flax fiber in Ohio and textile industries of the Rust Belt
- An appreciation for farmers and farming
- Feel more of a connection with fiber and farmer
- A confidence in exploring fiber and connecting with farmers
- A better understanding in the processing that natural fibers go through

How

- A survey given at the beginning and end of the program
- Ask at the end of each meeting to share one thing they’ve learned or experienced regarding the cultivation of fiber
- A textile made by each participant
Plant Seeds

May 2nd

Farmer Speaker

May 16th

Build Processing Equipment

June 6th

Volunteer on Regional Farm

June 20th

Harvest Half of Fiber and Begin Retting Process

July 11th

Harvest Half of Fiber for Seed

August 1st

Process Fiber

August 22nd

Spin Fiber into Yarn

September 12th

Weave Yarn into Textile

October 10th

✻ Dates subject to change based on student and farmer availability
IN OUR SMALL WAY AND IN OUR DESIGN COMMUNITY WE HOPE TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR BETTER CONNECTING WITH THE STEWARDS OF OUR LAND, TO SEE THE IMMENSE VALUE OF THIS WORK AND BETTER UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEMS NATURAL, SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL AT PLAY.
SPECIAL THANKS TO:

FACULTY ADVISOR: ASSISTANT PROFESSOR ASHLEY KUBLEY

INTERVIEWEES:
LIZ RICKETTS (HEMP FARMER AND FOUNDER OF THE OR FOUNDATION)
ANGELA DAMMAN (HENEQUEN AND SANSEVIERIA FARMER AND DESIGNER)
MAX HOLDEN (FLAX AND NATURAL DYE FARMER)
SANDY FISHER (FLAX FARMER AND WEAVER)
JESS BOEKE (FOUNDER OF THE RUST BELT FIBER SHED AND NATURAL Dyer)
BRITTANY DICKENSON (FASHION DESIGNER AND SUSTAINABILITY ADVOCATE)
GEANA SIEBURGER (FASHION DESIGNER AND OWNER OF GDS CLOTH GOODS)

THE COLLEGE OF DESIGN ARCHITECTURE ART AND PLANNING
MYRON E. ULLMAN JR. SCHOOL OF DESIGN
FASHION DESIGN PROGRAM
THE RUST BELT FIBERSHED
AND KAREN KAHLE OF THE CIVIC GARDEN CENTER OF GREATER CINCINNATI