

# Thinking outside the boll



Photo courtesy of Picador Creative

Before David Barton moved to Lubbock, Texas, last fall to continue his education at Texas Tech University, he had never seen a cotton field.

“I looked out of the car window and asked my friend, ‘Is that cotton?’” Barton said. “I never really thought of where cotton comes from.”

Barton also never paid attention to what his clothes were made of. According to the National Cotton Council, one bale of cotton produces 1,217 men’s t-shirts or 313,600 \$100 bills. Each year, more than two billion t-shirts and 520 million pairs of jeans are sold worldwide making it likely that some of Barton’s clothes were cotton.

Mary Jane Buerkle, director of public affairs and communications at Plains Cotton Growers, Inc. (PCG), said Lubbock County sits in one of the largest continuous growing cotton patches in the world. The agricultural industry is one-third of the area’s economy and within 100 miles of Lubbock, cotton makes up 80 percent of that agricultural economic activity.

The cotton industry is not just an economic driver in the Texas High Plains, it is a way of life. Dahlen Hancock, a fourth generation cotton producer from New Home, Texas, grew up surrounded by cotton. Hancock was unsure of his desire to live the farm life so he decided to attend college for two years then work. After a few years in the work force, he soon realized he missed the country life.

“I came back in 1980 to farm and found 160 acres of land to rent,” Hancock said. “Thirty-five years later, I’m still here.”

Hancock said he now has a diverse operation of 6,000 total acres, where he produces cotton, corn and sorghum.

Cotton has always been a constant in the High Plains, but when cotton market prices spiked in 2010, a shift occurred. The increased price of cotton caused a change in fabric manufacturing. Suddenly, more and more clothes were being made of synthetic fibers.

“When the shift happened, it became cheaper to manufacture synthetics,” Stacey Gorman, director of communications for the Cotton Board, said. “But since that time, consumers have spoken and they want more cotton back in their closets.”

The promotion of cotton has become even more significant in recent years. In 2012, PCG sold Texas Tech University the idea of celebrating the cotton industry at a Red Raider football game. Buerkle said the “Celebrate Cotton” game is a great opportunity to create awareness about cotton.

“We will continue to ensure that as many people know, especially in the Texas High Plains, just how important cotton is to this area,” Buerkle said.

Cotton is not only vital to the High Plains, but the entire country. According to Cotton Incorporated, the U.S. leads the world in cotton exportation and is third in cotton production. Cotton, Inc. is the country’s domestic advertising and research promoting association.

Cotton, Inc. was created in 1970 to battle market loss due to consumers craze with synthetic fibers. Since then, Cotton, Inc. has been pivotal throughout the years in advertising cotton clothing.

In 1976, Cotton, Inc. was an Olympic sponsor promoting 100 percent cotton jeans with the slogan, “If it’s not 100 percent cotton, it’s not denim.” On Thanksgiving

Day in 1989, Cotton, Inc. launched its largely successful campaign, “The touch, the feel of cotton, the fabric of our lives.” The Fabric of Our Lives campaign ran for over 15 years and was retired in 2004. In 2009, The Fabric of Our Lives campaign was re-launched featuring celebrities such as Zooey Deschanel and Miranda Lambert.

In April 2015, Cotton, Inc. launched its newest campaign, “Cotton. It’s your favorite for a reason.” Gorman said the authenticity of this campaign resonates with consumers. According to the Cotton Board, the purpose of this campaign is to make consumers aware of what their clothes are made of and shed light on why cotton is their



Photo courtesy of Stacey Gorman at the Cotton Board.

favorite fabric.

"I wear cotton because I believe in cotton," Hancock said. "I know cotton is produced responsibly, sustainability, and with a smaller carbon footprint than synthetic fibers."

**"You will not find anything more versatile, more comfortable, or produced more sustainably. Cotton is the total package."**

Aside from being a cotton producer, Hancock also serves as president for Cotton Council International. CCI promotes the exportation of U.S. grown cotton fiber. Through this leadership position, Hancock has received the opportunity to travel the world to promote U.S. cotton.

"I found my niche in the world being a spokesperson for cotton," Hancock said. "It's easy for me, because I live it."

Hancock said the key to reversing the shift from cotton fiber is to create awareness. It is as necessary today as it was in 1970 to demand more cotton from manufacturers.

"I became involved in the promotion of cotton, because I wanted to give back to the industry and make a difference," Hancock said. "Right now, the cotton industry is going through a valley, but history has shown us that fashion is cyclical."


Buerkle said it is imperative that consumers request cotton products, because if not, retailers may not see it as an important stock.

"You will not find anything more versatile, more comfortable, or produced more sustainably," Buerkle said. "Cotton is the total package when it comes to clothing, and ultimately you're supporting our local producers."

Cotton is more than a crop to the U.S. and the High Plains, it is a symbol of livelihood.

"Producers' emotional attachment to cotton stems from the fact that these are family farms, family operations, personal livelihoods," Buerkle said. "That naturally makes you more attached to it and more passionate about it."

Barton said he moved to Lubbock to continue his education in the medical field, but never imagined becoming emerged in the culture of cotton.

"After moving to Lubbock, I have definitely become more aware of cotton," Barton said. "West Texans are crazy about their cotton, their passion has made me take notice in what I wear." 

## Cotton Incorporated History



1973  
Cotton, Inc. seal is introduced. It is one of the most recognizable brands in the country.



1976  
Cotton, Inc. was an olympic sponsor promoting 100 percent cotton jeans.

*"If it's not 100% cotton, it's not denim."*



1984  
Cotton, Inc. launches "True Performance" campaign.



1989  
On Thanksgiving Day, Cotton, Inc. launches new television campaign to 200 million viewers.

*"The touch, the feel of cotton, the fabric of our lives."*



2004  
Cotton, Inc. retires its largely successful "The Fabric of Our Lives" campaign.

2009

Cotton, Inc. re-launches its "The Fabric of Our Lives" campaign featuring celebrities like, Zooey Deschanel and Miranda Lambert.



2010  
Cotton, Inc. celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with "Forty Years of Progress" campaign.

2015

Cotton, Inc. launches new, authentic campaign. "Cotton. It's your favorite for a reason."



**{ YASMIN REY }**  
**BIG LAKE, TEXAS**