



Wool Excels at the IWTO Congress

As evidence of the devastating impact of plastics and synthetic fibres on the planet continues to mount, the time for wool has come

BRUSSELS, 18 APRIL 2019 - Combining Italy's rich wool heritage with the latest research and developments in wool applications, the 88th Congress of the International Wool Textile Organisation (IWTO) concluded last week in Venice, Italy.

More than 320 delegates, representing all stages of the global wool textile pipeline, attended the annual three-day event. Of these, 25 delegates attended as part of IWTO's Young Professionals Programme, which has welcomed more than 100 young members of the industry since 2012.

The third day of the Congress was hosted by Benetton, one of the best-known fashion companies in the world, at its headquarters in Treviso, while a visit to The Marzotto Group, a global leader in the production of high quality fabrics for men's and women's clothing, provided insight into one of the biggest users of fine wool.

The programme highlighted developments in wool traceability, transparency in the supply chain, and research on wool's contributions to health and wellness, but sustainability took centre stage.

"The time for wool is now," said keynote speaker Livia Firth, Co-founder and Creative Director of Eco-Age, as she commented on the devastating impact of plastic and synthetic fibres in the world.

The subject was returned to throughout the three-day event, notably by Evelyne Orndorff, Senior Textiles Engineer at the NASA Johnson Space Center.

"In space, nothing is disposable," Ms Orndorff told delegates. Wool baselayers won out in NASA's independent investigations not only for their ease of care and ability to continue to smell fresh after repeated wears, but due to wool's "human factors" – "The longer we stay in space," she said, "the more important the human factors of comfort, odour, static, and preference become."

That the merits of wool surpass competing fibres, comes as no surprise to those inside the industry, yet "the very genuine message of environmental excellence that wool carries is in danger of being swamped by spuriously well-funded messages from the inherently unsustainable," warned IWTO President Peter Ackroyd in his opening address.

"It is entirely ethically possible for anyone who wishes to abstain from meat, fish and dairy to use wool for the well-being of the planet," Mr Ackroyd said. "The revival of ethics in lifestyle and fashion mean choices that last and stand the test of time, without in any way contributing to a global eco imbalance.

"As one of the leading supporters of the Campaign for Wool, Vivienne Westwood, so aptly said, BUY LESS, BUY WELL, BUY WOOL.

“The words ‘retro’ and ‘vintage’ have now entered the fashion world’s vocabulary and no longer is it seen as un-trendy to wear one’s father’s coat. Quite the contrary: things are here to stay!”

Wool for the planet – and for people

Along with its intrinsic links to sustainability, wool contributes in many ways to human health and wellbeing.

Beginning with Woolcool’s presentation on how wool insulation provides more stable climate control for international shipment of vaccines, a session devoted to Health and Wellness also featured research into the ways in which wool baselayers provide a more stable microclimate for eczema sufferers.

The session concluded with a presentation of NASA’s rigorous studies testing the merits of different fibres for the conditions of life in space, along with Armadillo Merino’s occasionally graphic footage of the consequences of omitting wool baselayers from next-to-skin clothing for tactical operators and professionals performing in high risk environments.

Other sessions covered wool market intelligence with speakers Joe Farren of British Wool and Giovanni Schneider of The Schneider Group, sustainability with Dr Paul Swan, Harriet Vocking of Eco-Age and Giorgio Todesco of Marzotto Wool Manufacturing; retail insights with Heinz Zeller of Hugo Boss and Marshall Allender of Campaign for Wool; and wool interiors with Ennio Santagiuliana of Lanerossi.

The 89th annual IWTO Congress will be held in Tongxiang, China, 18-20 May 2020.

About IWTO

With a worldwide membership encompassing the wool pipeline from farm to retail, the IWTO represents the interests of the global wool trade. By facilitating research and development and maintaining textile industry standards, IWTO ensures a sustainable future for wool. The annual IWTO Congress is one of the highlights of the wool industry calendar. To learn more about IWTO and its activities, visit www.iwto.org.

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