

hessnatur expands Offer of Organic Silk Articles to America

The Hess Natur-Textilien GmbH in Butzbach/Hesse – since more than 30 years trailblazer concerning “Green Clothing” – offers besides clothes made from organic cotton and wool also organic silk for women, beginning fall/winter 2008, for the first time in the USA. Since two years already the silk lingerie and a big part of the basic silk collection is made of organic silk. The about 90 samples are designed by designers from their own house and are presented in the catalogues, the stores as well as on the homepage www.hess-natur.com.

Starting in September, due to the great response on the German-speaking market, also an assortment of Organic Silk-items will be offered in the US-mail order catalogue. As Textination learned in an interview with Rolf Heimann, (rolf.heimann@hess-natur.de) director Innovation and Ecology with a specialist team of 7 experts, from hessnatur, that hessnatur works here together with the seller and supplier China. The Asian country has supposedly the greatest competency with this natural product and the best know-how (silk is being produced in China since 5,000 years). The same goes for hemp and cashmere from this source. Big silk producers like India and Thailand are according to Rolf Heimann not able to deliver silk in as high a quality as China. For their path to China had therefore for the enterprise not reasons of price and cheap worker’s wages been determining but quality considerations.

They are co-operating via a Swiss partner in the Chinese province Sichuan with companies, who are finishing besides organic silk-fabrics also hemp- and high quality

cashmere weaves for clothing parts for the German natural textile company.

The worldwide first and so far only plant, which offers and ships organic silk in the form of clothing parts, is located in Central China – according to Heimann. Organic silk is supposedly 20% more expensive compared to conventional silk and has become even more expensive this year by some percent points. This, however, is not passed on to the consumer, since they are orienting with the pricing mostly on market prices for qualitatively comparable “normal” silk products.

The silk, spun by silk worm moths with controlled biological feed (mulberry leaves), is, however, according to Heimann, by far more pure, finer and longer than the conventional one. The mulberry leaves – the food for the silk worm moths – come from mulberry tree plantations, which are not sprayed with pesticides and also not with defoliation chemicals. The cocoons are cleaned without the usual formaldehyde. The organic silk extraction is very work intensive, since the silk worm moths have to be fed several times a day and their surroundings have to be cleaned very thoroughly.

Facing the discussion about worldwide decreasing agricultural areas (tightening of the food production) by increasing industrialisation and climate changes (desertification due to over-exploitation of the forests) they pointed out that the mulberry tree plantations in China can survive on inferior grounds. hessnatur is working consequently for the realization and

observance of the regulations of a fair production.

They do not settle for offering environmentally compatible, ecologically pure natural clothing. Through close contacts to the production plants they know the problems of the workers. According to this guideline they also homed in on the suppliers of the organic silk collection in China; this country has lately come more under fire for the not socially compatible working conditions in the production plants there.

Heimann stressed in the interview that hessnatur makes sure with their clothing suppliers in China that the employees there – mostly women – do not have to work more than 60 hours per week and also have their overtime paid for. And the conditions at the work place also to have conform to Western social standards. Besides in-house controls by hessnatur they introduced a complaint system

for the workers. Here the employees can apply to a neutral agency on location. This way problems at the workstation and with superiors can be publicised without having to worry about consequences from the employer. In a further step the plants will be monitored over the Fair Wear Foundation (FWF), located in Amsterdam, which just in Shanghai has a regional office with three employees. This conducts in the Chinese plants, working for hessnatur, independent check-ups, so-called Audits. The organisation is an initiative of Dutch branch associations of the textile industry, trade unions and non-governmental corporations.

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