

# FEATURES

Photo courtesy of Allbirds



Photo courtesy of Outerknown



Bethany Mallet of Outerknown



Hana Kajimura of Allbirds



Rachel Lincoln of PrAna

LET **LOVE** OF THE PLANET  
AND PEOPLE **INSPIRE** YOU

By Daniella Platt

**T**he idea that new collection each season is simply wasteful is what originally motivated pro-surfer Kelly Slater to create a 100% sustainable collection. Slater's brand, Outerknown, joins the spotlight with PrAna and Allbirds to pave the way for fashion industry sustainable solutions. Weaving a thread of love for protecting our planet and shaping practices for the better brings these brands in harmony. Sustainability is no longer just a passing trend. Here's a look at their missions to inspire mindful brand strategies for all brands.

## Outerknown

Slater and designer John Moore co-founded Outerwear with a focus on sustainability. Rooted in surf culture, Slater's questioning of what he puts *in* his body led him to question what he puts *on* his body.

"I felt a sense of responsibility to make nice, respectable clothing that lasts," Slater shared. The principles set forth by the brand are designed to establish a connection with customers on the value of their clothing and to make durable, desirable products that stand the test of time.

The brand follows the standards of the Fair Labor Association (FLA), which lays out ethical guidelines for brands on labor and sourcing. The FLA principles span categories like workplace standards, monitoring and functioning grievance mechanisms.

But what's unique about Outerknown's fabrications? Nearly 90% of the brand's assortment is made of organic cotton, recycled polyester or recycled nylon and hemp, according to Bethany Mallet, director of design. Organic cotton eliminates waste in farming, diverts waste in landfills and reduces water consumption. Its swim trunks are made from wool, which is naturally biodegradable. S.E.A. jeans are made in a clean denim facility using less water, fewer chemicals and organic cotton. If the jeans wear out, Outerknown will patch and repair them.

## PrAna

As a brand that began in a garage as a collection for climbing and yoga, PrAna touts an ethos of sustainability at its core. The brand is recognized as the first brand to certify fair trade apparel, and in 2011, it had the first fair-trade T-shirt.

"We are the coolest brand no one has heard of," said Rachel Lincoln, director of sustainability for PrAna.

Since the brand is plastic-free, most garments are packaged in a roll, "like sushi or a sausage," and tied with recyclable paper. Its hang tags are 100% post-consumer waste content and printed with soy ink.

The brand also uses Tencel's certified and biodegradable fiber. In 2018, it confirmed that it only uses organic cotton. These efforts, along with others, have diverted more than 13 million polybags from landfills.

PrAna's internal fabric toolkit guides its designers with a "preferred fiber" list, a "do not use" list, a "watch" list (for fabrics that may not have an alternative solution) and an "under review" list (for fibers that need to be vetted). It also follows guiding textile principles rooted in sustainability, such as, "Recycled is better than organic," "Organic is better than conventional," "Natural is better than synthetic," and "Individual fibers are better than blends."

PrAna's goal for 2028 is to be 100% fair trade (currently, it's at 29%). To make it to 100%, the brand is seeking partnership with like-minded companies, such as Patagonia and Outerknown, as well as consumer support. Partnerships will also require transparency, meaning that the brand will show its supplier list and open its doors for collaboration with others engaging in fair trade.

## Allbirds

Allbirds is another brand that began with a partnership between two kinds of thinkers.

"Tim was a professional soccer player try-

ing to figure out how to make shoes when he met Joey, a renewal expert looking to fight climate change," said Hana Kajimura, head of sustainability for the company. "Allbirds is on a mission to make better things in a better way. Better signifies the idea of continuous improvement. And that, perhaps, sustainability is a destination we don't actually ever reach? We just keep getting better."

Allbirds set out to drive chemicals out of the industry and elevate natural renewal materials in their place. To do this, it needed a great product, because people buy great products that happen to be made sustainably. To accomplish this, it focused on using raw materials and experimenting with things like wool and sugar. Its wool is super-fine New Zealand merino. It also uses a material it calls "tree," which is made from Tencel and used for more breathable shoes. Tencel is derived from eucalyptus trees.

For outer soles, Allbirds wanted an alternative to a foam traditionally made of petroleum-based ethylene-vinyl acetate (EVA). Instead, it sought out a company in Brazil that makes soda bottles from sugarcane to create SweetFoam, an EVA chemically identical to the fossil fuel version, but derived from sugar cane. SweetFoam is an open-source material, with the purpose to drive the price down as volume increases and eliminate barriers of entry for other brands sustainable usage.

Allbirds is a Certified B Corporation, a legal designation that holds the brand accountable to the environment, its community and shareholders.

## Do Your Part

Can brands shift to a 100% sustainable model? That question is yet to be answered, but through their actions, these brands suggest that it may be possible. If 100% of the community commits to making a 1% change for the better, both businesses and consumers can help move the market in that direction.