

MADE-BY Track & Trace[®]

With MADE-BY Track & Trace, you can find out who exactly was involved in the production of a particular article of clothing. The special Track & Trace code in MADE-BY clothing brands traces the production process from the harvesting of the cotton to the sewing studio.

The fashion brands affiliated with MADE-BY try to work as much as possible with suppliers with honest and ethical production practices. Some suppliers do not yet meet the requirements set by MADE-BY, but the fashion brands do not often have the power or means to improve the entire production system all at once. MADE-BY supports the brands in implementing improvements in the chain. Track & Trace enables the brands to show consumers that the article of clothing they have purchased was produced in a sustainable fashion (using organic raw materials and/or under good working conditions). The Scorecards published on the site and in the annual report each year show the percentage of the each brand's collections that are produced in this manner.

Track & Trace – What is it? Track & Trace is a database system (referred to as a 'string' in the industry) for manufacturers that was developed by MADE-BY in collaboration with Organic Exchange and the English IT company Historic Futures. Every link in the production chain enters production information into the database and forwards it to the next link. This gives the brands as direct access as possible to production data from the other suppliers in the chain. Consumers can enter the code found on the clothing label into a simplified consumer page to see who was involved in the production of their clothing.

Track & Trace – Who monitors it? MADE-BY checks whether every party has entered the relevant information and/or whether certificates are available showing that sustainable materials have been used and/or whether work was carried out under good working conditions. The various links in the chain verify the contents of deliveries from the previous links. For example, a cotton spinner who is sent five bales of cotton from a cotton farmer checks whether five bales have been entered into the Track & Trace system. MADE-BY and its partner, Solidaridad, make sure that the consumer page of Track & Trace is kept up-to-date with photographs and comments from suppliers.

Track & Trace - Airtight? Track & Trace is not yet 100% airtight and, like many other monitoring systems, can never be. MADE-BY operates worldwide with hundreds of different parties, some of whom have automated production processes, some of whom do not. Some parties are difficult to reach, which means it takes a great deal of time to keep all information up to date. Also, not everyone gives the Track & Trace system the highest priority. As you can imagine, a cotton farmer in India has other things on his mind than entering information into a computer system. All the same, the system can be considered highly reliable since the various links monitor one another and MADE-BY carries out a final inspection.

Track & Trace – The future. Consumers are demanding more and more information on the origin of their clothing. MADE-BY brands stimulate their suppliers to use the Track & Trace system as much as possible. By working with Track & Trace, suppliers can also create a more positive profile for themselves and distinguish themselves from the competition. MADE-BY, Organic Exchange and Historic Futures work continuously on improving Track & Trace to make this system the global standard for production chain transparency.

Track & Trace – How does it work? To explain exactly how the system works, we'll use the example of a pair of trousers made of 100% organic cotton.

Definition of the chain. The clothing brand wants consumers to find out exactly who was involved in the production of the trousers and seeks the help of MADE-BY. The brand provides a Track & Trace code for the trousers that will be used to link all information. Together with Solidaridad, MADE-BY determines which parties are involved in the production process. Those parties that have never worked with the Track & Trace system before receive brief training, after which they can start using the programme immediately.

The first link in the chain: the cotton farmer. The cotton farmer harvests the organic cotton and packages the crop into convenient cotton bales. He then sells these bales to the cotton spinner. He enters the number of bales delivered into the Track & Trace system and e-mails this information to the spinner. It is important that the cotton farmer send a copy of his certificate for organic cotton.

Cotton spinner. The spinner receives the e-mail from the cotton farmer, checks the organic cotton certificate and whether the number of bales of cotton corresponds with the number he has received. If he accepts the information, it is then saved and used as the basis for a new e-mail to be sent to the next link in the chain. The spinner then processes the organic cotton into spools of thread and sells them to the weaving mill. He adds information on the spools of thread to the e-mail from the cotton farmer and forwards it to the cotton weaver.

Cotton weaver. The cotton weaver also checks (and accepts) the information he receives. He then weaves cotton cloth from the organic cotton threads, which he sells to a sewing studio. The weaver enters information on his production method into the (now extensive) e-mail message and forwards it to the sewing studio.

Sewing studio. After the e-mail is checked and accepted, the sewing studio starts working with the pieces of cloth. The special clothing label containing the Track & Trace code is sewn into the trousers. The trousers are then sent to the fashion brand, which then (hopefully) accepts the message and enters the clothing code for the trousers into the system.

All information on the production of the article of clothing is now in the system. MADE-BY makes sure that the right photographs and quotes from persons involved in the production process of the trousers are linked in the Track & Trace module at www.made-by.nl. The buyer of the trousers can now use the code to trace the production process and makers of the trousers.

Amsterdam, July 2008



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