

# Hemp: Planting an idea for sustainability

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20 Nov 2024 [+1 more](#) Dr Komathi Wasudawan,

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The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, highlights the importance in fostering a universal understanding of sustainable lifestyles.

However, achieving this goal is undoubtedly challenging not least due to the global consumption of plastic and the fast fashion industry.

## A crisis in production

Plastic consumption and production have escalated into a severe environmental issue over the past few decades. The accumulation of plastic products and waste in the environment that has led to widespread plastic pollution, eventually harming wildlife, ecosystems, and human populations.

This has been largely propagated

through single-use plastics, improper waste disposal to ocean dumping, and abandoned fishing gear, leading to dire consequences.

Wildlife as a result suffer from entanglement and ingestion of plastic debris, microplastic contamination and habitat destruction, introducing harmful chemicals and contamination into our food chain.

## An unsustainable fashion

Fast fashion has revolutionised consumer behaviour, with people buying more clothing at an unprecedented rate. This consumption surge has led to massive textile waste, as clothing that falls out of style or deteriorates quickly get discarded irresponsibly.

Consumers are now able to access the latest trends almost immediately and inexpensively, though conversely, at a steep cost to the environment.



The incorporation of hemp by fashion brands is crucial in building both a sustainable industry

As a resource-intensive industry, fast fashion generates significant waste through its consumption of harmful dyes and chemicals, compounded by the extensive disposal



of unsold clothing.

Further to that, textile production consumes vast amounts of water and energy, an environmental impact that represents the tragedy of the commons.

### Planting a solution for plastic

Addressing such complex issues requires a multifaceted approach involving governments, industries, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), communities, and individuals.

By 2030, the UN aims to ensure

global awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

One promising solution for production lies in hemp.

Hemp, or industrial hemp (*Cannabis sativa*), is a versatile plant that has the immense potential as a sustainable alternative in the plastic consumption and fast fashion crises.

Naturally pest-resistant and naturally renewable, hemp requires no pesticides or herbicides nor any genetic modification, and has deep roots that help preserve topsoil and prevent soil erosion.

Grown globally within three to four months, hemp can produce over 50,000 commercial products including bioplastics that are more

environmentally friendly than traditional plastics.

Derived from the plant's cellulose, these bioplastics can break down more readily in the environment, reducing longlasting plastic waste.

### Fashioning change

The fashion industry can also benefit from adopting hemp. In comparison with cotton, hemp consumes significantly less water and does not deplete soil, producing up to three times more fibre which are stronger by tenfold.

Unlike cotton, which accounts for a quarter of global pesticide consumption, hemp contains natural defences against pests and weeds making chemical interventions that are environmentally and financially costly, no longer necessary.

The incorporation of hemp by fashion brands is crucial in building both a sustainable industry and lifestyle.

### Challenge of change

Despite the clear benefits, transitioning to more sustainable practices like using hemp can be challenging for businesses. The fast fashion and plastic industries are deeply entrenched, with longestablished supply chains, significant investments, and consumers that favour the status quo.

Shifting to sustainable materials, like hemp, requires significant investment, research and development, and a willingness to disrupt existing business models.

However, history has shown that bold and innovative leaps can lead to great rewards.

Businesses that dare to innovate and lead the charge in sustainability often find themselves ahead of the curve, reaping the benefits of a loyal customer base, positive brand reputation, and long-term cost savings.

Fortune has often favoured the bold, and appears to carry genuine weight in the context of sustainability. Companies that embrace sustainable practices not only contribute to a healthier environment but also

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Companies that embrace sustainable practices not only contribute to a healthier environment but also

position themselves as pioneers in a rapidly evolving market.

## For a sustainable future

Tackling the issues entangled with plastic use and fast fashion are critical for promoting sustainable consumption and production outlined by SDG 12.

Transitioning to a circular economy, which emphasises on waste reduction through product redesign, is essential for minimising environmental impact.

Concurrently, promoting thoughtful consumption through education, awareness and ecological activities requires collaboration between governments, companies, NGOs, communities, and individuals.

Businesses that are bold and innovative are essential to set the pace for this change to take place amidst our current production and consumption habits.

Adopting hemp will reduce plastic waste and the environmental impact of fast fashion, supporting a

more sustainable and resilient global economy.

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