

ETHICAL COMPANIES from The British Council

Set up in the 1920s by James Carston, a Manchester tailor, the company has remained in the family and is now run by James's grandson, Paul Carston. Employing fewer than 50 people, the company has a reputation for producing high-quality men's shirts, which it sells by mail order, and has a loyal customer base. [...]

When Paul Carston took over running the company in 1999, he inherited a business that prided itself on using local well-paid machinists rather than sweatshop labour, and looked upon its employees as members of an extended family. Paul, a committed environmentalist, felt that the company fitted in well with his values. The shirts were made from 100 per cent cotton, and as Paul says, 'It's a completely natural fibre, so you would think it was environmentally sound'. Then Paul read a magazine article about Fair Trade and cotton producers. He was devastated to read that the cotton industry is a major source of pollution, and that the synthetic fertilisers used to produce cotton are finding their way into the food chain.

Paul takes up the story. 'I investigated our suppliers, and sure enough found that they were producing cotton on an industrial scale using massive amounts of chemicals. Then I looked into organic cotton suppliers, and found an organisation of Indian farmers who worked together to produce organic cotton on a Fair Trade basis. Organic cotton is considerably more expensive than conventionally produced cotton.[...]

He decided to take the plunge and switch entirely to organic cotton.