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The Fight for Cotton in the Athleisure Market

In today's society that is moving towards a more sedentary lifestyle, there is a greater need than ever to increase the daily activity level. Given this accepted increase, widespread adoption of healthy living and fitness has become important. The progressive acceptance of a more casual dress code alongside these beliefs have led to the current hybrid of athletic and leisure apparel known as “athleisure.” The result of athleisure has shown rapid growth and there have been no signs of slowing down, creating potential opportunities for brands to expand. From track pants and trainers to sporty dresses Forbes estimated the rise of the trend globally, with sales climbing from $197 billion in 2007 to over $350 billion by 2020.

The U.S. active wear market, to which athleisure belongs, is the largest in the world. The U.S. market dominates, accounting for 36% of sales worldwide. Majority of this product presumably is being created from synthetic fibers. The rise of this industry as a reflection, has created a problem with the impact it’s had in accompanying the declining cost of cotton. This problem is affecting those who are making the cotton and the profitability of the crops they produce. With cotton prices near their lowest in almost a decade, farmers are simply cutting back on cotton and moving to other crops. In recent years U.S. farmers have planted the fewest acres of cotton since 1983, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture data. The hard work of those farmers help to create some of the most important products across the globe.

At the moment roughly forty billion pounds of cotton are produced each year from 77 million acres of land covering more than eighty countries. The effects of declining cotton prices leading to less cotton production, at this large of a scale, results in significantly less cotton available on the global market each year. If there’s less cotton available, this can further affect the supply of other industries like cotton clothing, home furnishings, medical supplies and industrial supplies. 4 markets that have a large impact on everyone’s life, without which the global community would struggle, if the competitiveness of the cotton industry is not addressed. In order to address these problems, we will need to look at research on how cotton can create a sustainable partnership with the increasing athleisure market.

The goal of this research is to find an area of athleisure where cotton will be able to see growth and maintain sustainability. We aim to interpret the consumer’s perception on athleisure clothing, along with the needs and wants of what they look for in this clothing. We are looking for the most discussed topics in the industry and why they are discussed. By researching the popular opinion through consumer reviews and articles we can understand the rise of this trend and the characteristics of the product. To accomplish our goal, we will:

1. Search and compile consumer’s reviews, articles, and thoughts on athleisure through online sources.
2. Analyze the data that’s been compiled in order to find out consumer’s perception of the market and what else they want and/or are missing from it.
3. Compare the results of the analyzed data with the information athleisure brands make available, in order to determine the opportunities that cotton can create.

The result of this research will have a large impact by creating growth of cotton in the athleisure market, resulting in further sustainability.