



SUSTAINABILITY *NOW*

Top sustainability priorities to act on today

FASHION
by informa

→ **WHY NOW?**

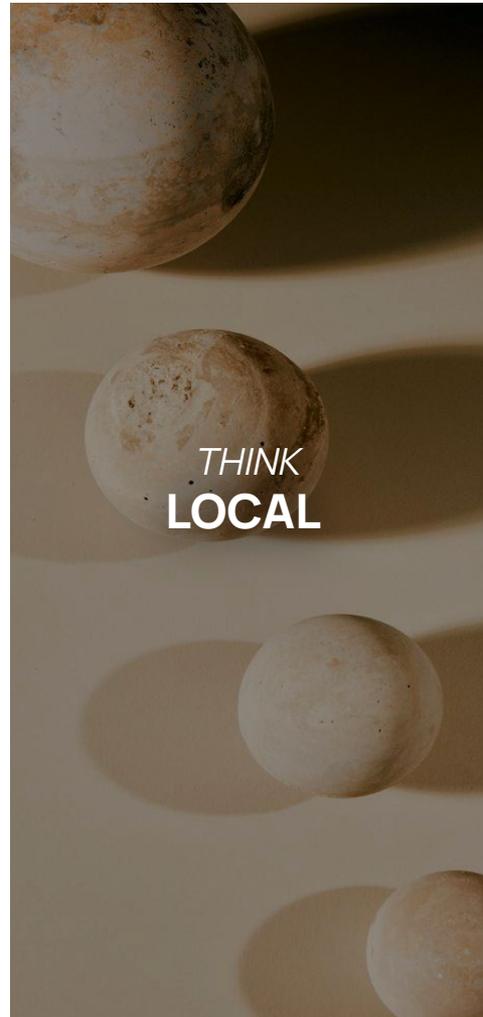
With so much news, innovation, advice, and conflicting information about sustainability coming out on a daily basis, how can you even start to make sense of it all?

In this **SUSTAINABILITY NOW** guide, we distill things down to four top priorities that you can act on *today*. Along with each, we present the latest policies, tactics, opportunities, and leading examples that lay out a blueprint for next steps.

By offering a mix of practical wisdom and ideas that break the mold, we hope to inspire you to come up with creative solutions that enable your business, the industry, and our planet to continue thriving tomorrow.



→ *ACT NOW* **PRIORITIES**



DESIGN FOR END-OF-LIFE

As the world barrels toward doubling the 1.5°C of warming cautioned by the Paris Agreement, it is clear that our reactionary approach to sustainability *isn't* working, and neither is the trend of pinning environmental responsibility on the consumer. The burden is rightly shifting to larger organizations that are in a better position to effect significant change.

One way to start is to make decisions for the good of the environment at the very onset—the design level. Because by challenging ourselves to design for the future, we have potential to create product that is truly innovative and stands the test of time.

→ The Imperative

Extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation is gaining momentum around the world. These programs shift the burden of end-of-life management to producers.

In short, they make fashion brands and textile producers financially responsible for the collection, sorting, and recycling of their waste.



The EUROPEAN UNION has proposed a number of [EPR policies](#) aimed at textile waste that they hope to have solidly in place by [2028](#). New [ecodesign regulations](#) go a step further in incentivizing producers to design with circularity in mind and offer clearer labeling.



CALIFORNIA introduced the [Responsible Textile Recovery Act](#) in 2023. The bill would require producers to establish a stewardship program for the collection and recycling of textile products unsuitable for reuse, as well as facilitate the repair and reuse of clothing.



[Packaging waste](#) liability continues to come up for debate in NEW YORK. The latest proposal puts the responsibility on larger producers and outlines [material requirements](#), such as setting recycled content minimums and banning certain chemicals in packaging.

→ The Opportunity

Rather than waiting for the end of life, producers can prepare by making thoughtful decisions at the very start of the design process.

65%

OF CONSUMERS FEEL THAT COMPANIES SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PAYING FOR THE COST OF RECYCLING THEIR PRODUCTS, RATHER THAN INDIVIDUALS OR CITIES.

Ipsos



→ Tactic 01

MAKE IT EASY TO

DISASSEMBLE

Proper recycling requires items to be separated according to substrate due to specialized processing needs and to preserve material integrity for further use. As a result, designing products so that they can be easily disassembled is becoming a necessity, not only to facilitate recycling but also repair work and interesting customization possibilities.



Innovators

DISASSEMBLY LAB

is a project that explores different ways sneakers can be constructed to be easily taken apart. Conceived by Robin Luginbühl, the concepts feature modular component parts that are 3D printed and knitted so they can be easily replaced or recycled.

RESORTECS

offers heat-dissolvable threads in place of traditional polyester ones that make it easier and up to 5x faster to disassemble apparel items for recycling or to repair parts such as zippers. An initial life-cycle assessment estimates that the process could reduce waste generation by 80%.

→ Tactic 02

WORK TOWARDS

MONO-MATERIALS

Another end-of-life tactic that designers can employ from the start is to limit the number of different materials used within a single item, which can make things easier on both the recycling and sourcing ends.

Remember that this also extends to any surface treatments or coatings, adhesives, hardware, embellishments, and miscellaneous notions.



Innovators

TIM TEVEN

exemplifies the mono-material movement that is being led by the home category. Circularity sits central to his design ethos, from the singular use of highly recyclable uncoated aluminum to the bent-to-shape construction—approaches that can easily apply to hardlines like accessories.

UPFIELD

has rolled out an all-paper fiber tub for their Flora Plant brand of plant-based butters. The deceptively simple packaging took the food company four years to develop in close coordination with partners such as label company [MCC](#) and materials science company [Footprint](#).

→ Tactic 03

PLAN FOR

THOUGHTFUL OBSOLESCENCE

While product longevity certainly sounds ideal, what if everything did *not* need to be made to last? As it stands, 50% of Americans say they feel overwhelmed by the amount of stuff in their homes. Be honest in assessing the relationship that consumers have with your products and let that guide you to responsible solutions that make sense for the use case.



Innovator

KYENNO SCHEEPERS

is an industrial designer who offers a unique proposition: creating products that will *not* outlive us. He does this by utilizing biomaterials like mycelium that are meant to degrade over a given amount of time. While Scheepers' experiments mostly revolve around consumer electronics, this approach presents interesting possibilities for low-cost and more disposable goods, as well as categories with a limited shelf life such as kids.

PHASE OUT PLASTIC

We have a plastic problem. Essentially fossil fuel in solid form and difficult to properly break down or reuse, plastic has become widely regarded as a temporary solution—but unfortunately, it leaves a very permanent mark, lingering in our landfills, water, air, and even our bodies.

As consumers become increasingly informed of the dangers microplastics pose to personal health, putting people first in material decisions will be a non-negotiable. While daunting, sweeping behavioral changes, such as the phasing out of single-use grocery bags, show that real progress *is* possible.

→ The Imperative

Regulation is coming for plastic. Over 60 countries have introduced bans and levies on plastic packaging and single-use waste.

In 2025, the Global Plastics Treaty is set to come into force, which will hold the 175 countries involved to a high common standard on plastic consumption and create a clear path to a plastic-free future.



GLOBAL EMISSIONS from plastic production is on track to triple by 2050, accounting for one-fifth of Earth's remaining carbon budget—or the 1.5°C threshold for global warming designated by the Paris Climate Accord.



Over 16,000 substances are used to make plastic, and more than 4,000 of those are known to be hazardous to human health. These include endocrine-disrupting FOREVER CHEMICALS (PFAS) that have been linked to health issues from certain cancers to infertility.



It is not enough to RECYCLE PLASTIC or to use recycled plastic. Plastic is purposefully designed to be hard to break down, and only 9% of recycled plastic is successfully given a second life, with the rest going on to pollute our land, air, water, and bodies.

→ The Opportunity

Plastic is last century's material. For the sake of our personal and planetary health, we have a chance to future-proof our business by reducing our dependence on plastic today.

88%

OF CONSUMERS ARE READY TO PAY A PREMIUM FOR PRODUCTS THAT ARE MANUFACTURED WITH NET-ZERO EMISSIONS.

BCG



→ Tactic 01

ELIMINATE THE PACKAGING

Most packaging is meant to be discarded; however, plastic is meant to be indestructible—the use case does not match the medium. Over 80% of the legal measures relating to sustainable packaging focus on plastics. Not only do businesses run the risk of fines for plastic use, but reducing it in nonessential areas like packaging can lead to significant cost savings—and less clutter for the customer to deal with.



Innovators

K ROUNDS

are a plastic-free capsule coffee innovation from Keurig that will launch as a beta test in fall 2024. The waste-less pods are compressed pucks of coffee wrapped in a compostable shell of cellulose and starch sourced from algae.

ONÉLOGY

sells water-activated skincare tablets that, by reducing the form factor, significantly reduce the amount of packaging, not to mention associated costs like transport and storage. The tablets come in more recyclable aluminium blister packs and remain fresh for up to 10 years.

→ Tactic 02

MAKE EASY SWITCHES TO PLASTIC ALTERNATIVES

Once plastic is created, as we've seen, it won't just go away. The key going forward is not generating any new plastic at all. The transition has to start *somewhere*, so in undertaking a comprehensive audit of plastic usage with the help of organizations like [PlasticFree](#), businesses might want to first consider where they can make fast, easy swap-outs to alternatives.



Innovator

BLUE OCEAN CLOSURES

is a Swedish start-up that has created fiber screw caps that tackle a pesky, overlooked obstacle to recycling, with the potential to reduce our plastic use by 2.6 tons per year. Made from cellulose fibers, they're fully recyclable in the paper waste stream and are suitable for bottles and aseptically packaged products. The company recently launched its first commercial product with supplement brand [Great Earth](#), in addition to partnerships with beverage giants [Coca-Cola](#) and [Absolut](#).

→ Tactic 03

REVISIT

TRADITIONAL METHODS

Plastic and related synthetic fibers only reached commercialization starting in the mid-20th century. Before that, we have a centuries-long proof of concept of people and industries that managed *without* plastic. A growing desire to reconnect with the natural world is also creating a new appreciation for tried-and-true ways of the past, including all the aesthetic and functional benefits that nature can provide.



Innovators

MOVER

is a Swiss brand that is returning to natural fibers for high-performance, all-weather gear rather than continuing with technical synthetics—for example, taking advantage of wool for its thermoregulation, moisture-wicking, and antibacterial properties.

AIZOME

brings back ancient Japanese traditions of dyeing textiles with plants known for medicinal properties such as indigo and sumac. The bedding and sleepwear brand strives to create healthy textiles rooted in the concept of *omoiyari*—or honoring one's relationship to all things.

INVEST IN REGENERATION

Sustainability implies maintenance—a responsible allocation of resources in order to continue on our current track. However, much damage has already been done to what underlies the whole well-being of our ecosystem: the soil.

As a result, it is not enough anymore to sustain, but the repair of Earth's natural processes—starting with the ground—is crucial to ensuring healthy products today *and* abundance for tomorrow. In short, the survival of the industry hinges on transitioning from an extractive approach to a regenerative one.

→ The Imperative

The [WEF warns](#) that there may not be enough viable soil left in 50 years to grow the food we need to feed the world.

Modern agricultural practices have destroyed half the world's fertile soil and worn away at the nutrients that plants need to flourish, putting our health and the bedrock of almost the entire consumer industries at risk.



Soil is one of our most important weapons against GLOBAL WARMING. When soil is healthy, it can store CO2 that plants absorb from the atmosphere—in fact, up to 15 times more than other [carbon sequestration](#) methods.



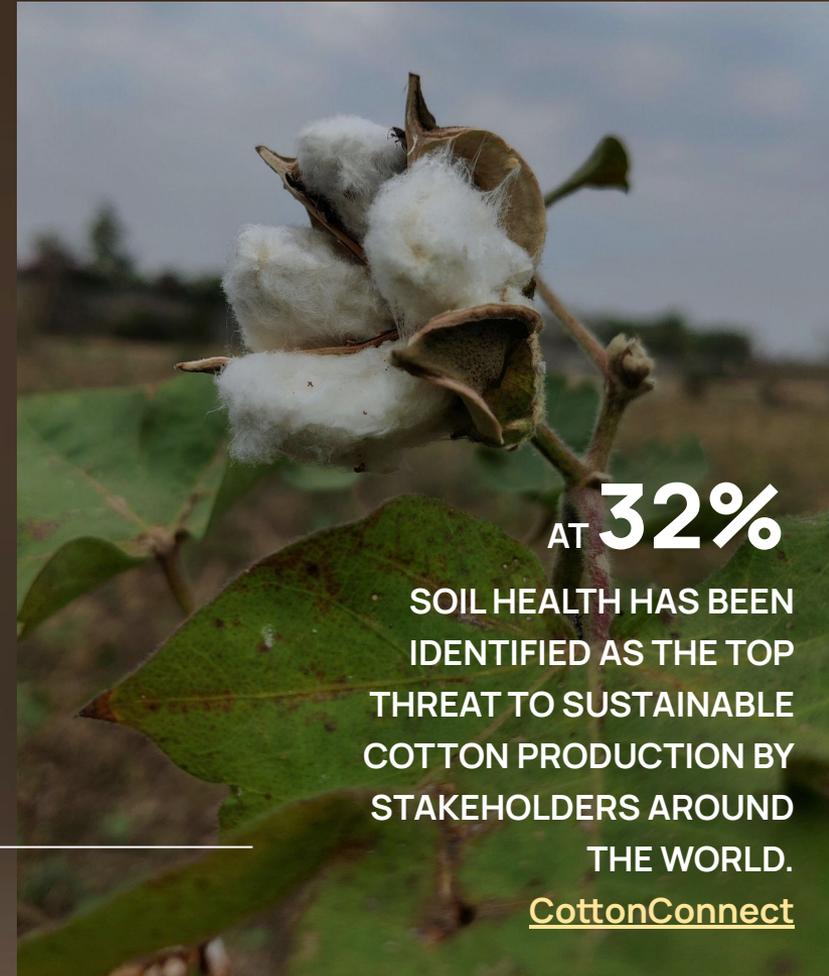
COTTON CULTIVATION is inextricably linked to soil health. It requires nutrient-rich soil and an excessive amount of water to grow, but this—and the widespread use of agrochemicals (e.g. pesticides) in cotton farming—has contributed to severely [degrading soil quality](#).



Following the example of California's [Healthy Soils](#) program, [six US states](#) recently passed bills that advance HEALTHY SOIL MANAGEMENT. Nationally, Congress is mulling the [Agriculture Resilience Act](#), which would incentivize farmers and ranchers to use climate-friendly practices.

→ The Opportunity

For the future health of the industry, businesses can start by focusing on health at the soil level, making sourcing decisions that promote the regeneration of natural systems.



→ Tactic 01

INVESTIGATE

LOW-IMPACT BIOMATERIALS

Not all natural materials are created equally. Some require more specific or carbon-intensive processes to grow. Highly commercial crops such as cotton have also encouraged monoculture farming, eliminating the biodiversity that enables important natural processes to take place. Nature offers abundant raw material, but fully optimizing them will require dedicated research, testing, and consumer education.



Innovators

BIOPUFF® FROM PONDA

is an insulation fiber made from a regenerative crop called *typha latifolia* and is set to rival both goose down and synthetic alternatives. The plant is cultivated through the practice of paludiculture—or marsh-farming, which regenerates natural peatlands, bogs, and fens.

UNDER ARMOUR

has engaged Hemp Black to be the exclusive supplier of a carbon-neutral yarn made from industrial hemp—a low-till crop that can regenerate the soil and requires far less water than cotton while boasting superior durability. As part of the deal, UA will invest in specialized equipment for the manufacturing of the yarn, tackling one factor that has been a hurdle to wider adoption of hemp.

→ Tactic 02

UNCOVER VALUE IN UPCYCLING

From fibers to finished goods, finding new purpose in bio-based waste also contributes to a healthy regenerative ecosystem. While upcycling was once somewhat of a cottage industry, consumer interest in secondhand has turned brands and retailers into middlemen for discarded goods. Rather than being a burden, waste presents a new revenue stream and an abundant supplier for the next generation of innovative product.



Innovators

DIESEL and LEE

have joined forces to create a collection made of both brands' unsold stock, ingeniously bringing the discarded jeans exclusive value in their afterlife. Called "Diesel Loves Lee," the line is the first chapter in an ongoing initiative for Diesel to find creative ways to tackle overproduction.

CIRCULAR SYSTEMS

is a material sciences company that produces natural fibers from textile and agricultural waste. For example, they've spun food waste into their [Agraloop BioFibre](#) yarns and fibers, which are fit for use in clothing, upholstery, packaging and more.

→ Tactic 03

AIM TO

RESTORE NUTRIENTS

Another way that product makers can reframe their approach to design is to think about if they are creating something that has potential to give back to the Earth in the form of nutrients that can healthily break down in the soil and fuel future plant growth. All products will reach *some* end point, and so the best prevention is to ensure they can safely be absorbed back into the environment.



Innovator

NATURAL FIBER WELDING (NFW)

develops plant-based materials based around the idea of returning nutrients to the soil. One of their key developments is a natural footwear outsole called PLIANT sourced from rubber farms in Thailand that practice agroforestry (or traditional methods that maintain biodiversity). At the end of their life, the 100% bio-based, toxic-free soles can harmlessly decompose in the soil and provide food for the next generation of plant life.

THINK LOCAL

Much of the environmental harm inflicted by the consumer industries can be attributed to unchecked growth—a bid to scale and broaden reach at the lowest cost and effort. However, new consumer mindsets favoring authenticity, intimacy, and connection are prompting a shift to *small*.

As it turns out, refocusing the lens on the local is also good for the environment, reducing the carbon footprint associated with transport and unaccountable practices offshore. In addition, sourcing, designing, making, and selling close to home creates potential for products that work better *with* and *for* the people and environment.

→ The Imperative

The fashion industry is responsible for up to 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The movement of goods by ship alone accounts for 2.5% of the world's total CO2 emissions.

And this doesn't account for the countless hidden costs, such as transport beyond the initial point of sale, travel by industry personnel, and differing standards in other countries involved in production.



The new book Proximity explores the PROXIMITY REVOLUTION that new technologies and consumer mindsets are enabling, making a case for just-in-time solutions and the most sustainable supply chain being the closest one.



The EU is trying to mitigate TRADE EMBODIED EMISSIONS, particularly the carbon leakage that occurs when production is offshored to countries that have less stringent climate policies or when domestically made products are replaced by more carbon-intensive imports.



Beyond the environmental implications, consumers around the world are growing more interested in LOCALLY MADE goods due to perceived quality and authenticity, with those under 35, in particular, buying local brands in twice as many categories as those 55+.

→ The Opportunity

In focusing only on the sustainability of the end product, businesses are missing the many environmental (and human) costs found in the distance between the product and the consumer.



→ Tactic 01

SOURCE

CLOSE TO HOME

Reports show that 43% of China's [greenhouse gas emissions](#) come from apparel production, and 44% of India's cotton-related emissions are in response to foreign demand—we are often importing pollution when we make clothes. As consumers begin to crave one-of-a-kind items and a connection to their community, there is a huge opportunity to embrace 'local' along the entire chain, from sourcing to selling.



Innovator

G-STAR RAW

partnered with a Dutch university to experiment with growing cotton locally in a greenhouse that then went into making jeans end-to-end entirely in the Netherlands. The pilot far exceeded their expectations, with the plants sprouting much taller and more efficiently in the controlled environment—and without the need for pesticides. Next, they are looking to scale the promising project by bringing in partners across the industry.

→ Tactic 02

EXPLORE

ON-DEMAND MODELS

Scaling local, 'just-in-time' products requires dedicated investment in on-demand technologies and schemes. However, the potential cost savings are huge: In the luxury apparel industry alone, it is estimated that excess inventory accounts for over \$6 billion. An on-demand strategy also offers some future-proofing as trend cycles continue to accelerate and consumer expectations for responsive personalization advance.



Innovators

RODINIA GENERATION

is a Danish company that is creating a global network of microfactories that will enable fast, low-impact nearshore production. Their simple setup comprises five machines connected by proprietary software that prints, cuts, and more—all without the use of water or toxic chemicals.

E.L.V. DENIM

sells upcycled, made-to-order jeans that are also locally designed and produced in East London. While reuse is driven by good intentions, the carbon footprint of material transport and processing can undo some of the benefits, and so a further step that brands could take is to offer upcycled products exclusively in local stores to reduce the route to customer.

→ Tactic 03

CREATE FOR THE COMMUNITY

Engaging in more holistic design and business practices also means keeping the interests of the communities you are going into top of mind. The trend towards hyperlocal doesn't just encompass offering customized assortments but also extends to materials used, labor practices, and harmony with the culture and natural environment. Adopting this community mindset has potential to foster strong loyalty and inspire game-changing products and experiences.



Innovators

LVMH x MIAMI DESIGN DISTRICT's

sustainability partnership sets a new precedent for community-minded retail. Not only is LVMH transitioning all their stores in the area to green energy by 2025, they also plan to source most of the building materials for new outlets in Florida, as well as adhere to various resource conservation standards—delivering a boost to the local economy while minimizing their footprint.

SERENE SKINLAB

is a Singaporean skincare brand that caters to local needs with formulations optimized for the humid urban environment. Rooted in Traditional Chinese Medicine ideas of balance, the line prioritizes natural, high-quality ingredients and is made entirely in Singapore.

→ WHAT NEXT?

Environmental stewardship feels like a tall order, but you can start by reframing your thinking *just a little bit*. Challenge yourself to keep these main ideas in mind as you embark on your next collection or project.

PREVENTION FROM THE START

Design *is* coming up with solutions. Responsibility should be part of the calculus in every design or creative decision. Rather than seeing sustainability as a burden or something to think about later, as the examples in this guide show, it can be a catalyst for innovation that provides a competitive edge.

PROACTIVE RESTORATION

The damage has already been done to the environment, but the good news is that much of it can be reversed and even improved, whether through business advocacy or sourcing and production decisions that support the restoration of soil health and Earth's natural processes.

LOW-IMPACT AND BIO-BASED

Hard to break down and involving carbon-intensive processes, petroleum-based synthetics need to start being phased out where possible. While bio-based sources are much more preferable, not all are created equally, so it is also important to keep in mind the whole environmental and human costs associated.

CONTINUE THE **SUSTAINABILITY** CONVERSATION

Explore how the sustainability priorities explored in this guide translate to the the design trends of FW25/26 and how creating circular systems is key to the future of our industry.





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