The Social Sustainability and Ethics of Gildan T-Shirts

Overview
The purpose of this research was to compare the sustainability of custom t-shirt brands from my college career. I surveyed student organizations for brands to research. In the end, Gildan owned most of the brands identified. So instead of comparison, I researched the sustainability of Gildan in terms of certifications, program participation, and audit procedures.

Methodology
- 5 question survey to determine where student organizations ordered custom t-shirts
- Survey sent to 109 student organization treasurers

Data
- 57 total responses
- 24 valid responses

Organizations Sourced
- Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)
- Fair Labor Association (FLA)
- Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)
- Sedex: Supplier Ethical Data Exchange
- International Labour Organization’s Better Work Programme
- Sustainable Apparel Coalition
- Audit
- All Gildan owned and third party contractor facilities are subject to an internal audit at least once in a 18-month base period
- Internal audits are unannounced
- External audits conducted at Gildan owned and contractor facilities. They are performed by third party monitoring organizations, mandated by FLA, WRAP, Better Work and customers

Key Learnings
- Number of brands in Gildan portfolio
- Detail of supply chain information shared with public among different brands
- Not all sustainability certifications and programs equal in terms of meaning
- Gildan owned facilities and 3rd party contractors subject to internal and external audits
- The results of these audits and remediation actions are tracked by Gildan

Color Key
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6. Key Learnings

Worldwide Responsible Accredited Production (WRAP)
- Overview: Team of global social compliance experts dedicated to promoting safe, lawful, humane, and ethical manufacturing around the world
- Who Sponsors: Independent, objective, non-profit
- Requirements: 12 Principles
- What Does It Cover? Apparel, footwear, and sewn products

Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)
- Independent labor rights monitoring organization, conducting investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe
- Purpose is to combat sweatshops and protect the rights of workers who make apparel and other products
- 187 college and university affiliates including University of Iowa but not ISU

Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN)
- Labor and women’s rights organization focused in Central America and Mexico
- Supports workers in global supply chains to improve wages, working conditions, and respect rights

Sustainable Apparel Coalition
- Joined Coalition in 2013
- Coalition’s core driver is Higg Index to enable big picture transparency
- Higg Index: Self-assessment tools for brands, retailers, and facilities to measure their environmental and social impacts and identify areas for improvement

International Labour Organization’s Better Work Programme
- Participating through third party contractors in Haiti
- Collaboration between the United Nation’s International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group
- Goal to improve working conditions and respect workers rights

Sedex: Supplier Ethical Data Exchange
- Global non-profit
- World’s largest collaborative platform for sharing responsible sourcing data on supply chains
- Work with brands, factories, producers, industry experts
- They do not audit or certify

Fair Labor Association (FLA)
- Universities, organizations, and companies dedicated to protecting workers’ rights around the world
- Organizations voluntarily meet internationally recognized labor standards wherever their products are made
- Assist companies in improving compliance systems
- ISU not a member

STANDARD 100 by OEKO-TEX
- Overview: Worldwide independent testing and certification system focused on consumer product safety
- Who Sponsors: The International Association for Research and Testing in the Field of Textile and Leather Ecology
- Requirements: Sample materials, declaration of conformity, company audit
- What’s Covered: Raw, semi-finished, and finished textile products at all processing levels

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