Google links with Stella McCartney, Textile Exchange to boost sustainable sourcing

By Sandra Halliday - 23 November 2021

Google is aiming to help the fashion industry become more sustainable and has linked up with Stella McCartney, The Textile Exchange and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) on the Global Fibre Impact Explorer (GFIE) tool.

It worked with McCartney “to understand the industry's needs and to test the platform” and other brands and retailers such as Adidas, Allbirds, H&M Group and VF Corporation, have also been involved pre-release. It’s now inviting others to register an interest in using it.

The tool is intended to help brands understand the environmental issues involved in sourcing the raw materials they use and enable them to make more eco-friendly decisions.

In a blog post, the digital giant said the fashion industry is “one of the largest contributors to the global climate and ecological crisis” and accounts for up to 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions, much of which occurs at the raw materials stage of the supply chain.

But when brands source these materials, they often have “little to no visibility” on the environmental impact of them.

So for the past two years it has been working on developing a tool “that would give companies the data they need to make more responsible sourcing decisions”.

The first version of the GFIE is built on Google Earth Engine and uses Google Cloud computing to assess the environmental risk of different fibres in relation to factors such as air pollution, biodiversity, climate and greenhouse gasses, forestry and water use.

It said the tool should make it easy to “identify environmental risks across more than 20 fibre types — including natural, cellulosic and synthetics materials”. It will also provide brands with recommendations for targeted and regionally-specific risk reduction activities.
The link-up with McCartney saw her team using the tool alongside their existing sustainability efforts. Google said they were able to “identify cotton sources in Turkey that were facing increased water and climate risks. This affirms the need for investing in local farming communities that focus on regenerative practices, such as water management and soil regeneration”.

The GFIE idea was originally born out of a partnership between Google and the WWF, and aims to complement existing tools focused on industry impact and risk analysis.

And with the initial development phase complete, Google and WWF are now transitioning GFIE to Textile Exchange, the global non-profit group focused on accelerating the use of eco-friendly fibres across the global industry. Textile Exchange will continue the development of the tool, onboard new brands and work towards an industry launch in 2022.

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