EXPERT’S INSIGHT - SOUTH AFRICA

There are two options facing every one of us - to continue doing business as usual or face up to the realisation that if we do that we face the possibility of permanently damaging the planet we share, forever and at the cost of our very own survival. There is no doubt that the second option is not going to be a pleasant one, mainly for the challenges that it presents in shifting our behaviour as consumers and producers. But setting out to produce something that is harmful in its creation and use simply doesn’t stack up. In fact if that is the accepted norm it is not only selfish and irresponsible, but in the longer term could be suicidal.

There are a number of approaches on the table at the moment - not least organic cotton. At face value the question of organic production seems absolutely correct - natural production in a natural way. But the world’s trading systems and environment are sterile, and certainly not the most accommodating of something as simple as organic cotton. The principal challenges here centre around being able to maintain and indeed contain the value of the fiber through a complex processing and trading system. Current practice has so many areas of unnecessary cost being added that ultimately have very little to do with the end product - and often these costs are punitive enough to restrict development at the rate that is required.

This will require partnership and transparency and, most important, a will to make it work. Without the last one it will be a very hard and long journey.

Hugo Lemon, Woolworths, South Africa