

BRAND PROFILE: RAMBLERS WAY

Ramblers Way wears its values on its sleeve

The founders of sustainable personal care brand Tom's of Maine recently set up a new company, Ramblers Way, which offers base-layer garments and intimate apparel made from US Rambouillet (from which the name of the business comes) wool. The wool is grown at its own sheep farms in Maine and at carefully selected and monitored partner ranches in Colorado, Montana, Nevada, South Dakota, Texas and Utah. The garments are then manufactured by its partners' factories in the Carolinas and New England.

Kate and Tom Chappell set up Tom's of Maine back in 1970 and went on to sell the brand to global giant Colgate-Palmolive in 2006. They said on launching their new venture that Ramblers Way was born from a desire to re-imagine wool as a next-to-skin, superfine fabric, to warm and comfort people of all ages and walks of life. "After nearly 40 years of experience in building Tom's into a leading eco-friendly company, we have learned a lot about how a business can be a positive force for its consumers, workers, communities, and the planet," the Chappells say.

As well as producing high-quality products, the company is determined to look after the environment and the local community. "We've created a company that pays homage to America's rich history as a textile producer, while breathing new life into the domestic wool industry, through our collaboration with farmers and producers around the country," say the company founders. The Chappells also argue that Rambouillet wool offers "a much lower impact alternative to overseas Merino wool from elsewhere", without losing any of the benefits offered by other types of Merino.

Why choose wool?

Coming from a background in personal care products, the Chappells' decision to make garments from wool might not seem an obvious one. However, the company claims it is a natural progression as part of its sustainability strategy. Wool, it points out, is a natural, renewable fibre offering a wide variety of different uses. Furthermore its attributes are numerous: it offers



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excellent insulation, water repellency, water absorption and odour control. Added to this it resists wrinkling and soiling and is naturally flame-resistant.

Meanwhile, Rambouillet wool has its own unique attributes and, according to the Chappells, it fits particularly well with the company's image. It is farmed and produced in the US so it has a much lower impact on the environment than Merino wool sourced from elsewhere (usually Australia or New Zealand). They also claim it is "some of the best superfine wool available in America" and that the fabric produced from it is "unlike any natural fabric you've ever felt or seen".

Moreover, Ramblers Way believes its worsted wool works particularly well in clothing because it can be worn all year round; the wool naturally warms and cools the wearer depending on the climate, it says. The company believes its clothing is durable and long-lasting and that its next-to-skin garments are soft and lightweight so they can be worn throughout the day and night. The wool is enzyme-treated for shrinkage and is fully washable, and the garments are completely chemical-free.

A sustainable approach

While the quality of products Ramblers Way designs and manufacturers is extremely important to the company, the way its goods are produced is every bit as significant. At its farms it uses organic, no-till practices, which means its sheep are reared year after year without ploughing, ripping, or turning the soil. No-till is an emergent agricultural technique that can increase the amount of water in the soil and decrease erosion. It can also increase the amount and variety of life in and on the soil. According to the company it does all it can to protect wildlife habitat and preserve critical ecosystems. Its sheep breed and lamb naturally and graze rotationally. Moreover, trained animals are used to protect and move its flocks, and the company uses gentle combs and humane handling systems when shearing and sorting.

The company also aims to use reputable techniques and practices when it comes to manufacturing its garments. One example is that it uses its own chlorine-free, "environmentally sensitive" enzyme wash rather than using chemical alternatives. Minimal packaging is used, and the packaging that is absolutely necessary is made from reclaimed materials that are both compostable and recyclable. The company generates its own renewable solar and geothermal energy, and when it comes to transporting the goods it uses bio-fuels in its trucks and tractors. Furthermore, because it is a web-based firm it connects with its customers online, reducing the environmental impact of its business even further.



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And its sustainable approach also covers its attitude towards the local community. "At the core of our sustainability definition is the premise that all components of our work and process are interconnected," the company founders say. "Thus, we maintain a holistic view of how each decision we make affects the larger whole." One way it does this is that it gives 10% of its profits and 5% of its paid time back to the community. It also claims to connect American farms with American manufacturing, and to "invigorate" local economies.

The ultimate aim, according to the Chappells, is to "source, grow, and produce our fine woollen apparel using 100% domestic resources, without jeopardising the availability and viability of these resources for future generations." In order to do this it has joined forces with an organisation that is working to address the problem of global warming, Clean Air-Cool Planet. This environmental group works alongside campuses, communities, corporations and science centres to help develop and implement pragmatic solutions.

Clean Air-Cool Planet is currently reviewing all the components of Ramblers Way Farm, from the sheep grazing in the fields, through the entire process including shearing, transportation, scouring, combing, spinning, knitting, sewing, ordering and distribution. The purpose is to help the company understand its environmental footprint even better, enabling it to identify opportunities where it can improve its sustainable practices and ultimately to help it fulfil its goal of becoming completely carbon neutral. 