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New parenthood heightens your sensitivity to the multiple meanings of “earth-friendliness.” Of course, the conventional wisdom definition always applies: You want to make choices that help the planet conserve energy, use renewable resources of all kinds, and keep chemicals out of the air and water. You want to serve foods that properly nourish your family without sucking all the nutrients from the soil, and you want to save both money and the planet by recycling and reusing everything that will not quickly degrade. Organic cotton naturally measures-up against those standards.

Commercially grown cotton is just plain evil

No other single crop inflicts as much environmental damage as commercially grown cotton. Multi-national agricultural corporations persist in abusive farming practices allegedly to “keep prices low,” but really to maximize profits by increasing yields and automating their operations. Cotton naturally depletes the soil of almost all nutrients as it miraculously metabolizes water and minerals into indestructible fibres; and cotton ranks among the world’s most disease- and insect-prone crops. Corporate farmers cope with both of these problems by pumping petro-chemicals into their plants and soil, and environmental scientists have found, despite repeated washing and rinsing in manufacturing, cotton fabric retains up to 10% of the petrochemicals used to foster its growth. Sleeping in little commercial cotton pyjamas, your precious baby is exposed to several dozen carcinogens. That fact alone ought to convince you, “Only organic cotton for this baby.”

Organic cotton is exceptionally soft and absorbent

If you hold an organic cotton t-shirt in one hand and a commercial cotton tee in the other, you clearly, unmistakably, undeniably can feel difference. The organic cotton shirt is softer, fluffier, cosier, and generally better than the commercial cotton knock-off. The commercial cotton tee shirt just plain feels “cheap” in your hands; imagine how it would feel next to your baby’s sensitive skin.

Organic cotton grows softer with washing, but it does not lose its “loft,” the soft fluffiness that makes tender to baby’s skin and wonderfully forgiving of her little accidents. With the right detergent, you can—and should—wash organic cotton in cold water, and you should set your washing machine to use less water, because you are not using bleach and harsh, surfactant-heavy detergents. Of course, your baby and Mother Earth will feel happiest if you dry your organic-cotton baby clothes outside in the sunshine—you know, “the solar clothes dryer.”

Most organic cotton is grown by family farmers in emerging African nations

“Earth-friendliness” implies respect and concern for the world’s emerging nations. In an age of competition among the post-industrial nations, so-called “third world” nations are rising to parity on the strength of their organic agricultural products. Cotton leads the list of their exports with great consequences for the economies and families.

Last year, in the United States and the United Kingdom, families welcomed 4.7 million newborn babies. If each family bought just one organic cotton “onesie” for its new member, combined purchases would consume 1,175,000 bales of cotton, putting \$58.8 million into the world economy from cotton sales alone. Adding the multiplier effects of ginning, transportation, weaving, and clothing manufacture, those simple purchases put more than \$6 billion into world trade. Then, consider that each newborn goes home to a drawer filled with at least ten “onesies,” and the complete magnitude of the purchases becomes clearer. As you stand at the point of purchase, you must

choose whether your pounds-sterling will go to a family farmer in Central Africa or the shareholders in a Fortune 100 corporation.

The laws of supply and demand still govern the market for cotton products, and consumers' old habits die or evolve very slowly. Therefore, today you will pay about 10% more for an organic cotton product than you will pay for its commercial equivalent. Sustained demand for organic cotton products will, however, eventually tip the supply and demand curves in organic farmers' and shoppers' favour. Meanwhile, isn't your baby worth 10% extra?

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