



NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand's innovative wool industry

Wool is not just for keeping warm. New Zealand entrepreneurs and scientists are creating new business opportunities by using the traditional fibre in innovative ways. Wool can now be found in toiletries, horticultural and medical products as well as at the forefront of the international fashion scene.

Keratec

Research and development company Keratec is devising ways to use keratin proteins from wool in ways not previously possible. Keratec has developed an ingredient to use in hair grooming products – where it can strengthen hair – and is also working on the use of keratin in bone screws to use in orthopaedic treatment and the care of wounds.

Canesis

Canesis, another New Zealand company, is involved in developing new ways to use wool in fabrics and textiles. Among the products it has pioneered are non-woven fabrics including a matting to provide newly-sown grass seed with ideal growing conditions. Grass penetrates the material as it grows and as the matting breaks down, nitrogen from the wool is released to fertilise the young grass. Products based on Canesis research are also being used to insulate buildings and in bedding materials.

Wool's traditional role as a fibre for clothing is being given a new twist by fashion-conscious entrepreneurs in New Zealand.

Snowy Peak

Peri Drysdale is the founder of fashion clothing company Snowy Peak and the entrepreneur behind the development of Merinomink. This blends possum fur – readily available in New Zealand – with wool from the merino sheep to produce garments with the feel of cashmere. Merino thrive in the New Zealand high country and their wool produces a particularly fine fibre. Snowy Peak has used technology to enhance its properties and produce luxury garments that wash well. Snowy Peak's brands include Untouched World, and the company is known for stylish designs that are sold widely internationally. It counts former United States President Bill Clinton among its customers.

Drysdale's company continues to work on product development. She says: "I don't know of a better fibre than wool. All the money that has gone into synthetics has not produced a better material than we have currently."

Icebreaker

Icebreaker is another New Zealand clothing brand using fine merino wool. The brand was developed by an entrepreneur with a marketing background and produces merino-based garments suitable for outdoor activities in all temperatures but which are also coveted fashion items.



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Icebreaker is sold in 17 countries and the company's founder Jeremy Moon estimates that it has half a million customers.

Escorial

At the most exclusive end of the international fashion industry, farmer-entrepreneur Peter Radford is making a mark with wool produced in New Zealand from sheep that descend from rare European flocks producing super-fine fibre. The wool is sold under the Escorial label and has been used by some of Europe's top designers including Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Comme des Garçons. The fabric is significantly lighter than cashmere and crease-resistant. Radford also markets fine wool from the Saxon merino sheep to the international fashion industry under the Saxxon brand.

Stansborough Farm

Clothing based on wool from Stansborough Farm will be familiar to people who saw the *Lord of the Rings* films. Some of the costumes were made from wool produced from the Stansborough Grey sheep, developed from another breed, the Gotland Pelt, by Barry and Cheryl Eldridge. The wool creates fabric that is silky and lustrous and has good draping qualities. Stansborough markets a range of textiles and accessories.

New Zealand's expertise with natural fibres is producing other innovations. A North Island based company Douglas Creek has produced a fibre for luxury clothing from the undercoat of New Zealand red deer. Douglas Creek is preparing to market Cervelt commercially.

For more information, see the wool and fibre industry profile.