



Southeastern Massachusetts Fiber and Textile Roundtable – March 7, 2017

NOTES

Panel Notes:

Q: 1. How is rebuilding a localized model of production valuable to a community?

Kathryn Hildebrand, Founder & CEO, Good Clothing Co.:

- Job creation, education, student internships
- Sense of hope
- We all have a part to play in bringing this back

Eric Henry, President & CEO, TS Designs:

- Keep \$ in your community. A dollar invested locally can bounce 7 times.

Maria Gooch-Smith, Executive Director, South Eastern Economic Development (SEED) Corporation:

- SEED's role is to "seed" small business. They cover the region. Role is to fill gaps. It can be any type of business.
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2. Are you personally witnessing a growing awareness and demand for sustainable materials and Made in America and where are you seeing it most? Consumers? Designers? In terms of Joseph Abboud, perhaps your brand ethos is becoming even more aligned with it?

Maria Gooch-Smith:

- They make Micro and small loans – the micro category has really grown.
- Banks may not be willing to finance this.
- SEED's ratio is more flexible
- They do business TA as well.

Tony Sapienza, President, Joseph Abboud Manufacturing Corporation:

- JA developed as a made in America brand.

- Before NAFTA, we didn't have a global economy.
- Before then, they had 5000 workers in the men's garment union and another 500 in the women's union.
- It was part of the integrity of the brand, so it was of value to stay here.
- BUT all the other products under the JA label (shirts, hats etc) are now made offshore.
- The value proposition is still very difficult [for manufacturing in America]
- So we have to do what Whole Foods Market has done – we have to **sell that value.**

Chris Riley, Co-Owner, Golden Touch Farm/New England Alpaca Fiber Pool:

- NEAFP supports 3500 farms and small shops.
- The end consumer is VERY excited to connect to the local movement. So small shops are seeing great growth.
- They are doing everything they can to stay in front of this wave.
- So NEAFP does:
 - o A lot of email support on trends, newsletter on what they are seeing
 - o A lot of surveys – to be responsive to boots on the ground demand.
 - o Tremendous amount of data analysis to predict needs/manage supply chain & inventory.
- The old models [of supply chain management?] are not working – they are creating an alternative.
- Think outside the box – bring designers into it – create unique / one of a kind things. These ideas never existed before – example, ability to create 1-off T-shirts with individual designs.

Kathryn Hildebrand:

- We have to create the opportunity to make small scale runs possible for new designers.
- They started with 2 pissed off tailors and \$8 in can redemption \$ to open Good Clothing Co. bank account . . .
- Two years later they are a \$1 million business and have created 20 jobs.
- They are making opportunity available for new and emerging designers.
- But it only works if the volume pice also works – changing the conversation – so that 's why they opened the Fall River space.
- Made in the US is more important than she realized. Example – Green Cotton – bringing it back to the US – they want the workers to benefit.

Q: Are we ready to change demand?

Maria Gooch-Smith: She feels yes, we are – and their role is to support this financially.

Tony Sapienze:

- Yes, this is happening. We've seen it happen in food. Also beer! Local breweries, etc. Clothing is an identifier of who we are as individuals.
- It's doable AND it can be a part of large corporations. It is a niche.

Chris Riley:

- The SouthCoast has a really cool vibe. There's a great story behind our vibe. Branding the region would be a huge benefit to many of us.
- Also, we should marry ourselves with the maker industry. A new generation is computer-savvy -- he wants to connect these dots.

Eric Henry:

- We have a President who's talking about bringing jobs back – but this is not best done through tariffs and regulations. We need METRICS to show what's really cheaper – to show externalized costs and the true costs of “cheaper” products. We need those tools.
- Get away from thinking about how this can happen in the “marketplace” – the marketplace has no soul.

Roundtable Report-Outs

Table 1:

Challenges:

- Land Access – it can be cost prohibitive
- Finding desired livestock breeds for fiber
- Finding longline flax seed in quantity
- Finding people who know how to sew – we need to make sewing sexy again!
- Need more High School training programs
- Need more fiber processors

On Hemp: Need more forward progress and clarity on MA legislation. There are currently 48 bills amending the marijuana/hemp act . . . In RI it is more straightforward since the act just allowed industrial hemp.

Eco-boutiques – a critical step in the supply chain – supports small designers.

Need better communication between apparel designers and textile designers – when textile designers make a fabric, what do they know/think about what the designer needs?

When apparel designers use a fabric, what do they know/think about the qualities that the textile designer put into it?

Needs/next steps:

- Need reliable information/resources – a clearinghouse of information?
- A consumer-focused event to follow up from today?
- [Later idea – Kathleen Grevers – A Colloquium to bring together the many academics who were interested in today’s program and give them a chance to present their work.]

Policy leads to investments – how can we influence policy to support local/sustainable textiles?

Opportunities:

- Fiber processing as a niche that needs filling.
- Local hemp production is an opportunity once we can get regulations clarified.
- Create a local online info clearinghouse/database/etc! [Emma W. interest in internship project].

Table 2:

Gaps/Challenges:

- Technical assistance for farmers
- Getting people to see wool use beyond winter!
- Too many trends to be relevant/immediate gratification.
- Education/awareness
- Scaling/connecting supply chains

Opportunities:

- Promotion of farmscapes/ecotourism
- Job creation
- Redefining America and American made through storytelling
- Linking fiber and food

Missing pieces:

- Create approachable products – “Gateway Drugs”
- Message that it’s FUN to support local
- Message for different age groups – teenagers as well as baby boomers
- Certification support
- Identifying sources/production

Table 3:

Gaps:

- Attracting customers
- Connecting designers, growers, dyers, etc.
- Sourcing enough raw materials

Opportunities:

- Database to connect supply chain

Table 4:

Supply Chain Challenges:

- Spinning capacity – key step missing here today
- Machinery expertise
- Social and cultural issues around interest in being a machinist

Opportunity:

- THIS support of community
- Building of new machinery (design)

Perspectives to include:

- Government??
- More round table
- Large brands – could they take a risk on a small product to start with?

Table 5:

Gaps/Challenges:

- Processing - Chokeholds/pinch points/lead time
- Scouring – Sustainability issues / regulations around scouring water / caustic chemicals
- Shipping/transport – Getting fiber “out of the field”
- Expense of transport
- Seed sources – flax
- Finding scale-appropriate technology

Opportunities:

- Consumer awareness – “feel good” consumption / rejecting “fast fashion”
- Builds community – increased outreach

- Keeps land in production or returns land to production
- Manufacturing /new revenue streams
- Shared manufacturing spaces

Table 6:

Gaps/Challenges:

- Creating a regional brand
- Identifying place distinction
- A cohesive voice for region
- Inclusive of supply chain partners (not too narrow geographically)
- Consumer marketing needed!
- Scaling supply chains (micro to macro)
- Transparency in business – waste/circular economies

Opportunities:

- High quality fiber – “New England has the best alpaca”
- NEAFP as an aggregator
- Regional pride
- Stakeholders – funding + resources + skills

Key needs:

- Make industry cleaner
- Don’t repeat mistakes

Wrap-Up:

Key need/consideration: Don’t make the same mistakes that were made in the first wave of the textile industry – pollution, etc.

Bring High School and Vocations schools to the table with us.

What is our capacity of meet demand – how do we get to critical mass.

Don’t separately try to recreate the wheel. Connect people to each other so we know what is going on.

Think about small scale projects as a way to start rebuilding local supply and demand.

Rhonda Fazio – idea for pilot project – weaving Southeastern Massachusetts-sourced throw on a 16-harness loom from the original Quaker Mill that she has in her studio

Emma Werowinski, RISD – internship proposal for map/database of New England textile mills/processors – could be focused more specifically on SE Mass/RI.