

A call out to UK Shepherds

TILLY KAYE

We would love to hear from all the UK's Biodynamic Shepherds for a nationwide wide research project into Biodynamic wool!

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The fashion industry, the second most polluting industry in the world, has been entirely reliant on offshore, centralised textile production for so long that the majority of this generations designers don't know how or where to access local textile resources such as wool, despite there being an abundance of the raw material right here in this country. The charity DIRT founded by Arizona

Muse, is on a mission to promote biodynamic agriculture to the fashion industry, as a useful solution to soil degradation. As part of this mission, they have commissioned South East England Fibreshed to begin to bridge the gap between shepherd and designer. Our initial aim with this project is to map out the availability of biodynamic wool in the UK, as well as interview designers and fashion brands to discover the level of existing knowledge about biodynamic farming, the UK wool industry, and their enthusiasm and capacity for investing in biodynamic fibre.

Wool was one of the fundamental resources of the English economy in the Middle Ages.



Biodynamic wool dyed with fresh woad leaf (blue) and weld (yellow).



Lauriston Farm: Self coloured organic yarn in 4 colours.

Not only did we have an endless supply for our own domestic use, but English wool was highly prized and sought after by the elite European weavers in Flanders, Belgium and wool cloth was the primary choice for clothing at this time.

As a designer wool is hands down my favourite material to work with. Cutting out the pieces for a wool garment is like cutting through butter. It glides through the sewing machine like no other material, and when you steam it, it can be manipulated to your desired shape and fit, which then sets as it cools, maintaining its new shape thereafter. It is genuinely delightful to use, and with proper care can endure generations of wear.

With this research project we aim to understand the possibilities and challenges for a healthy supply network to be developed here in the UK, so that this wonderful raw material can regain status and go towards a highly prized and long lasting product in the apparel industry.

Today a small but growing number of designers are interested in more local, regenerative solutions to their trade. Designer Phoebe English recently worked directly with Plaw Hatch farm (in the South East England Fibreshed) to produce a beautiful, and wearable, worsted wool jumper using the Romney Marsh breed. North Ronaldsay is another British breed which is more than suitable for apparel, Lauriston Biodynamic Farm in Essex keep a flock of Demeter certified North Ronaldsay sheep from which they achieve four different shades of self coloured, award winning, yarn.



Gala Bailey Barker: Biodynamic Plaw Hatch Flock with blanket made from their Lleyrn fleece



Deborah Barker with Lenny the sheep!

This research project has multiple phases which will be informed by the findings of Phase 1, which is where we need your input!

If you have a flock already or are considering getting sheep (flocks of all sizes count, no flock is too small) we would love to talk to you. We would like to gain an understanding of all the flocks, the current (and potential) quantities of fleece here in the UK, and eventually we hope to successfully increase the opportunities for direct

trade between the farmers and designers looking for a home grown biodynamic wool material.

We understand there may only be a small number of biodynamically certified sheep farmers right now, but if you are in conversion, or thinking of getting sheep in the future, we would still love to speak with you and can help sign post you to the questions you need to be asking when considering dual purpose breeds for wool and meat

If you would like more information or to contribute to the project please email Deborah Barker who is leading the project southeastenglandfibreshed@gmail.com We really look forward to hearing from you!

You can read more about Arizona's journey and her mission for DIRT in her insightful article in the previous issue of Star & Furrow.

Tilly Kaye is a clothing designer based in Hackney, East London. With a lifelong passion for better practices in the fashion space, a love of natural materials and a desire to discover the possibilities of local textile production in this country. She has recently started her own brand www.finetilth.co, to explore



Tilly Kaye

ideas around decentralising textiles and fashion, soil health, ancient natural materials, biodegradability and natural dyes.

'Tilth' is a term used to describe the condition of soil; it is best to achieve a 'fine tilth' before sowing seeds or planting out seedlings.'

On behalf of DIRT, the project is led by Deborah Barker from South East Fibreshed.

"We hope to support our small but mighty network of biodynamic shepherds and increase the supply of biodynamic wool available to craftspeople, designers and fashion houses across the UK. This is part of DIRT's mission to turn fashion into a climate solution."



Biodynamic plant dyed wool rainbow

DIRT CHARITY PROJECT

<https://www.dirt.charity/first-biodynamic-wool-supply-chain>

SOUTH EAST FIBRESHED

<https://fibreshed.org/affiliate/southeast-england-fibreshed/>