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PALESTINE
SOLIDARITY:
BRANDS TO
SUPPORT

EXERCISE YOUR ETHICS

SHOPPING GUIDES TO

● Sportswear ● Trainers ● Shoes
● Outdoor clothing

ISSN 0955-8608



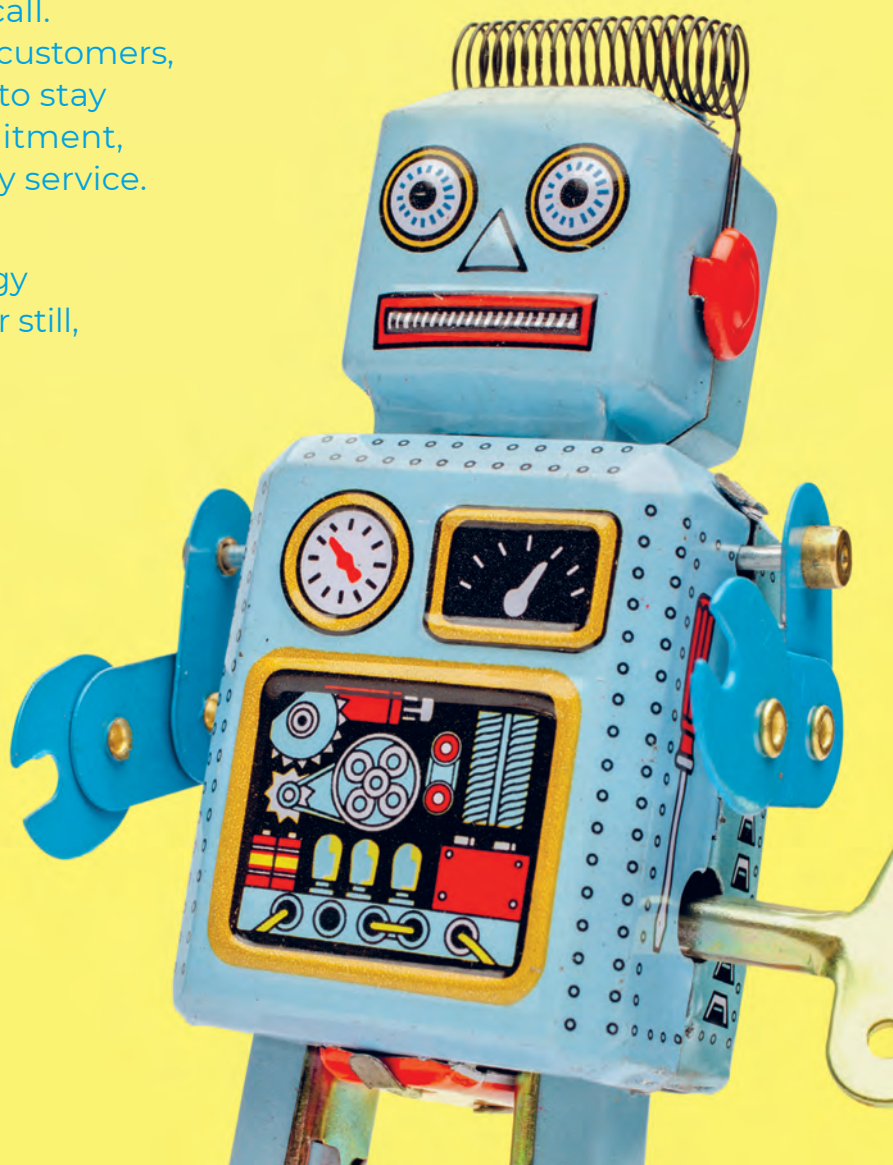
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Keeping life green and simple

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ABOUT THE ADVERTISERS

ECRA checks out advertisers before accepting their ads and reserves the right to refuse any advert.

COVERED IN PREVIOUS SHOPPING GUIDES

Ecotricity (201), Friendly Soap (206), Kingfisher Toothpaste (206), Infinity Wholefoods (178), Naturesave (202), Vegetarian Shoes (208), 100Green (201), Fairphone (198), Green Stationery (205), Suma (195), Zaytoun (178).

OTHER ADVERTISERS Ethical Property Company, Good Green Money, Investing Ethically, The Path, Ripple Effect, Toybox, Womankind.

WHAT IS ETHICAL CONSUMER?

We are an independent, not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder co-operative founded in 1989 and based in Manchester. Our primary goal is making global businesses more sustainable through consumer pressure. Our mission is to:

1 Help consumers to challenge corporate power by using their economic vote every time they go shopping.

In the last issue of the magazine, we noted how our Markets Report had tracked the most difficult trading conditions for more than a decade in some ethical markets. And so it is with some sadness that we report the demise of the Body Shop in the news pages of this issue. Body Shop was an early pioneer for ethical consumption ideas and leaves a powerful legacy here and elsewhere.

Also, since the last issue we have seen extraordinary demand for our published information on the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns that UK consumers can join to protest against the Israeli government's actions in Gaza. We are therefore publishing a special feature in this issue.

Ethical Consumer reaches middle age!

Ethical Consumer magazine celebrated its 35th birthday on March 7th so, on page 8, we have a graphic feature with a few facts and stats about our research co-operative's own beginnings and current position.

Generally speaking, we have been successful in creating a good environment for people to hold and discuss political views around business and society. It was therefore somewhat disconcerting that last month was the first time in 35 years that we began to offer formal support for staff at the front end of receiving abusive messages from the general public. The BDS movement's work, which we have been reporting on since at least 2005, has become the target of hostility and vitriol in a way that, from memory, the Anti-Apartheid movement's campaigning (and other boycotts) never were.

Calling out the tech giants

At the heart of many of the current problems around disinformation and abusive political discourse, lie the giant technology companies bestriding the world. Their arrogant disregard for social impacts and tax contributions

have led to their own extraordinary profitability and growth, but at an extraordinarily high cost to the societies they operate in.

Last month, Ethical Consumer signed up to some campaigns organised by the Global Coalition for Tech Justice and the Conscious Advertising Network which are concerned about impacts of tech company indifference during the '2024 election megacycle'. More information appears at <https://yearofdemocracy.org>

Innovating our own products

So as not to go the way of Body Shop (!), and to stay ahead of the curve in these fast-moving times, Ethical Consumer needs to be innovative and responsive as well as long-lived. In the last issue we introduced our new approach to ranking consumer brands which continues to bed itself in well with the four guides in this issue.

This issue we are also announcing a new approach to our Best Buy product label with its award to Suma organic Italian pasta. Previously the label was only available to companies at the top of our published guides. We are now opening it up to any brands that score highly enough in our new ranking system. More info appears on page 47.

Notes from our Board

We would like to express gratitude to Shaun Fensom, our longest serving non-executive director, who is stepping down from our board in May.

Since he joined in 2009, Shaun's knowledge of tech and the co-operative movement has been instrumental in helping Ethical Consumer develop into the resilient institution that it is today.

Shaun's departure, and an election year for member directors, mean that there will be opportunities to join our board coming soon.

For more information see www.ethicalconsumer.org/about-us/board-directors

ROB HARRISON
EDITOR



5 Push for wider political action and legislative change. Ethical consumerism is not a replacement for other forms of political action. But it is an important additional way for people to exert their influence.

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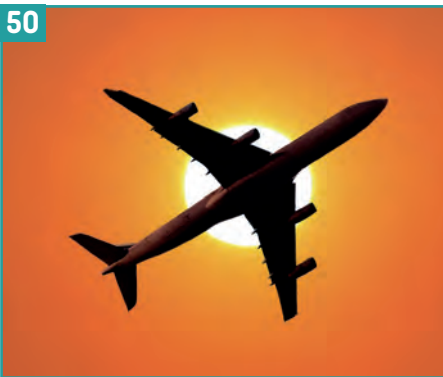
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GUIDE UPDATES

Nappies

Scottish Best Buy reusable nappy company Tots Bots has unfortunately gone bust. It was also a Recommended brand in the menstrual products guide for its Nora brand.

Tots Bots have been going for 20 years but four years ago sold the business to a private equity firm. In 2023, it was reacquired by its founders, husband and wife Magnus and Fiona Smyth. The liquidators blamed “challenging trading conditions, including rising costs and fragile consumer confidence”.

Check out the guides for other Best Buys and Recommended brands:

- www.ethicalconsumer.org/health-beauty/shopping-guide/ethical-eco-nappies
- www.ethicalconsumer.org/health-beauty/shopping-guide/sanitary-products

Supermarkets

Best Buy in our Supermarkets guide, HISBE, has also gone into liquidation. Brighton-based HISBE (How It Should Be) was a Community Interest Company with a shop on the high street which sold organic and fair trade produce sourced from small, local, and ethical producers.

It said that it “could not weather the cumulative impacts of Covid, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis. We hope that our rebel supermarket sowed a seed of change – and we trust that the important work to transform the food industry will continue through others.”

Check out our current guide which we plan to update in August – www.ethicalconsumer.org/retailers/shopping-guide/supermarkets.

Chocolate

Since our chocolate guide in EC205, Hotel Chocolat has been bought by Mars. Hotel Chocolat’s previous score of 8 went down to 1.5. See how all the companies compare – www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/ethical-chocolate

The demise of the pioneering Body Shop

It was announced in February that Body Shop’s private equity owner, Aurelius, was calling in the administrators for its UK operations which trade from around 200 shops. It is predicted that some shops will close and there will be job losses. Aurelius said that Body Shop had insufficient working capital and was trading more weakly than it had anticipated.

Body Shop began as a single shop in Brighton and was founded by Anita Roddick and her husband Gordon in 1976, pioneers at the time in their opposition to animal testing, and champions of environmental and social causes. She argued that “businesses have the power to do good” and should “exist to fight for a fairer, more beautiful world” – as well as make money.

Millie Kendall, chief executive of The British Beauty Council, attributed the brand’s downfall to Roddick no longer being here to steer the ship in these rocky waters. “For a long time, the brand has desperately needed an activist at the helm,” says Kendall. “Roddick created the British, independent founder-led brand and it needs her brilliant activism at a time like this.”

Problems first emerged in 2006 with the surprising sale to L’Oreal. This led to a boycott call over animal testing, as loyal customers saw the sale to an animal tester as a betrayal of Body Shop’s ethical values.

It was the defining brand of a generation and helped set the stage for the wider ethical consumer movement in the UK. Mark Constantine, co-founder of Lush said “Body Shop’s troubles are sad: without Anita Roddick there would be no Lush ... I would even go so far as to say it did more to change the world we live in for the better than any other company since.”

MONDELEZ IS SUING TONY'S CHOCOLONELY

Milka manufacturer Mondelez has taken legal action against Tony's Chocolonely for mimicking its purple packaging. Tony's has launched four new temporary wrappers, inspired by well-known bars Milka, Kit Kat (Nestle), Twix (Mars), and Ferrero Rocher. It said it released a campaign in Germany and Austria to highlight the use of child labour by major suppliers in the cocoa industry.

Mondelez said it owned a colour trademark in Europe. Tony's has since replaced the purple with grey. It added that it planned on appealing the injunction but would comply by changing the packaging for “as long as we need to”, adding: “Let's pay farmers, not lawyers.” Tony's is a Recommended brand in the Chocolate guide.



Plastic-free margarine tubs

In January, Upfield announced what it says is the world’s first plastic-free tub for its Flora spreads. The paper tubs are made from compressed wet paper fibres and are waterproof, oil-proof, and recyclable in local paper waste streams. Upfield expects the packaging to achieve home compostability certification by 2025. The paper tubs do not have a plastic coating or liner and no PFAS (waterproofing ‘forever chemicals’) so they can be recycled along with other paper and cardboard household waste.

However, the European Environment Bureau, a network of environmental organisations, published a report in September 2023 claiming that disposable paper-based food packaging was a “false solution” to the waste crisis, raising concerns about deforestation and arguing that EU rules should tackle all single-use packaging, regardless of the material. The report concludes that the EU and Member States should promote well-designed reuse systems to credibly prevent waste generation.

Flora doesn’t score that well in our Spreads guide because of its ultimate ownership by US investment company KKR – www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/shopping-guide/butter-spreads



Food and home

Stop river dead zones – ban new intensive chicken farms

The Soil Association has launched a petition calling for a UK-wide ban on new intensive poultry units.

Their new Stop Killing Our Rivers report reveals that 10 rivers are at risk of becoming dead zones from pollution from the chicken industry which has been booming by a million birds per month for the last 10 years. Today, a billion broiler (or 'meat') chickens are reared for consumption each year in the UK, 95% of them in intensive units each holding 40,000 birds.



The riverbed of the River Wye is coated with green algae.

In the River Wye alone, the manure from 20 million chickens has contributed to phosphate pollution that causes algal blooms, suffocating plants, and starving wildlife.

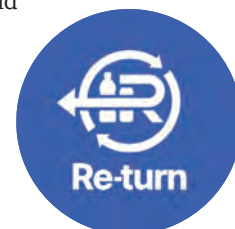
The petition also calls for support for farmers to exit this "damaging" industry that is "impossible to manage sustainably" via a just transition to higher welfare, nature friendly, and agroecological production. It also calls for the government to take action to reduce chicken consumption – less and better meat.

- Sign the petition – <https://act.soilassociation.org/stop-killing-our-rivers>
- Watch the campaign film: <https://youtu.be/TECnFi0NcEI?si=W5aBxQLtVhibjKhA>

Deposit Return Scheme launches in Ireland

On the day that the Irish Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) went live, campaigners at City to Sea who have long called for a DRS in the UK say that delays to the scheme are "trashing our countryside".

The deposit return scheme for PET plastic bottles and steel or aluminium drink cans went live in Ireland on 1st February. Drinks with a new Re-turn logo will require the purchaser to pay a deposit in addition to the price of the product. You can get the deposit back from shops when the container is returned through a Reverse Vending Machine or manually, over the counter. You can get the refund against a store-bought purchase, or as cash.



City to Sea's Policy Manager, Steve Hynd, responded to the Irish rollout of their DRS saying, "While the Irish will now be effectively recycling their 1.9 billion drink bottles and cans consumed on the go, in the UK we are still seeing too many of them littered. We were promised a deposit return scheme by the Conservatives in 2019 but it has been delayed time and time again ... they're delaying the crucial investment we need to see in infrastructure that will allow for bottles and containers to be reused."

The UK currently uses 14 billion plastic drinks bottles and nine billion drinks cans each year.

Although incentivising recycling of plastic bottles and drinks cans is good news, environmental campaigners lament the exclusion of glass. Wales's DRS is likely to include glass but the UK government has ruled out Scotland including glass.

Including glass in a DRS would also give the opportunity for refill and reuse over recycling.

Steve Hynd said: "Other countries already have this. The Danish system, for example, has almost one-quarter of all deposit-marked bottles as refillable. We cannot recycle our way out of the environmental crisis we face, we need a wholesale shift to reuse and refill and a DRS fit for purpose could and should be a key tool to helping us achieve that."



MASSIVE ATTACK FESTIVAL TO BE POWERED BY 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY

Following in the footsteps of more alternative festivals like Big Green Gathering and Shambala, Massive Attack are planning a one-day festival on 25th August at Clifton Downs, Bristol which they hope will be 'proof of concept' to the music industry that low-carbon festivals are possible. Every energy source will be battery or solar on the site.

The Massive Attack event is also targeting the biggest source of carbon emissions related to gigs: transport for the crowd itself. 65% to 85% of emissions for large-scale shows comes from audience travel. Massive Attack will give local fans priority when it comes to tickets, train travel will be encouraged, and the organisers are putting on free electric buses to ferry crowds back to Bristol Temple Meads station.

In 2019, they teamed up with the University of Manchester's Tyndall Centre to map the carbon footprint of tours, producing a 'roadmap' for the industry that encouraged

acts to reduce the amount of kit they brought with them and stop travelling by private jet. In 2021, the band had hoped to play a sustainable gig in Liverpool, but cancelled when it was revealed the venue was also due to host an arms fair.

Founding member Robert Del Naja also called on artists to stop being "greenwashers" for the music industry. "We'll wear 'the climate has changed' T-shirts and make declarations from the stage," he said, while suggesting some groups might be playing at events where the sponsors have connections to fossil fuels. "Ultimately, artists need to ... [do] a bit more research on what they're getting into."

Read more: Super-Low Carbon Live Music: a roadmap for the UK live music sector to play its part in tackling the climate crisis – <https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=56701>

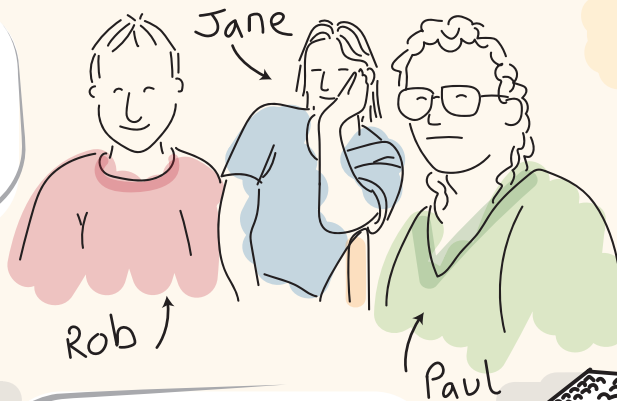
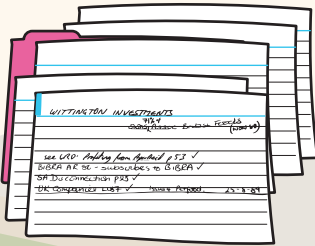
Get to know Ethical Consumer

a few Ethical Consumer facts and stats in our

35th BIRTHDAY YEAR!

1989

Ethical Consumer was set up as a workers' co-op in 1989 by 3 friends in a council flat in Moss Side, Manchester...



...after 2 years of collecting criticisms of companies on index cards by hand!

We had one computer between the 3 of us.



2024

Money comes in...

Magazine & Website

50:50

Research & Consultancy

Ethically-vetted advertisers

£568,538 of investment capital from approx. 200 investors

Our turnover for 2023 was £901,869

We have 14,000 subscribers and around 150,000 monthly website readers

(for clients like Lush, Co-op Bank, Amnesty, NUS and Stop Funding Hate)

Mainly on wages as well as: office rent, utilities, printing and posting the magazine, investing in computers and IT.

We paid for 1,380 organic olive trees in 2021-22 to be planted in the West Bank, Palestine as part of our gift subscription package.



Money goes out...

Who are we?

We now have 22 worker co-op members and many long term suppliers and partners. Co-op members are all on a flat pay structure and paid the same hourly wage no matter what role we have or how long we have been here. We are Real Living Wage employers. We are a multi-stakeholder, not-for-profit co-operative with open membership. Worker members and investor members can sit on the Board, which is majority controlled by the workers. We are Fair Tax Mark accredited.

Where are we?

Our office is in Hulme, Manchester in a workspace run by another co-op. Since Covid, the majority of our workers work remotely. Greater Manchester was the home of the founder of the co-operative movement, Robert Owen, and the Rochdale pioneers who developed a set of co-operative principles that the modern co-operative movement is based on.



UK FINALLY LEAVES ENERGY CHARTER TREATY



© energy charter treaty placard.jpg

Following years of cross-country campaigning and collaboration by civil society organisations, in February 2024 the UK followed eleven other countries in leaving the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). The ECT is a system of secret courts that allows energy companies to sue governments over policies that will reduce their profits. Global Justice Now, Friends of the Earth, War on Want and 350.org handed in a petition of 120,000 signatures to Downing Street in 2023 calling for a UK exit from the ECT.

The treaty had previously been signed by more than 52 countries across Europe and central Asia, and fossil fuel companies have been awarded more than \$100bn by the ECT tribunals since 1998.¹

Companies have sued governments that decided to phase out coal-fired power stations, end offshore oil drilling, or ban fracking. The Netherlands is currently facing a £1.1bn challenge over its phase-out of coal. In 2022, when the EU said it was imposing a windfall tax on energy company profits that were more than 20% higher than the 2018-21 average, an oil firm named Klesch decided to sue under the treaty.

As countries have taken measures to bring emissions down in line with the 2015 Paris climate agreement, the number of claims brought under the treaty has rocketed. Even a former ECT executive has said “The treaty is not consistent with the Paris climate agreement.”²

Cleodie Rickard, trade campaign manager at Global Justice Now said: “By leaving the Energy Charter Treaty we have taken away one of fossil fuel companies’ most used weapons to deter or punish climate action. Doing so has untied a straitjacket on our current and future capacity to enact the just transition we desperately need.”³

There is a so-called ‘sunset clause’ in the treaty that means normally companies can continue to sue for 20 years after countries exit, but the UK’s Climate Change Committee said: “As momentum gathers behind the ECT exit, departing parties may come together to agree not to apply the sunset clause to each other”, and that “a critical mass of exiting parties” would bring “bargaining power”.²

References: 1 www.theguardian.com/business/2022/nov/14/revealed-secret-courts-that-allow-energy-firms-to-sue-for-billions-accused-of-bias-as-governments-exit 2 www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/jul/10/uk-should-quit-energy-charter-treaty-climate-change-committee 3 www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/leaving-the-energy-charter-treaty-has-untied-a-straitjacket-on-uks-ability-to-bring-about-just-transition-campaigners-say

Stop Funding Heat successes

The Stop Funding Heat campaign has been working to persuade advertisers to remove their ads from GB News, as it is a channel they say is “riddled with climate misinformation and denial”.

Successes in the last year include the withdrawal by a London-based coffee company, Grind, and the vegan syrup brand Sweet Freedom. Both had previously had ads on GB News, but after being contacted by Stop Funding Heat supporters on social media and email, they chose to remove them.

In response to Grind pulling its spending with the channel, the actor Laurence Fox, founder of the right-wing political party Reclaim, tried to start a boycott of Grind coffee, which backfired.

Support for Grind bloomed, and it saw a 50% increase in sales. The CEO of Grind said “it’s simply not the right fit for Grind to partner with a channel that provides a platform for those who cast doubt on climate science”. The brand also displayed a billboard in Leicester Square in London showing some of the positive tweets it received over its decision and made a £1,432 donation to the WWF Climate Crisis Fund – twice the amount it had spent with GB news.



RENEWABLES CAN'T RELY ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Anti-Slavery International and partners have released a guidance document for investors and a policy brief to the UK Government, to help the solar and electric vehicle industries move away from reliance on forced labour in the Uyghur Region where there is systematic persecution by the Chinese government.

They say “There is no reason that green technology should go hand in hand with human rights abuses”, “it is imperative for governments and investors to divest from the Uyghur Region and diversify sourcing locations to ensure both an ethical and stable source of inputs for solar and EV technologies.”

“Consumers must use their bargaining power with companies that sell electric vehicles and solar panels, demanding information on their supply chains and links to the Uyghur Region.”

For more information see www.antislavery.org/latest/supporting-a-just-transition-through-sustainable-and-ethical-production-of-green-technologies

Outdoor clothing

Not an easy road

In a sector awash with synthetic fibres and ‘forever chemicals’, ALEX CRUMBIE goes in search of the ethical options.

The beauty of the great outdoors is central to the marketing of outdoor brands: *buy our products and you will experience the natural world in all its glory*. Of course, there is some truth in this – it isn’t advisable to go hiking in a pair of heels and a mini-skirt (believe me). But when you consider the environmental damage that results from the production of much outdoor gear, this marketing shtick can seem hypocritical.

But not all brands are biting the hand that feeds them. In this guide we look at a range of outdoor brands, from well-known high-street names to lesser-known ethical labels that you might not have heard of, to highlight the best and the worst ethical practice.

We chose brands which make a wide range of outdoor clothing e.g waterproofs, and fleeces, but they may also make walking boots, tents, sleeping bags and rucksacks. We have not covered brands that are specialists in only one area e.g just walking boots.

As well as our core ethical categories (Animals, Climate, Company Ethos, Tax, and Workers), we have also examined each brand’s use of sustainable materials and toxic PFAS.

What makes outdoor clothing ethical?

The most ethical outdoor clothing and gear is that which you already own. You may consider your decades-old gilet unstylish, but retro is always in fashion! And if it is broken then repair it – either yourself or send it to one of the brands that offers repair services (p15).

The most ethical outdoor gear is that which you already own.

The next best option is buying secondhand and, to make life easier (and cheaper), most of our Best Buy brands have secondhand online shops (see p15).

If you do need to buy new, then opt for one of our Best Buys or Recommended brands.



A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website

Which materials should I buy?

Unfortunately, there isn't a simple answer to this because there are competing ethical factors and some differences in performance. Plant-based natural fibres, especially when organically produced, are generally the most sustainable, so go for these where possible. But they may not be adequate for more testing outdoor activities and the joys of British weather.

Animal-derived fibres, such as wool and down, can perform very well (especially for warmth) but come with animal rights and welfare issues. And synthetic fibres, which are ubiquitous in this market, have great performance credentials, but are mostly derived from fossil fuels, are not biodegradable, and contribute to microplastic pollution.

An important consideration is what you need it for: are you going to be climbing Everest, or is your expedition only taking you as far as the local park? For the latter you may not need a whole outfit of high-tech synthetic gear, so natural fibres will likely suffice.

Buying secondhand products allows you to bypass most of these ethical dilemmas because it means you aren't contributing to demand for new products – though secondhand synthetic clothing will still contribute to microplastic pollution. See p15 for more on buying secondhand. ●

COMMON MATERIALS FOUND IN OUTDOOR CLOTHING

Material	Most ethical options	Generally used for	Pros	Cons
Natural plant-based fibres: cotton, linen, hemp, etc.	Recycled Organic	Base layers, t-shirts, shirts, some jackets, and coats.	Biodegradable. Does not contribute to microplastic pollution. Generally a lower climate impact than wool, especially if organic.	Generally not waterproof. Not as light as synthetics.
Wool & Merino wool	Recycled Organic Certified by Responsible Wool Standard Sourced from non-mulesing farms (mulesing is prohibited in the UK).	Base layers.	Biodegradable. Does not contribute to microplastic pollution. Warm, breathable, does not need washing often.	Animal rights/welfare issues, especially if sourced from farms that practice mulesing, which is prohibited in the UK but common in Australia – one of the largest wool exporters. Higher climate impact than most plant-based or synthetic fibres when full life cycle of the sheep is accounted for.
Down (goose and duck feathers)	Recycled Certified: Responsible Down Standard (RDS); Global Traceable Down Standard (TDS); Fjällräven's Down Promise; Mountain Equipment's Down Codex.	Insulation in jackets, sleeping bags.	Biodegradable. Warm and lightweight. Does not contribute to microplastic pollution, though the outer layer of down jackets and sleeping bags are generally synthetic.	Animal rights/welfare issues, especially if the down is not certified, which means it might be plucked from live animals. Not waterproof, can clump together if wet and can take a long time to dry.
Leather	Secondhand* Leather sourced from a supplier certified 'gold' by the Leather Working Group ensures best environmental and social practice, though is not a marker of animal welfare.	Walking boots, some gloves.	Durable and strong. Water resistant, though not waterproof.	Animal rights/welfare issues. While many claim that leather is merely a by-product of the meat industry, it still supports it. The tanning process is usually very polluting and toxic. Opt for leather from gold-standard tanneries.
Synthetic materials including polyester, nylon, elastane, and faux leather.	Recycled, though this still sheds microplastics.	Clothing of all varieties, shoes, sleeping bags, tents.	Lightweight, dries easily, wicks well.	Not biodegradable. Contributes to microplastic pollution.** Generally derived from fossil fuels.

* We found little when it came to policies that guaranteed the welfare of animals made into leather. Most brands just said it was a by-product of the meat industry, so argued that welfare considerations were not applicable. Buying secondhand is best.




** See web version of this guide for more on microplastics

SHOPPING GUIDE


Outdoor clothing

ETHISCORE

The higher the ethiscore, the better the company.

GOOD 60+ 
AVERAGE 25-59 
POOR 0-24 

CATEGORIES





























































































































































































































































































The more green bars the better  *

Best Buys

 **Recommended**

 **Brands to avoid**

* Each category is scored out of 100. The final Ethiscore is the average of the category scores.

BRAND	ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)	CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS	USE OF PFAS	COMPANY GROUP
 Páramo	80								Gearform Holdings Ltd
 Finisterre	76								Fitzroy Apparel Ltd
 Alpkita	68								Alpkita Ltd
 Lowe Alpine rucksacks	60								EOTH Ltd
 Patagonia	60								Patagonia Purpose Trust
 Rab	60								EOTH Ltd
 Vaude	56								VAUDE Sport GmbH & Co. KG
 Fjällräven	45								Fenix Outdoor/Nordin Family
Montane	44								Inverleith LLP, Montane Ltd
Craghoppers	41								Regatta Group
Mammut	41								Telemos Capital Holdings Ltd
Dare2b	40								Regatta Group
Regatta	40								Regatta Group
Jack Wolfskin	30								Topgolf Callaway Brands Corp
The North Face	28								VF Corporation Inc
Decathlon, Forclaz, Simond	26								Decathlon SA
Quechua	26								Decathlon SA
Bridgedale socks	24								Bollin Group Ltd
Mountain Equipment	24								Bollin Group Ltd
Sprayway	24								Bollin Group Ltd
Mountain Warehouse	21								Mountain Warehouse International Ltd
prAna	19								Columbia Sportswear Co Inc
Brasher	18								Pentland Group/JD Sports Fashion plc
Eurohike, Hi Gear	18								Pentland Group/JD Sports Fashion plc
Freedom Trail	18								Pentland Group/JD Sports Fashion plc
North Ridge	18								Pentland Group/JD Sports Fashion plc
Peter Storm	18								Pentland Group/JD Sports Fashion plc
Adidas Terrex	16								Adidas AG
Berghaus	16								Pentland Group Holdings Limited
Salomon	16								Anta Sports
Ayacucho	14								PAI Partners
Trespass	14								Jacobs & Turner Ltd
Arc'Teryx	12								Anta Sports
Columbia	11								Columbia Sportswear Co Inc
Mountain Hardwear	11								Columbia Sportswear Co Inc
Rohan	10								Rinaldo Rinaldini Limited
 Gelert	5								Fraser's Group/Sports Direct
 Karrimor	5								Fraser's Group/Sports Direct
 Merrell	5								Wolverine World Wide Inc

We consider Company Ethos particularly important and it covers the whole company group so it is weighted double.



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has.

WHAT TO BUY

- **Is it secondhand?** Buying secondhand is nearly always the more sustainable option. Many of the brands in our guide sell secondhand items and offer repair services.
- **People before profit?** Does the brand ensure that the workers in its supply chain are respected and paid a living wage? Opt for a brand that scores well in our Workers category.
- **Is it made from sustainable materials?** Outdoor brands are heavily reliant on synthetic fibres, which are generally not sustainable. Natural fibres are preferable, though may not be as effective as synthetics for more testing outdoor settings.

WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Do you really need it?** The most ethical outdoor gear is that which you already own. Repair the gear you have and only buy more if you really need to.
- **Does it contain PFAS?** Many brands are still using these harmful industrial chemicals for waterproofing outdoor gear such as jackets and boots. Opt for a brand that doesn't use them at all.
- **Is it the product of animal exploitation?** Most outdoor gear companies rely on wool, down and leather. If you do choose products containing these materials, ensure that the brand has adequate animal welfare policies in place, such as certified down or wool, or uses recycled animal materials.

Score table highlights

Use of PFAS

PFAS are persistent toxic chemicals used as waterproofing in a wide range of outdoor clothing products. There is a special extended feature on PFAS and the approach taken to them by companies in this guide on page 16 below.

Animals

Most of the brands in this guide used wool, down, leather, and, to a lesser extent, silk in their products. To get full marks, a brand and its wider group needed to be free of animal-derived materials and have a policy committing to not using animal products in future.

None of the brands in this guide achieved this, but the closest was Páramo, which currently doesn't use any animal-derived materials, but didn't have an explicit policy saying this. We award more marks for brands that have policies on this issue because it shows that they have committed to not using animal-derived materials at all.

Brands that sold animal products but were considered to have adequate animal welfare policies (such as certified down, or prohibiting wool from farms that practice mulesing) could score up to 40 points. So opt for these brands if you are buying clothing made from animal products. Brands that used animal products but did not have adequate welfare policies scored zero.

Some brands used silk – for example, in gloves. Equip Outdoor Technologies, which owns brands Rab and Lowe Alpine, stopped using silk as a result of Ethical Consumer. They told us: “After Ethical Consumer emphasised the negative impacts of silk production in 2021, we dropped our small range of products containing silk.” It's great to see companies making positive changes as a result of our research.

Workers

All the brands in this guide outsourced the production of all or most of their products, as is the norm in the clothing sector. To get full marks brands were required to have policies in place to uphold workers' rights throughout their supply chains. We paid particular attention to whether a brand had good purchasing practices (poor purchasing practices can

The best option is to repair or upcycle what you already own, or buy secondhand (see p15).

BEST BUYS



Our Best Buy brands are: **Páramo, Finisterre, Alpkit, Lowe Alpine, Patagonia** and **Rab**.

All these brands scored well across most/all categories and were either PFAS free or almost PFAS free. They also offered repair services and recycled donated materials. Most sold secondhand products.

All these brands sold waterproofs, fleeces and rucksacks, except Páramo which doesn't sell rucksacks and Lowe Alpine which only sold rucksacks. Finisterre also sold walking boots, Alpkit and Rab sold tents and sleeping bags, and Patagonia sold sleeping bags.



Vaude and Fjällräven

are also great options, but overall scored lower across the board than our Best Buys and didn't appear to offer recycling of old products.

They both make waterproofs, fleeces, rucksacks, tents and sleeping bags. Vaude additionally makes walking boots.

RECOMMENDED

Avoid brands right at the bottom of the score table: **Gelert, Karrimor** and **Merrell** score only 5/100.

You may also wish to avoid **Regatta** and **Dare 2b** because Regatta Ltd's parent company Risol Imports Ltd donates to the Conservative Party and the Conservative Friends of Israel (see page 14).

BRANDS TO AVOID

Outdoor clothing

cause suppliers to cut wages or demand excessive overtime), and what they were doing to ensure living wages were paid by their suppliers. Marks were deducted for any third-party evidence of workers' rights abuses.

Five brands scored full marks: Alpkit, Lowe Alpine, Páramo, Rab, and Vaude, while Mammüt received 90/100.

Of particular note is Páramo, which partnered with the Miquelina Foundation in Bogotá, Colombia in 1992, which gives "valuable opportunities to vulnerable women at risk of prostitution and drugs by providing them with training and employment." All the garments manufactured at this site (80% of its annual production) carry the World Fair Trade Organisation Fair Trade label.

Alpkit is also worth mentioning because 30% of what they sell is manufactured by them in the UK, which is relatively rare in this sector. According to its website, the items that are manufactured in the UK are its wetsuits and Sonder bikes.

Sustainable Materials

Nearly all outdoor gear brands rely heavily on synthetic fibres, primarily because they are lightweight, durable, and can be waterproofed. However, as we have pointed out in other clothing guides, most synthetic fibres, such as polyester, are made from fossil fuels and contribute to microplastic pollution. A report by Changing Markets Foundation recommended that the sector needed to "reduce reliance on synthetic materials, through a viable trajectory and targets for the uptake of more sustainable alternatives."

Brands were awarded marks on several criteria:

- The proportion of their materials that Ethical Consumer considered to be 'most' sustainable (eg organic or recycled natural fibres, recycled wool/down) or 'more' sustainable (eg recycled synthetics, non-organic plant fibres, responsibly sourced wool).
- Whether the company had taken steps to reduce water usage and pollution from fabric production.
- Whether the company was signed up to the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals, a multi-stakeholder initiative working to phase out hazardous chemicals from the fashion industry.

Many of the brands are increasing their use of recycled synthetic fibres, which in some respect is good news. We considered recycled synthetic fibre to be a 'more' sustainable material because

of the lower carbon impact associated with it. However, it still ends up in landfill eventually and contributes to microplastic pollution, so ultimately the sector needs to find more sustainable solutions in future.

Company Ethos

Most companies scored poorly for Company Ethos, but a few scored notably well:

● **Páramo (90/100)** – As of 2022 the company, including sister company Nikwax and the Miquelina factory in Bogotá, Colombia, became an employee-owned business. It also was considered to be offering an environmental and social alternative because it didn't use PFAS and most of its products were produced in a Fair Trade-certified factory in Colombia which gave opportunities to vulnerable women.

● **Finisterre (80/100)** – Finisterre was considered to be offering an environmental alternative because it was PFAS free, had a clear focus on the

durability of its products and used a significant proportion of sustainable materials. It was also a B-Corp and a certified living wage company.

● **Patagonia (60/100)** – In 2022, the company restructured so that it is now owned by the Patagonia Purpose Trust and the Holdfast Collective. The company states: "every dollar that is not reinvested back into Patagonia will be distributed as dividends to protect the planet." The company expects the annual dividend to be roughly \$100m, which will be distributed to the Holdfast Collective, "to fight the environmental crisis, protect nature and biodiversity, and support thriving communities, as quickly as possible". Corporate restructures should be treated with suspicion, in part because they can be for self-serving reasons such as tax avoidance, but it appears that Patagonia's restructure is genuinely a good thing. The company also remains a B-Corp.

● **Alpkit (40/100)** – Alpkit was a certified living wage supplier and a B-Corp.

REGATTA'S POLITICAL DONATIONS

While sifting through the annual accounts of Risol Imports Ltd (which owns the Regatta and Dare 2b brands), we found that it had made thousands of pounds of political donations in recent years. Between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2023, the Risol Imports Group donated £100,000 to the UK Conservative Party and £30,000 to the Conservative Friends of Israel (CFI), among other organisations.

The owner of Regatta has donated thousands to the Conservative Party and the Conservative Friends of Israel.

The CFI is an influential lobby group. According to its website: "CFI works to promote its twin aims of supporting Israel and promoting Conservatism. With close to 2,000 activists as members – alongside 80% of Tory MPs – CFI is active at every level of the Party."

An investigation by openDemocracy found that the organisation has taken British MPs on 155 free trips in the last

ten years, "in an unprecedented charm offensive to promote the country in Westminster."

The CFI has taken a strong stance against the BDS movement and has lobbied against it in parliament, including through its support of the Economic Activity of Public Bodies (Overseas Matters) Bill – also known as the Anti-boycott Bill – which prevents public bodies from making procurement and investment decisions based on considerations of ethical and human rights. The bill even gives special status to Israel, which Amnesty International asserts will "shield Israeli authorities from accountability for human rights violations and breaching international law."

Craghoppers, another brand in this guide, is not directly owned by Risol Imports Ltd, but is part of the wider Regatta group, and the two companies share a director.

We contacted Regatta, as well as Craghoppers, to ask about these donations, but we received no reply.

For those of you that don't want your money to go to the Conservative Party or the CFI, you may wish to boycott Regatta and Dare 2b and spend your money with another brand – ideally one of our Best Buys.

Secondhand and repairing what you already own

The most ethical and sustainable gear is that which you already own, so it is best to make it last as long as possible. If it does need repairing and your skills aren't up to the job, then a number of the brands in our guide offer repairs (or will recycle your gear if it is beyond repair). We've highlighted the services provided by our Best Buy and Recommended brands in the table opposite.

Several brands will also accept your old clothes once you are done with them and recycle them, ensuring they don't go to landfill.

If what you have can't be fixed, then buying secondhand is a great option because it doesn't increase demand for new goods – all of which have some impact on people and planet. Plus, it is usually cheaper!

Some of the brands in this guide also sell secondhand products, including most of our Best Buy brands.

Brand	Repairs service?	Recycles old gear?	Secondhand shop?
Páramo	Yes	Yes – discount given on new gear in exchange.	Yes – Páramo Re-store Adventure eBay shop.
Finisterre	Yes	Yes – discount given on new gear in exchange.	Yes – Reskinned shop.
Alpkit	Yes – any brand.	Yes – Continuum Project, any brand.	Yes – Alpkit Outlet official eBay shop.
Rab/Lowe Alpine	Yes	Yes – including any old down items, such as pillows.	Kind of – 'Mountain Outfitters' shop sells end of line, factory seconds, and samples (Derbyshire store only).
Patagonia	Yes	Yes	Yes – Worn Wear, though only delivers within the US. In-person shop in Berlin.
Vaude	Yes – take to your nearest Vaude dealer. Repairs other brands too.	No	Maybe – Vaude Second Use Shop launched several years ago with eBay, though could not be found.
Fjällräven	No – but offers detailed instruction on its website of how to repair clothes.	No	No

Companies behind the brands

Páramo is a small British outdoor clothing company based in East Sussex, started by Nick Brown in 1992. In February 2022, Nick sold his businesses, Nikwax and Páramo, to his employees via a newly formed Employee Ownership Trust.

Finisterre started as a surf brand based on the Cornish coast. Its wetsuits are made from Yulex, a plant-based material made from natural rubber, and it offers a wetsuit rental service. The brand is still geared towards products for those that love the sea but sells a wide range of clothing for landlubbers too. It also sells secondhand products on its website.

Nottingham-based **Alpkit** is a certified B Corp, a founding member of the Microfibre Consortium, and it also offers repair and recycling for any brand of outdoor gear.

The only products that aren't PFAS free are its tents: "Switching to PFC-free tent fabrics has been slower than in our clothing and only now are we confident in the performance of the alternative. We aim to be PFC free in the entire shelter range by the end of this year 2024."

We have worked with Alpkit in the past on its ethical policy development and reporting. This relationship does not impact our ratings, and we try to remain a critical friend to all the companies we work with. Our independent ratings, which are published in full and based on a transparent methodology, help ensure our impartiality.

Rab and **Lowe Alpine** are both brands of Equip Outdoor Technologies. The company is headquartered in Derbyshire, though now has offices and showrooms across Europe, North America, and Asia. It offers product repairs and has a factory outlet shop in Derbyshire where you can find end-of-line and factory seconds for a discounted price. It also has a rental service, so you don't have to break the bank and purchase all new gear for your once-in-a-lifetime mid-life crisis expedition up Kilimanjaro!

Vaude is a supplier of outdoor and bike gear based in Germany. It doesn't have shops in the UK, but it has a number

of UK distributors. The company was doing some good stuff when it came to sustainability and ethics, though the corporate social responsibility section of its website was a labyrinthine nightmare – as if it had been designed by Escher on a sustainability kick!

The company lost marks in the Climate category because it marketed itself as "climate-neutral", with "climate neutral products". Ethical Consumer (and the EU, see p50) considers such claims, which rely on carbon off-setting, to be misleading.

The North Face is owned by US clothing and footwear company VF Corporation which also owns Timberland and Vans.

The North Face is one of the best-known outdoor brands but said hardly anything about PFAS and we couldn't find any targets for their phase out. In 2016, it was targeted by Greenpeace for its use of PFAS and promised to phase them out in its clothing by 2020. But now it's not even giving a phase-out date. Greenpeace is no longer running its 'Detox' campaign.

VF Corp has still not signed the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile Garment Industry, which is continuing the life-saving work of the Bangladesh Accord to make factories safe after the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013, which killed 1,134 people. 179 other major clothing companies have signed the Accord, including other outdoor gear companies.

Another top selling brand, **Berghaus**, is owned by the Pentland Group, which also owns the Ellesse sports brand, Kickers shoes, and Speedo swimwear. Pentland Group is a British privately owned, family business registered in Jersey, a tax haven – hence its score of 0/100 for Tax Conduct.

Pentland also owns 51% of JD Sports, a sports retailer which owns lots of outdoor gear brands – Brasher, Eurohike, Freedom Trail, Hi-Gear, North Ridge, and Peter Storm – brands which are exclusively sold in JD's outdoor gear shops: Blacks, Go Outdoors and Millets.

In June 2021, JD Sports faced an investor backlash after handing its boss a £4.3m bonus despite taking tens of millions of pounds in government support during the pandemic. ●

Outdoor clothing

The problem 'forever chemicals' used to waterproof your outdoor gear

JANE TURNER looks at the indelible footprint left by PFAS and investigates what companies are doing about it.

Since PFAS were first produced in the 1950s, they have found their way into our homes, cars, offices, and onto our supermarket shelves. They give stain-resistant properties to carpets, furniture, and clothing, and add water repellency to outdoor clothing. They're added to paints and varnishes, cleaning sprays, and personal care products. They're even in our kitchens as non-stick coatings on pots and pans, like Teflon, and the paper, board, and compostable food packaging that's replacing plastic.¹

Because of this widespread use, PFAS now contaminate water, air, wildlife, and human blood all across the world. More than 99% of people tested have PFAS in their blood, and studies now show babies are born with PFAS already in their bodies because of prenatal exposure.¹

The recent State of Our Rivers 2024 report from The Rivers Trust found that PFAS contaminate almost every river in England.⁶

What are PFAS?

PFAS (per- and polyfluorinated alkyl substances, including PFCs) are a group of around 10,000 harmful industrial chemicals linked to a wide range of health and environmental impacts. In humans, the list includes high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, thyroid disease, cancers, reproductive problems, and a reduced immune response to tetanus vaccinations.¹ PFAS have also been associated with immunotoxicity. In wildlife, impacts range from changes in the immune system of otters to the brain function of polar bears.¹

These chemicals are often referred to as 'Forever Chemicals' because they are extremely persistent. Once in the environment, they can take thousands of years to break down.¹ They have been labelled "the most persistent human-made chemicals known to date".⁴

The 2019 film *Dark Waters* dramatised the pollution in the USA around toxic PFAS dumps and revealed that their



PFAS make fabrics waterproof by repelling water and making it bead up. But Paramo's PFA-free finishes do exactly the same job without lasting 'forever'.

manufacturers – 3M and DuPont – knew about their toxicity from the start but kept it quiet. This is similar to the way the tobacco industry long knew about the negative health impacts of smoking, but carried on regardless.

The use of these persistent and highly toxic chemicals in outdoor clothing has gone under the radar for a long time. Greenpeace started campaigning against them in outdoor clothing and equipment in 2015. But most consumers are still unaware of the role they are playing in the perpetuation of 'forever chemicals'.

The outdoor gear industry tends to refer to these chemicals as PFCs (perfluorochemicals) but we are talking about the same thing. For the sake of simplicity, we will refer to PFAS as PFCs here because that's what you might see on labels in the shops or on company websites. They may also say 'fluorocarbon free'.

What are PFCs used for in outdoor gear?

PFCs are mainly used for waterproofing jackets, walking boots and tents, in two ways:

1. The fabric is given a **membrane** that functions like a thin skin incorporated between fabric layers such as the ubiquitous Gore-Tex and

eVent. They are mainly made from PTFE (which is also used as Teflon non-stick coatings) which requires toxic PFCs in its production and may degrade in the environment to these more toxic forms.

2. The other potential use of PFCs is **DWR (Durable Water Repellency)**. Textiles are given a coating or finish which ensures that water and dirt bead up on the product's exterior. The sprays and washes you can buy to re-waterproof your clothing or equipment yourself may also contain PFCs.

But it turns out that PFCs can turn up in loads of other things other than membranes and fabric finishes. It had become common practice in the footwear industry, for example, to coat every little part of a shoe: the laces, the stitching, the heel counter, and even products that weren't meant to be waterproof, like sandals.

Zips is one of the places that companies have found it hardest to get rid of PFCs. Zip manufacturer YKK got rid of them in their zips but found that the paint on their zippers contained PTFE.

For outdoor clothing, the manufacturing of waterproof clothes and footwear is where these chemicals mainly get into water, soils and sediments and then build up in the food chain, but they can also be released during the use and disposal of the products.

What are companies doing about PFCs?

We scrutinised what all the companies in this guide were saying about their use of PFCs, but much of the time we had to read between the lines.

Some of them are saying that they are now PFC-free, but companies don't always include PTFE membranes (e.g. Gore-Tex) in their definition of PFCs. So they may claim to be PFC-free when they are not. Or companies say they are using PFC-free DWRs but don't mention the membranes.

They may also say that all their 'apparel' (clothing) is PFC-free without mentioning their walking boots or tents, the lion's share of which are still using Gore-Tex or PFC waterproof finishes.

Either way, very few of the companies were completely clear about their use of PFCs apart from the four companies with full marks in our PFAS column: Paramo, Finisterre, Fjällräven and PrAna.

- Of the 27 companies listed here only 5 (18%) had stopped using PFCs.
- Nearly half of the 27 had no phase-out date for their use of PFCs.
- 82% of companies were still using PFCs.
- Four companies were not even acknowledging the issue.

What are governments doing?

New laws in the US about levels of toxic PFAS in drinking water have highlighted the need for much tighter regulation in the UK. Drinking water is the main way that we are exposed to these toxic chemicals.

The US has taken an unprecedented move to ban six of the most studied and toxic PFAS in drinking water above a certain level. Before, levels in drinking water were only advisory guidelines and unenforceable. The new legal limits of 4 ng/l (nanograms per litre) are still higher than is generally considered safe, and well above the US advisory health limits (0.02 ng/l and 0.004 ng/l for PFOA and PFOS). US public health advocates say the discrepancy is in part due to industry pressure.

But in the UK, our advisory levels are 25 times higher than even the compromised US legal limits, at 100 ng/l. Pressure is now building on the UK government to urgently tighten regulations.

In the UK only three PFAS are regulated. But the EU is pushing to get all PFAS banned as a class by 2025, a move opposed by the industry body, the Fluoropolymer Product Group, which represents the big chemical companies manufacturing PFAS, like 3M, Bayer, and BASF. It says PFAS have different risks so shouldn't be banned as one.

A recent testing of eleven high-level European politicians found up to seven PFAS in all eleven of them, with five politicians exceeding existing levels of concern.³

The testing was undertaken to raise awareness and urge them to support the PFAS ban.

Looking after PFC-free gear

Fabrics with PFC-free DWR waterproof coatings (like Nikwax), will need washing and reproofing more often than their toxic PFC equivalents. That's because they are not as strong as PFCs which have a very strong chemical bond which is difficult to break – hence them being persistent in the environment and being nicknamed 'forever chemicals'. The 'durable' element of PFC-free DWR is no longer as durable and the waterproofing benefits don't last as long but it seems to be a small price to pay for the sake of the environment and human health.

A word about Gore-Tex

Gore-Tex has become synonymous with waterproof and breathable fabrics. Gore-Tex fabrics usually contain a thin membrane made from PTFE (Polytetrafluoroethylene, also known as Teflon).

Gore-Tex has committed to eliminate what it calls 'PFCs of Environmental

Concern' (PFC EC) by the end of 2025, but it doesn't think that PFTE is of environmental concern so it will continue using it.

However, Gore-Tex has been developing a PFC-free membrane called ePE (based on polyethylene) and a PFC-free DWR. Now 50% of its fabrics are PFC-free in both membrane and DWR.²

It's likely it will continue to use PFTE in its Gore Pro products but will use ePE in the bulk of its range.⁵ Unfortunately, it's not clear how you can tell which products that bear the Gore-Tex label are PFC-free and which are not. ■

What can consumers do about PFCs?

- Only buy outdoor clothing and footwear that is PFC-free.
- Only buy your outdoor gear from companies that are totally PFC free now – Paramo, Finisterre, FjällRaven, prAna.
- Buy PFC-free clothing and footwear from companies who are nearly PFC-free – Alpkite, Lowe Alpine, Rab, Patagonia, Vaude, Marmot, Jack Wolfskin.
- Buy secondhand.
- Be aware that anything labelled as Gore-Tex or eVent may contain PFCs.
- Look for Sympatex membranes (polyethylene – PE) or membranes made of polyurethane.
- Look for Nikwax DWR fabrics and coatings which are used on Nikwax's sister company, Paramo.
- Re-waterproof your gear using PFC-free proofers like Nikwax.

More information

Via the #BanPFAS coalition, 128 European NGOs, including Ethical Consumer, are demanding a ban on all 'forever chemicals' in consumer products by 2025 and a complete ban on their manufacture and use in the EU by 2030. <https://banpfasmanifesto.org/en/manifesto-for-an-urgent-ban-of-forever-chemicals-pfas>

●● A DWR with PFCs is over-engineered for hiking shoes. We were using a formula that was doing things we didn't need. ●● KEEN PFA-FREE WALKING BOOTS

References: 1 Dr Kerry Dinsmore, FIDRA, February 2022, in article written for Ethical Consumer Issue195 2 www.ukclimbing.com/articles/features/sustainable_gear_the_evolution_of_gore_tex_-_eptfe_epe_and_pfc-free_dwr_treatments-15429 3 <https://eeb.org/high-level-european-politicians-polluted-by-pfas> 4 <https://banpfasmanifesto.org/en/manifesto-for-an-urgent-ban-of-forever-chemicals-pfas> 5 www.ukclimbing.com/articles/features/sustainable_gear_the_evolution_of_gore_tex_-_eptfe_epe_and_pfc-free_dwr_treatments-15429 6 <https://therivertrust.org/key-issues/state-of-our-rivers>

No easy feat

RUTH STRANGE uncovers some uncomfortable truths about footwear supply chains and examines some of the materials used.



Most footwear is produced in China, but this vegan shoe was made in Northampton, for Ethical Wares.

There used to be much more shoe manufacturing in the UK than there is today. Very few companies still manufacture in-house. From the 1970s, production was increasingly outsourced to lower-wage and less regulated economies. It's certainly not made easy for workers to resist, especially if their right to organise is limited. Organising to improve conditions is even harder for homeworkers in the shoe industry. In South Asia alone, the ILO estimate there are 50 million home-based workers serving different industries.

Workers

In our new Workers column, companies can accumulate points for positive steps like honest disclosure of who supplies them and convincing strategies to deal with the issues that come with complex supply chains. If we then find news reports of fundamental problems, we will deduct points. Detailed explanations are linked from our website Ethiscore tables. In many cases, scores are lower than those of clothing companies as

conditions in the footwear industry are said to be ten years behind the garment industry, partly because the supply chains are longer and harder to monitor.

Dangerous conditions

Lack of regulation is a huge health issue in an industry using toxic glues and cleaning agents, as workers may not have proper protections. There have also been building safety disasters. In 2022, a footwear factory fire in Bangladesh left three people dead and 40 injured. Just two years after the well-known Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013, a shoe factory collapsed in Wenling in China, crushing at least twelve shoe workers to death.

Over 60% of global footwear production takes place in China, with most of the work done by internal migratory workers. Another tragic consequence of this system is the estimated 66 million children that, due to costs and legal barriers, get left behind when their parents search for work.

Some still manufacture in the UK

Only one company on our table manufactured all its own products in the UK. Freerangers stated "All our own styles are made to order by hand in our own workshop here in the UK and we share the same working conditions you expect for yourself."

Ethical Wares stated, "Where we can, we support the UK footwear industry as this has been hit so very hard by cheap imports from abroad, forcing much of the

domestic industry to close down." You can see in the description of each product online if it was made in the UK.

Some manufacture in Europe

Birkenstock is a German company and 95% of its products are manufactured at the company's own production sites in Germany. Other companies also deliberately chose factories in Europe instead of Asia, such as Vegetarian Shoes – "All of our shoes are made within the EU (UK, Spain, Italy, Poland, and Portugal)", Viron – both of its supplier factories were located in Portugal, and Will's – "Our fashion collections are made in Italy and Portugal".

However, in general you might want to ask questions if you see a label such as 'Made in Italy', as it can hide the fact that some aspects of production might be outsourced to Eastern European countries where shoe workers can earn just 25-35% of an estimated living wage, according to campaign group Labour Behind the Label. Companies should really say more about these issues so that we can see what's really happening.

Some name suppliers or source countries

Publishing a list of suppliers is seen as an important step towards holding brands accountable for conditions in their supply chains. Twelve of the companies we looked at did publish their first tier of suppliers. These were: Allbirds, Birkenstock, Camper, Clarks, Dr Martens, Pentland, M&S, Sainsbury's,

A fully referenced version of this Shopping Guide is on our website

Deckers, Vagabond, VF Corporation, and Vivobarefoot.

However, only Clarks, Pentland, Vagabond (some tanneries), and VF Corporation were found to publish some suppliers beyond the first tier. These more distant suppliers can easily harbour more problems because there is less scrutiny. Sometimes though, a story hits the headlines, and in 2016 it was widely reported that many child refugees fleeing the Syrian civil war ended up working in second- and third-tier shoe factories in Turkey. While an EU-Turkey deal was negotiated to send refugees back from the Greek islands to Turkey, much of Turkey's refugee-made shoe exports were welcomed to enter the EU and the UK.

Several other companies we looked at didn't name actual suppliers, but did state which countries their products were made in. Crocs named (in order of number of factories used) China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Mexico, India, Brazil, Bosnia, and Argentina. Po-Zu discussed its "carefully sourced" supplier factories in Portugal and Sri Lanka and said they had a strict non-toxic policy. Vivobarefoot published a supply chain map of suppliers, partners, and manufacturers, but stated that it had not received some permissions to publish more detail on supplier names and addresses. Freet said that with 14 years of manufacture in the same town (in China), it had "evolved to working only in the best factories with the best workers' rights."

Purchasing practices

The Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) guide to buying responsibly states: "Conventional purchasing practices, including aggressive price negotiation, inaccurate forecasting, late orders, short lead times and last-minute changes put suppliers under intense pressure and lead directly to poor working conditions and low pay for workers."

We only found one company directly using the language of purchasing practices. This was Dr Martens, which said that, in 2023, it had worked on a Purchasing Practices Charter and discussed forecasting and pricing as elements of this.

Camper stated "85% of our production is made in factories that are part of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)", a body which includes work on purchasing practices. Pentland said it was a member of ACT, the Ethical Trading Initiative Act on Living Wages. According to its website "ACT aims to achieve living wages for workers through collective bargaining

From the 1970s, shoe production was increasingly outsourced to lower-wage and less regulated economies.

at industry level, freedom of association and responsible purchasing practises." However, any advance towards living wages appears glacially slow.

Cost cutting – from automation to Africa

Many of the brands on our table are designed to funnel wealth up and away, with directors getting excessive compensation, shareholders getting their cut, and precious little being paid back in worker wages, or in taxes to fund social systems we all depend on. Companies like these tend to ruthlessly keep labour costs down, in order to make more profit. Automation is not in itself the biggest threat to workers in shoe supply chains, but while we're in such an exploitative and unequal system, the use of robots could end up making things even worse.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has been advising southeast Asian nations to diversify away from their dependence on garment and footwear manufacturing, because of the threat of robots that could do the work faster. Replacement of people by machines is likely to accelerate with shoes before clothes, as the materials are more sturdy and robots can handle them more easily. Clothing production, which if you've ever used a sewing machine you'll know fabric can scrunch up and get out of control, is harder to automate. Although footwear workers are heavily exploited, being made redundant by robots could mean losing what autonomy these jobs gave them, and the majority who are women could find themselves even more disempowered.

Another threat from the hunt to reduce costs, is the transfer of jobs to new countries, where workers have to start from scratch to organise for better conditions with new employers. Ethiopia, for example, already has a large leather industry, and its government has decided to make footwear an industrial priority and offer tax breaks to foreign investors. However, it does not have a consistent minimum wage.

What's more, the ILO has also warned that temperature increases due to

climate change are going to result in lost working hours and, although Ethiopia should be cooler than other parts of Africa due to its higher altitude, it will still be affected. Rather than spreading the problems of the footwear industry further, especially at a time of increasing vulnerability, perhaps countries could be less exposed to global supply chains, and more organised around domestic requirements and regional trade. According to the authors of *Fashioning the Future*, only "a free and fair system that allows the Global South to properly use its own labour, land, people and resources for the common good, rather than multinational profit-generation will end the artificial scarcity of jobs and income that keeps so many people poor and dispossessed." ♦

READ MORE ON WORKERS

Foot Work – What your shoes tell you about globalisation.

By Tansy Hoskins. 2020.

This book provided several important stories that have been included in this article.

Tansy Hoskins was also a co-author on a new report by War on Want which is free to



download and explains how we got to where we are and what we could do about it:




Fashioning the Future – Fixing the fashion industry for workers and climate. August 2023.

SHOPPING GUIDE

Shoes




ETHISCORE





























































































































































































































































The higher the ethiscore, the better the company.

GOOD 60+ 
AVERAGE 25-59 
POOR 0-24 

CATEGORIES The more green bars the better*

CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	FOOTWEAR MATERIALS
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 **Best Buys**
 **Recommended**
 **Brands to avoid**

BRAND	ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)	CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	FOOTWEAR MATERIALS	COMPANY GROUP
 Viron	76							Notre World SAS
 Oxfam secondhand	74							Oxfam GB
 Will's Vegan	67							Will's Vegan Ltd
 Po-Zu	66							Positive Change People Limited
 Ethical Wares	64							Ethical Wares Ltd
 Vegetarian Shoes	59							Vegetarian Limited
 Vinted secondhand	59							Vinted Limited
 Good News	51							Good News Ltd
 Freerangers	49							Simple Ways
 Allbirds	44							Allbirds, Inc
 Dr Martens	44							Dr Martens plc
 Vivobarefoot	40							Vivobarefoot Ltd
 Freet	31							Freet Ltd
 M&S	30							Marks & Spencer Group plc
 Start-rite (childrens)	30							James Southall & Company Limited
 Vagabond	30							Vagabond Shoemakers Foundation
 Dune	27							Dune Topco Limited
 Timberland	27							VF Corporation Inc
 Vans	27							VF Corporation Inc
 Camper	26							Forch Med SL
 Depop secondhand	24							Etsy, Inc
 Shoe Zone	24							Shoe Zone Plc
 Pavers	21							Pavers Holdings Ltd
 Kickers	19							Pentland Group Holdings Limited
 Sainsbury's TU	19							J Sainsbury plc
 Schuh	17							Genesco Inc
 Birkenstock	16							L Catterton
 Crocs	13							Crocs, Inc
 Teva	13							Deckers Outdoor Corporation
 Clarks	11							Viva Goods Company Limited
 UGG	11							Deckers Outdoor Corporation
 CAT	4							Wolverine World Wide Inc
 Hush Puppies	4							Wolverine World Wide Inc
 Wolverine	4							Wolverine World Wide Inc
 Skechers	3							Skechers USA Inc
 ASDA George	0							TDR Capital LLP/Issa Brothers

* Each category is scored out of 100. The final Ethiscore is the average of the category scores. We consider Company Ethos particularly important and it covers the whole company group so it is weighted double.



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has.



Climate

Two companies with more than £500m turnover each, had surprisingly little information on their websites about their climate impacts, with no reporting on emissions or reduction targets found there.

Clarks had an Environment section, with only a Restricted Substances Policy and policies related to animal materials.

Its Sustainability page did mention using durable materials, but both the Origin shoes it highlighted as its most sustainable shoe, and its

organic cotton children's shoes, did not appear to be available for sale.

Birkenstock's sustainability pages talked about using cork and water-based adhesives, but no mention of carbon emissions or reducing climate impacts was found.

Tax Conduct and Company Ethos

Tax avoidance keeps profits for shareholders and directors rather than paying back into society for services we all depend on. Scoring 0/100 for Tax Conduct were Asda, Birkenstock, Clarks (Viva Goods), Crocs, Etsy (Depop), Pentland (Kickers), Skechers, Teva, UGG (Deckers), VF Corporation (Timberland, Vans), Wolverine (Hush Puppies, CAT).

Unsurprisingly, we found that all of these company groups (except Viva Goods and Asda for which details were unavailable), had directors that had been paid over £1m a year. In the case of Birkenstock, its immediate private equity owner's pay details were not found, but LVMH which backed the investment paid over £1m.

WHAT TO BUY

- **Do they respect the workers?** Larger companies tend to have long complex supply chains which are likely to contain serious issues. Look for companies that are clear about where they source from and show that workers' rights are important to them.
- **Have you tried leather alternatives?** Leather production involves animal slaughter, and is also often highly toxic. There are an increasing number of alternatives, many now using plant-based materials as well as synthetic.

WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Do you need new shoes?** First of all, you might be able to repair an existing pair. Also, for many types of footwear, a secondhand pair is a great low-impact solution.
- **Are they paying tax?** Many large companies are using tax havens, and keeping profits for their directors and shareholders, rather than reinvesting in society.

The price of an ethical pair of shoes

Prices vary a lot but our Best Buys and Recommended brands begin from around: £2 for Vinted secondhand, £5 for Oxfam secondhand, £35 for Ethical Wares, £60 for Will's, £70 for Dr Martens, £80 for Freerangers and Vegetarian Shoes, £90 for Po-Zu, £180 for Viron. ●



Secondhand shoes are most affordable and widely available, either in charity shops like **Oxfam** or from online retailers like **Vinted** (and also Oxfam) which scored highly on our table.

For new shoes, the four vegan companies came out top: **Viron**, **Will's**, **Ethical Wares**, and **Vegetarian Shoes**. Close behind was **Po-Zu**, with a limited collection of women's shoes made to its Solvent Free Policy.



Freerangers

was a vegan brand owned by a company using leather, but all made in-house in the UK.

Dr Martens is a widely available brand that has shops on many high streets so you can try shoes on before you buy. It sells vegan and leather boots, shoes, and sandals and scored relatively highly for Workers, being one of the few companies to discuss purchasing practices.



CAT boots are made by Wolverine, but under a

license agreement where royalties are paid to the brand holder Caterpillar, which has been the target of campaigns for being a long-standing supplier of the Israeli army. It has provided it with heavy machinery used to demolish Palestinian homes and structures in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Asda and **Skechers** also scored very poorly, and both had criticisms in the Workers category.



SHOPPING GUIDE

Shoes

Animals and leather

Well-made leather shoes can last a long time, but there are strong arguments for avoiding leather. Not only is leather made from the skin of animals raised and then slaughtered for sale, but the process of making it into a durable material is typically highly polluting. Leather accounts for about 5-10% of an animal's sale value, and over 50% of leather is destined for footwear.

It is also estimated that 90% of deforested Amazon land is occupied by cattle pastures. JBS is one of the biggest Brazilian slaughterhouses, and also one of the world's largest leather processors. In 2009, Greenpeace signed the Amazon Cattle Agreement with JBS and others but quit in 2017 after the company was found to have bought cattle from illegally deforested areas.

Although the agreement had led to huge improvements in monitoring, JBS was unable to monitor indirect suppliers who sold to farms that it bought from. JBS was then found to have bought almost 9,000 cattle between 2018-2022 from a criminal rancher's family that had also been illegally deforesting land in the Amazon.

The majority of leather tanning is done with heavy metals like chromium, lead, and mercury. The Guardian reported in 2017 on tanneries in Hazaribagh in Bangladesh, where chemicals were entering the waterways. It said that many workers living in slums around the tanneries were dying before the age of 50. Eventually the government moved the industry to a new industrial zone in Savar, but Hazaribagh was not cleaned up, and pollution is now entering the river in Savar too.

Our Animals category gives highest marks to companies which do not use leather or other animal products. Many companies have non-leather options, but only four on our table are fully vegan companies: Ethical Wares, Vegetarian Shoes, Viron, and Will's Vegan Shoes.

Most leather alternatives have until recently been oil-based. However, if you compare impacts such as carbon emissions, even oil-based synthetics come out better than leather on average. Some good news in shoes is the increase in plant-based alternatives to leather. We explain who uses what on the next page, and go into more detail in our article on Leather vs Synthetics on page 24.

Footwear Materials

Our Footwear Materials column gives most points to companies which appear to be making systematic attempts to manufacture with lower-impact materials and practices such as those highlighted in the table below. This table shows the 15 companies which scored more than 50 for Footwear Materials.

	Re-use and recycling	Repair offered?	Biodegradable	Bio-based leather alternatives	Recycled materials used	Leather but designed for durability	Secondhand only
Allbirds			Mirum uppers	Eucalyptus	✓		
Birkenstock		✓				✓	
Camper	Recrafted range		Mirum uppers		✓	✓	
Depop							✓
Dr Martens		✓			✓	✓	
Dune	Reskinned						
Ethical Wares					✓		
Good News					✓		
Oxfam							✓
Po-Zu				Apple leather	✓		
Start-rite	Rental					✓	
Vegetarian Shoes				Apple leather			
Vinted							✓
Viron	LOOP			Apple leather	✓		
Will's	Return to recycle		Fully biodegradable trainer!	Cereals, eucalyptus	✓		

Shoe recycling, refurbishment, and repair

Shoes are notoriously difficult to recycle, due to the complicated mix of materials. In fact, some experts are calling for a ban on metal components, so that old shoes can be more easily shredded and the materials reused for other purposes. Better than shredding though, we found several companies which were actually refurbishing returned shoes for resale

(Camper and Dune) or reusing the materials to make new shoes (Viron and Will's). Only three companies were found to offer a repair service that did more than just replace the sole (Birkenstock, Dr Martens and Vivobarefoot).

Biodegradable shoes

We only found one company with an officially biodegradable option available. Will's Vegan Shoes sell fully

Biodegradable Trainers for £86. The upper is made from Tencel, derived from wood, and the soles are made from a biodegradable bioplastic. Allbirds came close, with its Plant Pacers for £120. The uppers were made from Mirum, which they say does not meet "the rapid regulatory timeframe of 'biodegradability'", but that "when they do biodegrade, they contribute nutrients instead of pollutants to the environment."

The company Vivobarefoot is working on a compostable shoe by 2025. It would be made to measure, 3D printed, and composed of a 50% bio-based, durable thermoplastic that is recyclable or industrially compostable at the end of its life. Look out for VivoBiome, but only if you can afford £260 a pair!

More bio-based leather alternatives

Canvas shoe options have been available for years, but we found a number of companies were now beginning to also offer sturdier bio-based leather alternatives, ranging from materials based on apple leather (Po-Zu, Vegetarian Shoes, and Viron), to corn and cereals (Kickers and Will's), and eucalyptus (Allbirds and Will's). These all included some synthetic content too, but we hope the experiments will continue to generate improvements.

Recycled content

Many companies are now using recycled materials in a variety of components, from the liner (Allbirds, Camper), rubber or EVA outsoles (Camper, Clarks, Good News, Po-Zu, Viron, Vivobarefoot, Will's), leather (Dr Martens, Po-Zu), metallic heel loops, faux fur, insoles and laces (Dr Martens), scrap yard car seat uppers (Ethical Wares), denim uppers (Freerangers, Viron), and even coffee ground uppers (Freet). Even bigger brands such as Deckers, Schuh, and Skechers use recycled synthetics in some trainers.

Deconsumption

24 billion pairs of shoes are produced globally each year, with millions also being discarded, and most ending up in landfill.

Secondhand

For the first time in a Shoes Guide, we have looked at (mainly online) retailers of secondhand shoes, although charity shops have been around for years. The higher scoring ones are our best buys too. However, having shoes that fit well is important, and we do understand that this can make buying online a problem for footwear particularly. Returns of shoes bought online can also end up being wasted especially if not in perfect condition.

Shoes for rent

Start-Rite was the one company we found that was making its shoes available for rent, through a website called thelittleloop, which describes itself as "the UK's first shared wardrobe for kids", though of course passing on children's wear through friends, family or charity shops is nothing new! We also came across a project to make children's shoes expandable, and hope to update this guide online with more news on that soon.

Care and repair

With high quality shoes, it can be cheaper to resole a good shoe than buying a new pair. Timpson, the UK's largest shoe repair chain, was an early supporter of Fair Tax Mark and is one of the largest employers of ex-offenders in the UK. Approximately 10% of its workforce is made up of people who have criminal convictions.

According to Nikwax (see Paramo profile on p14) it is good to look after your shoes by stuffing them with newspaper if they get wet, rather than drying them on a radiator. Nikwax also have PFC-free products (see p16 for more on PFCs) to reduce cracking and improve water resistance, and rinsing off dirt with water can also reduce abrasion too.



Companies behind the brands

Will's Vegan Shoes scored poorly in our Climate category. It lost marks for claiming that all its products were 'carbon neutral'. Claims like this, that use carbon offsetting to justify suggesting that a purchase will have no impact on the climate, are also beginning to be banned in the EU. See also our Inside View article on p50.

Dr Martens was controlled by a private equity backer called Permira from 2013 until 2021 when it floated it onto the stock market and reduced its stake to 37%. Permira's ultimate holding company is registered in the tax haven of Guernsey, and it has several more holding companies in Luxembourg.

Crocs highest score was in the Animals category, but it could not get full marks there as it has bought another brand, HEYDUDE, that uses leather. It is working on changing the materials used for its famous soft clogs to halve their carbon footprint. The new bio-based material is being developed with the Dow Chemical Company and will be based on a by-product of wood pulping. It has also been criticised by Greenpeace for including some palm oil in this material.



Caterpillar's boots, made by Wolverine, are the target of campaigns for being a long-standing supplier of the Israeli army, providing it with heavy machinery used to demolish Palestinian homes and structures in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Shoes and Trainers

Footwear materials: leather vs synthetics

Cruelty-free, vegan footwear is on the rise, but most of the time it's made from plastic-based synthetic materials. While many may want to avoid animal use in the form of leather shoes, are fossil-fuel based alternatives really the answer?

Leather shoes and trainers

The skins of other animals have been used by humans for many millennia. However, the way that mainstream leather is processed, and the industrialisation of animal farming may be some of the reasons that people are looking for leather alternatives.

Animals

Most companies use the narrative that leather is a byproduct of the meat industry. However, leather is economically valuable with high demand for leather-based goods, including shoes. This makes it a profitable industry in its own right, worth over £200bn in 2022. It sustains and feeds the meat industry as a co-product of animal slaughter, and at the slaughterhouse level it's very difficult to say what 'comes first' when different animal bodily parts are shipped off for different industries.

We couldn't find any animal welfare policies for companies' leather supply chains in the shoes or trainers guides. Companies were only treating it as a 'leftover', thereby ignoring the type of farming or animal welfare issues that their purchases were sustaining. The Leather Working Group certification, which a number of companies use, does not formally include animal welfare and focuses on the environmental impacts of production.²

Carbon Emissions

As well as the high CO₂ emissions that occur raising cattle and other farmed animals used to make leather, transforming animal skin into smooth leather is a highly energy-intensive process.

In their sustainability reporting, footwear companies using leather report that their highest emissions came from leather. Some only count the impact from the tanning process onwards after the animal skin is obtained. This paints a



Leather is not just a by-product of the meat industry, but a valuable commodity on its own. We found no animal welfare policies for companies' leather supply chains.

© Louisa Gould

misleading picture as it doesn't take into account where the skin came from.

When comparing emissions of animal leather with synthetic leather made from polyurethane (PU), even without including emissions from farming, animal leather emissions are still higher at 17kg CO₂e per square metre compared to PU's 15.8kg. If farming impacts are included, cow leather comes out at 110kg CO₂e per square metre.¹ Using this data and shoe data, Collective Fashion Justice estimates that a pair of shoes made from cow leather has a carbon impact of 40.7kg CO₂e compared to 5.8kg CO₂e for a pair of PU shoes.

Pollution

To turn it into a wearable product and to prevent decomposition, animal skins undergo tanning. The majority of leather is tanned using chromium, which is highly toxic to both people and the environment.

Other hazardous substances used in leather processing have been classified by the European Chemical Agency (ECHA) as Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC). Tannery waste is highly toxic and polluting to the environment, plant and animal life, as well as being hazardous for tannery workers.

There are some processes which

reduce some of these impacts. Chrome-free leather is processed without the use of chromium, heavy metals, and particular acids. It also means that water use is reduced and water is recyclable after use, which is not possible with chrome leather. Vegetable-tanned leather uses tannins from trees or other organic fibres during processing. Buying secondhand gets around some of these issues.

Are synthetic 'faux' leather shoes better?

Concerns around the emissions of cattle, animal welfare, and pollution associated with leather processing have led some to look for vegan leather. Although for some, the priority may be whether shoes are vegan or not, many synthetic materials which are marketed as vegan alternatives to leather come with other ethical issues.

Synthetic leather alternatives typically consist of fossil fuel-based materials such as polyester or similar coated in PVC or PU. Some brands in the Trainers guide, such as New Balance and Salomon, are now PVC free due to its toxicity. Hylo also did not use PVC in its synthetic shoes. At the end of the product's life, shoes made

from synthetic plastic-based materials will not biodegrade but just break down into microplastics which infiltrate every corner of the world. However, although made from animal skin, the disposal and recycling of the majority of leather is also not straightforward due to its chemical treatment, among other factors.

For some, leather means buying a long-lasting product, but from this perspective the same could also be said for synthetics. One of the companies we rated, Vagabond, explicitly says that it chooses PU for its vegan range due to its durability being similar to leather. Although durability and longevity is an important issue, choosing a material which hardly degrades at all has a very high long-term cost. Synthetics are also heavily reliant on fossil fuels.

Vegan 'bio-based' shoe materials

Several companies in our guide to shoes (page 18) and trainers (page 26) have either been researching or already sell vegan 'bio-based' footwear products. Although cow leather is technically 'bio-based', by vegan bio-based materials we mean animal-free materials that are based on plant fibres.

Exciting innovations are developing in this space all the time now that companies are recognising that simply avoiding animal

leather by replacing it with plastic isn't necessarily a long-term strategy for the environment. Research has also found that the physical and chemical structure of some vegan bio-based materials including grape leather and apple leather are very similar to purely synthetic leather.

Beyond grapes and apples, vegan bio-based leathers for shoes can be made from mangoes, cacti, pineapples, and even fungi. Other novel combinations include corn-based and sugarcane derived materials.

Of course, canvas shoes have been around for hundreds of years and still feature in the ranges of many of the larger companies in our guides. Although canvas can sometimes be synthetic, it can also be made from cotton, flax, or hemp which are all vegan, bio-based, and degradable materials. It's important to note however, that almost all of the bio-based materials currently used in footwear contain some proportion of synthetic material too.

We only found one company, Will's Vegan Shoes, that had a fully biodegradable sneaker, which had textile uppers and was not leather-like. Only Allbirds and Camper had leather-like sneakers and boots with no synthetics in the main material of the uppers. They used a material called Mirum which is 100% bio-based, even though it is too

hardwearing to be officially classed as biodegradable, but both companies also used recycled polyester in their linings.



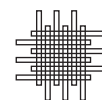
Vegan leather alternative from mushroom mycelium.

Footwear textile symbols

Leather



Textile



Synthetic



We recommend looking for vegan bio-based shoes if buying new. They are an alternative to the issues of leather outlined above, and are also moving away from fossil-fuel based synthetics. See page 22 and 27 for who has bio-based options in shoes and trainers.

Waterproofing

Generally speaking, well maintained leather, as well as PU and PVC, are used in footwear because of their ability to keep feet dry. So far as we can tell, many vegan bio-based shoe materials also aim to be water resistant at the very least, for example SAYE uses water-repellent organic cotton. One problem with waterproofing is that, in 'high-performance' footwear particularly, it can lead to the use of the 'forever chemicals', PFAS. It's worth trying to avoid these in footwear. More information on some of the companies trying to do this appear in our PFAS feature on page 16.

Our Footwear Materials rating

New in 2024 for our guides to shoes and trainers, our Footwear Materials rating column awarded points to companies that were taking action to reduce the impacts of materials including leather, PVC and PU, designing footwear for recycling or repair, using biodegradable uppers, bio-based uppers, all organic or recycled cotton, or recycled materials, and if the company's whole focus was on providing lower impact environmental alternatives. This way, we capture a holistic view of the impacts that a company's footwear materials have, rather than only looking at one issue such as vegan or not, or synthetic or not.

References: 1 https://leatherpanel.org/sites/default/files/publications-attachments/leather_carbon_footprint_p.pdf 2 <https://www.collectivefashionjustice.org/articles/carbon-cost-leather-goods>

Trainers

Trainers

LOUISA GOULD investigates the ethical credentials of trainer brands.

Trainers have become status symbols in popular culture as much as practical items, with some trainers selling for millions at prestigious auctions like rare artworks.

Over 20 billion shoes are produced annually worldwide with around 300m pairs of trainers alone thrown out every year, which are mostly made from problematic and complex combinations of materials that barely degrade.

Ultimately, we need fewer trainers in the world. But while some trainers are an "affordable luxury treat" and trainer company profits continue to rise, what does buying an ethical trainer look like?

Over 20 billion shoes are produced annually worldwide with around 300m pairs of trainers alone thrown out every year.

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website



The trainer empire of Nike Inc

Nike towers over its competitors, with its dominance visible everywhere from professional sports to streetwear. The overwhelming majority of the world's most expensive collector's item trainers are Nikes, largely thanks to its partnership with Michael Jordan.

Although Nike's popularity is indisputable, what about its ethics?

Nike has repeatedly faced criticism for the treatment of workers in its supply chain. Nike, among others including Puma and M&S, has sourced from factories in India which pay below the legal minimum, where workers have said that they cannot feed their children and they sometimes only receive half of what they need to survive.

Nike has also been accused of sourcing from Chinese companies using or benefitting from Uyghur forced labour, although it says it no longer sources from Xinjiang. In 2020, it failed to pay Cambodian workers \$1.4m in compensation and damages after a factory suddenly closed during the COVID pandemic. Although Nike has said it didn't source from the factory, labour groups have evidence to the contrary showing that the factory was producing for Nike. Labour and human rights NGOs have issued a joint statement to Nike in support of the workers. Nike has also refused to compensate workers who were denied legally owed pandemic furlough pay by a factory in Thailand employing mostly migrant workers.

Nike had also been part of a lawsuit dating back to 2018, with over 5,000 pages of records detailing a culture of sexism, bullying, and fear of speaking out for female employees. One female employee said that Nike was "a giant men's sports team, where favouritism prevails and females couldn't possibly play in the sandbox."



A pair of Air Jordans, some of the most desired trainers on the planet, although their maker Nike is criticised for low pay, no pay, and forced labour in its supply chain, and an internal culture of sexism and bullying.



with sole

Footwear materials

The main materials used in trainers are leather and suede, natural textiles (cotton, wool, and silk in sports trainers), synthetics (polyester, nylon, spandex), rubber, foam, and plastic.

We awarded points in our Sustainable Materials column for action on reducing impacts, such as designing trainers for recycling or repair; biodegradable uppers; plant-based options; all organic or recycled cotton; use of recycled materials; and for taking steps to reduce the impacts of leather, polyurethane, and PVC.

Recycled components in trainers

We found that recycled polyester was the most popular material to come from a recycled source. Of polyester used, Adidas uses 96% recycled polyester, On AG 85%, Puma 48%, Nike 46%, New Balance 44%, Veja 40.7%, VF Corporation 40%, M&S 35%, ASICS 30%, and Vivobarefoot 24.5%. On its website, Hoka lists how much of each polyester component per trainer was made from recycled polyester.

Other companies said that they use recycled polyester but didn't say how much, such as Hanesbrands, PVH Corporation, and Wolverine World Wide, Inc.

Less commonly used was recycled cotton. All of the cotton used in Ethletic, On Running, and Veja trainers is recycled or organic. Nike uses very small amounts of recycled cotton.

Recycled rubber is used for Fila insoles, one of Po-Zu soles, 70% of SAYE soles, and 10% of Vivobarefoot soles. Pangaia uses recycled plastic tips for its laces as well as selling a trainer which is

100% recycled polyamide.

SAYE also uses recycled polyurethane from mattress waste, recycled PET yarn, and Seaqual® yarn from "fishing communities to transform post-consumer plastic and upcycled marine plastic into high-quality yarn."

Leather

Most of the companies we rated sold leather trainers. In 2023, Deckers alone used "approximately 45.77 million sq. ft. of leather and suede". As well as animal rights and animal welfare issues associated with leather, the leather industry is highly polluting and a large source of materials-based emissions. We were looking for companies that were taking action to reduce these impacts.

Chrome-free leather is processed without the use of chromium, heavy metals, and particular acids. It also means that water use is reduced and water is recyclable after use, which is not possible with chrome leather. Brands that use chrome-free leather include New Balance, Vagabond (not all of its collection), and Veja.

Vegetable-tanned leather uses tannins from trees or other organic fibres during processing, compared to animal-based oil. Veja was using vegetable-tanned leather up until 2015 but said that the costs were too high, so it's looking to replace leather with bio-based materials. Vivobarefoot says that it aims to source chrome-free vegetable-tanned leather in future.

Adidas, Deckers Outdoor Corporation, New Balance, Nike, Vagabond, and Veja use leather that is Leather Working Group (LWG) certified, meaning it's audited for environmental impact and traceability.

Deckers Outdoor Corporation also had a detailed policy for leather originating from the Brazilian Amazon and requirements for suppliers to provide documentation that the skins were not originating from cows in regions associated with deforestation.

See page 24 for more on leather versus synthetics in footwear.

Vegan bio-based innovations

A number of companies are using or developing plant-based innovations to find alternatives to fossil fuel and leather-based trainers.

SAYE uses bio-based vegan leather made from corn, apple, cactus, and mango. Pangaia uses grape leather. Veja is experimenting with rice waste, uses Ethylene-vinyl acetate (EVA), a foam-like rubber from sugarcane, and has developed a vegan alternative to leather which is currently 54% bio-based. Will's Vegan Shoes mostly uses bio-based vegan leather as well as majority bio-based coating oil. Hylo uses sugarcane and corn which make up around 40% of each trainer.

Animals

Scores in our Animals column reflect the use of animal products (mainly leather). If wanting to steer completely clear of all animal-based products – including in overlooked components like glue – then check if the product is certified vegan, rather than taking a company's word for it. Also beware assuming that a trainer labelled 'faux leather' is wholly vegan.

Brands with vegan options versus vegan companies

100% vegan companies: Fair Deal Trading GmbH (Ethletic), Hylo Athletics (Hylo), Vegetarian Shoes, We Are Wado S.L (SAYE), Will's Vegan Shoes.

Brands with vegan bio-based options: Ethletic, Pangaia, SAYE, Will's Vegan Shoes, Vegetarian Shoes. Hylo, Po-Zu and Veja have a bio-based mix with synthetics.

Brands with vegan synthetic options: Adidas, Allbirds, Gola, Hoka, Hylo, M&S, New Balance, Nike, Po-Zu, Reebok, Skechers, Under Armour, Vans, Veja, Vivobarefoot. ●

SHOPPING GUIDE

Trainers

ETHISCORE

The higher the ethiscore, the better the company.

GOOD 60+
AVERAGE 25-59
POOR 0-24

CATEGORIES The more green bars the better*

ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)

CLIMATE

ANIMALS

WORKERS

TAX CONDUCT

COMPANY ETHOS

FOOTWEAR MATERIALS



Best Buys



Recommended



Brands to avoid

BRAND

COMPANY GROUP

BRAND	ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)	CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	FOOTWEAR MATERIALS	COMPANY GROUP
Ethletic	79	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	Fair Deal Trading GmbH
Oxfam secondhand	74	■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Oxfam GB
Preworn secondhand	73	■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	Preworn Ltd
SAYE	71	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	WE ARE WADO S.L
Pangaia	69	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	Pangaia Materials Science Limited
Will's Vegan Shoes	67	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	Will's Vegan Shoes Ltd
Po-Zu	66	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	Positive Change People Limited
Vegetarian Shoes	59	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Vegetarian Shoes Limited
Vinted secondhand	59	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	Vinted Limited
Hylo	47	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Hylo Athletics Limited
Allbirds	44	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Allbirds, Inc
On Running	44	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	On AG
Veja	43	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	Veja Faire Trade SARL
Vivobarefoot	40	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Vivobarefoot Ltd
M&S	30	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	Marks & Spencer Group plc
Vagabond	30	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Vagabond Shoemakers Foundation
Altra	27	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	VF Corporation Inc
Vans	27	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	VF Corporation Inc
Depop secondhand	24	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	Etsy, Inc
Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger	24	■■■■	■■■	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	PVH Corp
ASICS	21	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	ASICS Corporation
Champion	21	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Hanesbrands Inc
New Balance	21	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	New Balance Athletics Inc
Gola	20	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	Jacobson Group Ltd
Jordan	20	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Nike Inc
Nike	20	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Nike Inc
Puma	20	■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Puma SE
Sainsbury's Tu	20	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	J Sainsbury plc
Arc'Teryx, Salomon	11	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Anta Sports
Adidas	10	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Adidas AG
Hoka	10	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Deckers Outdoor Corporation
Reebok	10	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Authentic Brands Group LLC
Under Armour	10	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Under Armour, Inc
Topo Athletic	9	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Designer Brands Inc
Karrimor, Lonsdale, Slazenger	6	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Frasers Group/Sports Direct
Fila	4	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Fila Holdings Corp
Merrell, Saucony	4	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Wolverine World Wide Inc
Skechers	3	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Skechers USA Inc
ASDA George	0	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	TDR Capital LLP/Issa Brothers

* Each category is scored out of 100. The final Ethiscore is the average of the category scores. We consider Company Ethos particularly important and it covers the whole company group so it is weighted double.



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has.

Table highlights

Workers' Rights

We look for policies to protect workers' rights in company supply chains and also for evidence of action (or inaction). Ethletic stood out for its focus on a Fairtrade supply chain and employing full-time workers in its factory rather than temporary or subcontracted workers.

All of Veja's factories are located in Brazil, with its raw materials from Brazil and Peru. Veja calculated how much its trainers cost to produce compared to those made in China and concluded it cost five times more due to its fair trade and organic materials and principles. On its organic cotton it says, "At the beginning of the year, we agree on the price of cotton signing a contract valid for two years with the producers. That way, the producers know how much they will earn from the harvest before planting a single seed."

Chinese giant Anta Sports (Arc'Teryx and Salomon) made headlines for publicly saying that it would keep sourcing its cotton from Xinjiang, despite its association with human rights violations and forced Uyghur labour. NBA legend Kyrie Irving became an executive of Anta Sports in 2023 and has been facing increasing public pressure in the face of Anta's association with human rights abuses.

Directors' pay

Our Company Ethos column includes directors' pay. Not all of the companies we rated disclosed annual salaries, but the highest we came across were: Authentic Brands (Reebok), €43.9m (£34.8m); Nike: \$32.8m (£26m); and Skechers: \$22.1m (£17.5m).

These were followed by: Adidas, €11.5m (£9.8m); PVH Corp, \$12.1m (£9.6m); VF Corp, \$11.49m (£9.15m); Deckers, \$11.4m (£9.1m); Designer Brands, \$11.32m (£9m); Under Armour, \$11.3m (£9m); and Hanesbrands, \$9.2m (£7.3m).

We always highlight the pay cheques of company directors because of the massive inequality between them and the salaries of workers in their supply chains. ●



WHAT TO BUY

- **Fewer trainers.** If you have trainers with plenty of life still in them, avoid buying a new pair.
- **Secondhand.** Buy used trainers where possible to avoid the environmental and social impacts associated with new trainer production.
- **Are they made of vegan and bio-based materials?** Look for bio-based (made from plants) and vegan trainers where possible and those that use lower-impact materials such as organic cotton and sustainable natural rubber. These are better than plastic and materials which rely on fossil fuels.

WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Synthetic fossil fuel-based trainers.** Many trainers are made up of a huge array of plastic parts. This makes repair and recycling even harder than it already is and relies on non-renewable fossil fuels. Stick to simpler models with bio-based materials.
- **New leather trainers.** Leather is best avoided due to its high environmental impacts and association with poor animal welfare.
- **Do they respect workers' rights?** Many of the most well-known brands have been criticised for the treatment of workers in their supplier factories. Opt for brands that have higher labour standards.



Secondhand trainers: have the least impact in terms of buying footwear though the need for good fitting footwear can make this option less practical for many people. **Oxfam** secondhand, **Preworn** secondhand, and **Vinted** secondhand all score reasonably well.

73

PREWORN

74



Vinted 59

New trainers: Ethletic, Will's and SAYE are the Best Buys. These brands had a clear focus on environmental and social alternatives, were 100% vegan, and relied less on fossil fuel-based materials.

71

SAYE



79

Will's Vegan Store

67

✓ RECOMMENDED

The following companies selling new trainers were found to sell 100% vegan trainers with good policies in place for sustainable materials: **Hylo**, **Vegetarian Shoes**, and **Veja**.

✗ BRANDS TO AVOID

Asda George, Fila, Karrimor, Lonsdale, Slazenger, Skechers, Saucony, Merrell.

These brands were at the very bottom of our score table and had hardly any good policies.

SHOPPING GUIDE

Trainers

Climate

Most of the carbon emissions of footwear companies come from their materials, with leather coming at the top due to the impacts of cattle farming and the processing of animal skin into a wearable material. Collective Fashion Justice estimates that a pair of shoes made from cow leather has a carbon impact of 40.7kg CO2e compared to 5.8kg CO2e for a pair of PU shoes.

Themes from companies' sustainability reports included the use of renewable energy, reducing air freight, increasing recycled content, reducing plastic-based packaging, reducing water use, and some were researching alternative bio-based materials. Companies scored better for Climate if they had a focus on their main impacts from their supply chain and products (rather than talking about trivial ones), and had not only targets but also detailed plans of action to achieve them.

The low scorers on our table either had very little action or were making misleading statements about their emissions. For example, in 2022, NGO Zero Waste France filed a court complaint against Adidas and New Balance for greenwashing, with slogans such as "solution against plastic waste". Will's Vegan Shoes claims that "Everything we make and do is Carbon Neutral" but this appears to be based on offsetting, with no acknowledgement of the need for it to cut its primary emissions. Similarly, Allbirds is advertising "the world's first net zero carbon shoe" despite the company as a whole still having large emissions.

Price comparison

We looked at the price of trainers for brands at the top, in the middle and at the bottom of our score table. We also compared the prices when buying new from their websites, versus buying secondhand from Preworn and eBay. Preworn had far fewer items across all of the brands compared to eBay which is why we included both platforms. Prices vary a lot for secondhand trainers, so we took the first five items we found to make an average. The more ethical brands were much harder to find secondhand, due to producing far fewer trainers in general.

Brand	Cost (new)	Cost (secondhand)
Ethletic	£85.40 – £111.05	£29
SAYE	£129 – £179	£40
Pangaia	£100	£43
Veja	£115 – £165	£33.40
Vans	£52 – £145	£12.50
Calvin Klein	£65 – £180	£11.75
New Balance	£55 – £260	£39
Nike	£59.95 – £289.95	£43.80
Puma	£70 – £315	£14
Reebok	£35 – £270	£10.80
Under Armour	£60 – £225	£14.80
Skechers	£60 – £140	£17.40

Is it possible to recycle trainers?

It's not always clear what companies mean when they say that they 'recycle' trainers. The way that trainers are made in the first place and the combinations of materials makes them very hard to recycle. Multiple companies were talking about circular principles, but only a handful were doing meaningful things.

Hylo says it applies "the principle of circularity at the start of the shoe's life" by only including 16 components in its trainers which makes it easier to break down for recycling. Vivobarefoot sends some of its trainers to a footwear recycling company in the Netherlands called Fast Feet Grinded, which separates the materials to produce footwear or to sell on for other use. Some of Ethletic's trainers are made largely from cotton and rubber and have very few components, which can be separated more easily. Will's Vegan Shoes has a service where old pairs of trainers can be returned and used for new soles and uppers. Ethletic says it's in the process of creating a recycling system.

Thousand Fell (not ranked here) has made a fully recyclable trainer where every component is recyclable, however it only ships to the US and Canada.



Anatomy of a trainer - the average trainer contains 65 components (according to Hylo) and each component can be made up from a complex mix of materials.

Extending the life of your trainers

You can now find cleaning products in the form of specialist trainer brushes, wipes, and sprays just for trainers. Cleaning tips found online also often involve selling you something. But are these necessary to keep your trainers in good shape?

People have been cleaning their shoes long before 'trainer wipes' came along. There is mixed opinion about putting trainers in a washing machine or not depending on what they're made from, but less controversial are things including using an old toothbrush or cloth with soapy water to get to stains, appropriate storage in a dry place, brushing off dry dirt, and cleaning your laces and soles regularly. More obvious things include not wearing light cotton trainers on muddy walks (we've all been there).

You might also want to try a gentle laundry bar. Ethique, featured in our guide to make up, sells solid laundry and stain remover bars that come in plastic-free packaging, are vegan, and are not tested on animals.



You can use an old toothbrush to clean your trainers.

Trainer repair

Companies that offer repair services: Hylo, Veja, and Vivobarefoot.

Are secondhand trainers gross?

Many fungi and bacteria lurk on feet and in shoes, with some things being contagious. This might be a reason that secondhand trainers might feel intuitively less appealing than a secondhand jumper.

Spraying a small amount of disinfectant inside and letting your newly bought secondhand trainers have an air dry outside for a few days is generally a good idea, as is letting your trainers dry from sweaty feet in between uses. Lots of secondhand trainers for sale are still in good condition and often haven't been worn much, so they should still have plenty of wear left in them.

Companies behind the brands

By name and by nature, **Fair Deal Trading GmbH** and its brand **Ethletic** have a Fairtrade supply chain. Founded by James Lloyd and Martin Kunz in Germany and originally having started with the aim of creating an ethically made football in 1998, in 2004 the company created the first certified Fairtrade trainer. Its trainers are 100% vegan, and it says that "Complete biodegradability is our declared goal". It uses organic cotton, natural rubber, latex milk, and latex foam (as well as recycled PU) says it is looking for alternatives to its metal eyelets. As well as its approach to animal rights and the environment, Fair Deal Trading scored the highest in our score table for workers' rights.

SAYE is a small Barcelona-based trainer brand operating under the company name of **We Are Wado S.L.** A relatively new company, co-founded in 2018 by Marta Llaquet, Lizzie Sabin, and Damian Augustinyak, it has a strong focus on ethical alternatives to mainstream trainers with its range of innovative, bio-based, vegan trainers. On its website it says, "For us, vegan products must also have an environmental commitment and cannot be made of plastic." The company also had a solid approach to workers' rights and had a detailed supplier code of conduct on its website, which is relatively rare for small companies with a turnover of under £5m.

Hylo Athletics Limited is a UK-based company behind the brand **Hylo**. Another small company with a turnover of less than £5m, it's also quite new having only been founded in 2019. Its slogan, "Because there is no running without a planet to run on", is pretty apt. Each of its shoes has a detailed list of all its materials, with percentage composition, as well as a breakdown of its carbon impact. This was probably the most transparency we came across. All of its trainers were described as vegan. It lost points from a workers' rights perspective as it had practically no information on the workers in its supply chain. The only information we could find was when clicking on a trainer under the product description it said, "Supplier: Assembled in SEMS, China. We conduct regular third-party audits of labour conditions."

Reebok was founded in 1958 in Bolton, with the business originally called Mercury Sports Footwear. Reebok gained its brand name in 1960, the name of a small South African gazelle. It was bought by **Authentic Brands Group LLC** in 2022, having been under the ownership of Adidas before.

The largest shareholder of Authentic Brands Group is BlackRock, Inc., although we couldn't find an exact percentage in any company documentation. Authentic Brands Group lists its other shareholders

as including a large mix of private equity companies, including CVC Capital Partners, General Atlantic, HPS investment Partners, among a list of others. From its ownership alone, it's clear that the company's interest is in maximising profits. Authentic Brands Group owns a huge global portfolio of brands which extends even to people, including David Beckham, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe and Muhammad Ali. Reebok had basically no information at all on its website and we found very little information about Reebok in the reporting of Authentic Brands Group.

Arc'Teryx and **Salomon** are owned by **Amer Sports Holding (Cayman) Limited**, which is now 57.7% owned by **Anta Sports** in China.

Amer Sports was originally set up as a tobacco company in Finland. In Anta's 2022 annual report it names Zheng Jie, executive director of Anta Sports, as the CEO of Amer Sports.

Anta Sports has been described as "The biggest sneaker company you've never heard of" and the "Nike of China" by Fortune. It's perhaps ironic that Anta Sports is a multi-billion-pound company while Arc'Teryx's website says, "The most sustainable purchase is no purchase".

Arc'Teryx and Salomon appear to be financial investments for Anta Sports, rather than Anta controlling much about how the brands operate. Both brands had their own reporting and had some policies around animal use and 100% PVC- and PFC-free products, though beyond this weren't particularly ethical. ■



Should we sweat over our sportswear choices?

KATALIN CSATADI and RUAIRIDH FRASER explore what makes sportswear ethical and give their recommendations for avoiding greenwash.

Very few things are as important as exercise when it comes to our physical health, and the positive links between physical activities and mental health are also much better understood now.

This guide explores how to buy sportswear ethically to make sure that the people who make our garments can feel good too.

Who Makes Your Sportswear?

All large sportswear companies now have detailed supply chain policies and are going to great lengths, at least on the surface, to distance themselves from the sweatshop scandals of the 1990s-2010s. Whilst increased transparency and policy commitments are welcome – this is after all what Ethical Consumer has been advocating for since the 1980s – major questions remain around policy implementation and enforcement.

Adidas, for example, is hard to fault on its top-level commitments on forced labour and supply chain standards, but it continues to face allegations from NGOs and worker groups on issues ranging from modern slavery, unpaid overtime, union busting and wage theft. Nike, too, excelled in some areas – we deemed that it had gone further than many of its competitors in working towards living wages in its supply chain. But, like Adidas,

its suppliers have also faced accusations of wage theft and illegal severance compensation.

Rapanui, 3rd Rock, and Bamboo Clothing all stood out for their policies and practice and received 100 marks under the Workers column. The secondhand brands Rokit and Preloved Sports also received our top rating.

What is sustainable sportswear made of?

Flexible, breathable, durable, and comfortable are some of the qualities shoppers look for when buying sportswear. The three most popular fibres in technical sportswear appear to be polyester, elastane and nylon. All of them are fossil fuel based, although some in the industry have started to replace these.

Polyester or recycled polyester

Polyester is the most commonly used sportswear material. It is made of fossil fuels – or in the case of its recycled version, PET bottles. Because of its light weight, stretchiness, and good wicking quality, it is an extremely popular sportswear material. As it is made of plastic it does not break down and will pollute the environment forever.

Campaign group Changing Markets claims in its latest report that “polyester made from recycled [...] bottles as the main sustainability strategy for synthetics has been facing increasing scrutiny over the past year from regulators and consumers concerned about misleading environmental claims.” As we saw in EC207, clothing fibres are rarely recycled into more clothing because of technical difficulties. This means that the bottles get ‘downcycled’ when they are used for fabric production while they could be reused over and over again as recycled

plastic bottles. Changing Markets calls this a “false solution and a far cry from a circular model”.

If you do need specialist, technical gear, then recycled polyester is still a better option than virgin fabric.

Researchers found that an average load of laundry releases more than 700,000 microscopic plastic fibres into wastewater. To avoid microplastic pollution, use a microplastic filter or washing bag in your washing machine.

Nylon or recycled nylon

Nylon (or polyamide) accounts for only a tenth of synthetic fibre use worldwide but, when it comes to sportswear, it is the second most commonly used fabric. The virgin fabric is made of fossil fuels but recycled nylon can also be made from materials such as discarded fishing nets, carpets, or other used textiles. Currently, this only accounts for around 2% of all polyamide fibre production. Several companies in this guide use recycled nylon, including some of the higher scoring companies such as 3rd Rock, Bamboo Clothing, and We Are Tala, and some in the lower half of the table, such as – but not exclusively – the Frasers Group (Sports Direct) and Sweaty Betty (Wolverine)

The overlooked sportswear fabric: cotton

Among sports enthusiasts, cotton is thought of as a fabric that doesn’t absorb sweat and therefore is inferior to synthetic sportswear. This may be important for athletes and for those that are doing strenuous exercise. However, if you are just going to the gym a couple of times a week or run 5-10K, then cotton gear could work just as well.

All of the companies in this guide

A fully referenced version of this Product Guide is on our website



used at least a small percentage of cotton – usually blended in with synthetics but occasionally on its own. 3rd Rock, Howies, Rapanui and We Are Tala used exclusively organic, Bamboo Clothing and Community Clothing used some organic cotton, while all of Adidas', Decathlon's and Yogamatters' cotton was Better Cotton Initiative certified or other sustainable cotton. And even better, we found that all secondhand shops stocked cotton sportswear, ultimately the most sustainable option.

Secondhand shops stock cotton sportswear, which is ultimately the most sustainable option.

Bamboo

Bamboo fabric has been advertised as making a breathable, yet moisture-wicking activewear which sounds like it combines the good qualities of both cotton and polyester. Bamboo is subject to greenwashing because companies often cherry-pick its good qualities. These include that it grows super-fast and stores a large amount of carbon.

However, there are huge environmental issues with the manufacturing processes that transform the plant fibre into soft fabric. Bamboo viscose is made through harsh chemical processes. Modal and lyocell bamboo are better choices because they are made in a closed-loop process, which means the chemicals don't get out into the environment.

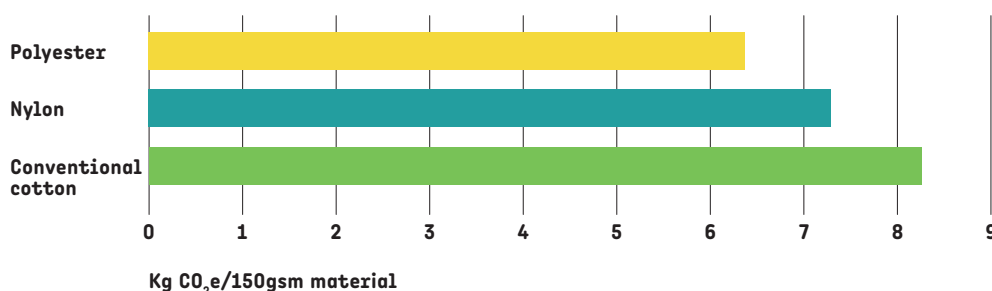
In this guide, apart from the odd bamboo socks, only two companies, Bamboo Clothing and Yogamatters sell bamboo clothing. Bamboo Clothing does use some modal and lyocell. We couldn't find information on what kind of bamboo Yogamatters uses but it mixes it with cotton and elastane.

The carbon cost of sportswear

Large sportswear companies tally up millions of tonnes of CO₂ through their operations every year. We expect them to at least explain how they have reduced the carbon impacts of their key materials and manufacturing in the past, as these make up the majority of companies' emissions. We also rate them on their future plans.

In the table below we show the carbon cost of the three most used sportswear materials: polyester, nylon, and cotton.

THE CARBON COST OF THE MOST POPULAR SPORTSWEAR FABRICS



Source: WRAP

The recycled versions of these fabrics however have smaller greenhouse gas emissions. Recycled cotton has 82% smaller CO₂e emissions per kilogram to that of conventional virgin cotton fibre. Recycled polyester reduces CO₂ emissions by 32% while recycled nylon is thought to save about 50% of carbon emissions compared to the virgin fabrics.

Organic cotton is generally estimated to have about half the emissions of conventional cotton, although it does use more land. And 'Better Cotton Initiative' cotton, though slightly less good, was estimated by one study to reduce emissions by two-thirds as much as organic cotton.

The best way to cut emissions is buying secondhand, repairing and upcycling clothes and to buy clothes made from the more sustainable fabrics.

SECONDHAND SPORTSWEAR

In this guide we rated eight secondhand clothing companies that sell sportswear. Preloved Sports, as the name suggests, sells only sportswear and it is the top secondhand company in our guide due to it also being a non-profit. All secondhand companies are Best Buys, with one exception, Depop which is owned by Etsy and scores much lower.

In the last few years, several large brands also launched their own resale marketplaces and secondhand schemes. These include for example Nike Refurbished and Decathlon - Second Life.

While moves by all companies into reuse and repair should be applauded because they can make important contributions to rapid carbon reductions, it is felt that getting in on the secondhand market, while doing little to address the scale of overall production and the model of disposable clothing is not helping anyone. As we mentioned in EC207, "we need to see scale and ambition here with detailed targets for it to move beyond tokenism and greenwash".

Both Nike and Decathlon also scored very low due to their poor fabric choices, workers' rights issues in their supply chains, and lack of animal welfare policies.

Secondhand sportswear is readily available and, if you're worried about other people sweating in it, here is what Preloved Sport's founder, Michael Hill says: "it's [secondhand sportswear] not as bad as you think. A small handful of the donations we receive do smell but once these have been washed (even on a 30-degree wash), they are usually fine".

<div> <div> ETHISCORE The higher the ethiscore, the better the company. <div> <div>GOOD 60+</div> <div>AVERAGE 25-59</div> <div>POOR 0-24</div> </div> </div> <div> CATEGORIES The more green bars the better <div>■■■■■*</div> <div> <div>CLIMATE</div> <div>ANIMALS</div> <div>WORKERS</div> <div>TAX CONDUCT</div> <div>COMPANY ETHOS</div> <div>COTTON</div> <div>SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS</div> </div> </div> <div> <div>Best Buys</div> <div>Recommended</div> <div>Brands to avoid</div> </div> </div>									
BRAND	ETHISCORE (OUT OF 100)	CLIMATE	ANIMALS	WORKERS	TAX CONDUCT	COMPANY ETHOS	COTTON	SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS	COMPANY GROUP
NEW SPORTSWEAR									
<div>Best Buys</div> Rapanui	88	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Teemill Tech Ltd
<div>Best Buys</div> BAM	76	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Bamboo Clothing Ltd
Pangaia	76	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Pangaia Materials Science Limited
<div>Best Buys</div> 3RD ROCK	74	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	3rd Rock Private Limited
<div>Best Buys</div> Girlfriend Collective	68	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	Girlfriend Collective LLC
<div>Recommended</div> Howies	60	■■■	■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	Yokozuna Ltd
<div>Recommended</div> Community Clothing	54	■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Community Clothing LLC
Tala	52	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	We Are TALA (Holdings) Limited
Gossypium	48	■■■	■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Yogamatters Limited
Scimitar	48	■■■	■■■■■	■	■■■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	Scimitar Sports UK Ltd
Yogamatters	48	■■■	■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	Yogamatters Limited
<div>Recommended</div> Contra	46	■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■	■	Parkrun Global Limited
Gymshark	42	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■	■■■	■■■	Gymshark Group Limited
Marks and Spencer	42	■■■■■	■	■■■	■■■	■	■■■■■	■■■	Marks & Spencer Group plc
Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger	32	■■■■■	■	■■■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	PVH Corp
North Face	32	■■■■■	■	■■■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	VF Corporation Inc
Decathlon	30	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Decathlon SA
Sainsbury's TU	30	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	J Sainsbury plc
Champion	24	■■■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■	■■■	Hanesbrands Inc
Puma	24	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■	■■■	Puma SE
Shock Absorber sports bras	24	■■■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■	■■■	Hanesbrands Inc
Nike	22	■■■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Nike Inc
Ellesse	21	■■■	■	■■■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Pentland Group Holdings Limited
Lululemon	20	■■■	■■■	■■■	■	■	■	■■■	Lululemon Athletica Inc.
Tesco F&F	20	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Tesco plc
Adidas	19	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Adidas AG
Asics	15	■■■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■	■	ASICS Corporation
Reebok	14	■	■	■	■■■	■	■■■	■■■	Authentic Brands Group LLC
Under Armour	14	■■■	■	■■■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Under Armour, Inc
Sweaty Betty	11	■■■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Wolverine World Wide Inc
<div>Brands to avoid</div> Amazon Essentials	8	■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Amazon.com Inc
Columbia	8	■■■	■■■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Columbia Co Inc
<div>Brands to avoid</div> Everlast, Karrimor, Slazenger	8	■■■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Fraser's Group/Sports Direct
<div>Brands to avoid</div> Saucony	8	■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Wolverine World Wide Inc
<div>Brands to avoid</div> USA Pro	8	■■■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Fraser's Group/Sports Direct
<div>Brands to avoid</div> ASDA	6	■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	TDR Capital LLP/Issa Brothers
<div>Brands to avoid</div> Fila	4	■	■	■	■	■	■■■	■■■	Fila Holdings Corp
SECONDHAND SPORTSWEAR									
<div>Best Buys</div> Preloved Sports	86	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Preloved Sports CIC
<div>Best Buys</div> Rokit	79	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Rokit Limited
<div>Best Buys</div> Oxfam	78	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Oxfam GB
<div>Best Buys</div> Preworn	76	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Preworn Ltd
<div>Best Buys</div> Thrifted	76	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Thrifted Limited
<div>Best Buys</div> Beyond Retro	72	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Bank & Vogue Ltd
<div>Best Buys</div> Vinted	64	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Vinted Limited
Depop	34	■■■	■	■	■	■	■■■■■	■■■■■	Etsy, Inc

* Each category is scored out of 100. The final Ethiscore is the average of the category scores. We consider Company Ethos particularly important and it covers the whole company group so it is weighted double.

Sportswear

Inclusivity

Brands seem to have become more sensitive to inclusivity. Toned-up models are now mixed with ones that look more like real people of different shapes and sizes. God forbid, some companies have even started using models with grey hair!

When we looked at leggings for all brands to see which did sizes above UK women's size 20, we noticed improvement on this front compared to when we last checked this in 2020. Compared to just a handful companies, now at least half the companies in this guide go up to XXL (from XXS, small people matter too!).

Of the large companies Adidas, Nike and Slazenger go up to 4XL for both women's leggings and men's joggers, Decathlon has 4XL for women and 3XL for men, and USA Pro caters for women only, up to 4XL.

The two companies that stand out in this matter are the Girlfriend Collective and Contra. The first goes up to 6XL, featuring plus size models on its website. Contra's largest size is 5XL (women and men) and it came up with an inclusive, anonymous labelling system from B to K. Although you still have to match the alphabetical labelling to your UK size, its innovation around inclusivity is admirable. The Girlfriend Collective is a Best Buy while Contra is Recommended.

3rd Rock also deserves a mention on its efforts to make the outdoor and climbing community more diverse. It offers free coached climbing sessions to BAME participants as well as LGBTQIA+ climbers.

WHAT TO BUY

- **Do you need it to be new?** There are many places to get secondhand sportswear, from charity shops to online.
- **Is sustainability core to the company?** Look for companies that use more sustainable materials across the board, such as organic cotton or organic hemp, rather than just a token amount.
- **Are workers being respected?** Look for companies that score high in our Workers category or don't have workers' rights criticisms

WHAT NOT TO BUY

- **Do you need specialist sportswear?** Or would simply wearing organic cotton tops and bottoms be suitable? We have included companies from our Ethical clothing guide that sell active wear too and you can check for joggers and t-shirts at Best Buy clothing companies, such as THTC
- **Does the company pay fairly?** Many companies pay executives millions, while garment workers are in poverty. Subscribers can see director compensation details in the Company ethos ratings, and living wages details in the Workers ratings.



Secondhand sportswear: All our high-scoring secondhand companies are

✓ **BEST BUYS**



Best Buys: **Preloved Sports, Rokit, Oxfam, Preworn, Thrifted, Beyond Retro, Vinted.**



79



76

**PREWORN
THRIFTED.**



Vinted 64

New sportswear: Best buys are **Rapanui, BAM, 3RD ROCK** and **Girlfriend Collective.**

88



76



74



**girlfriend
collective** 68

All of these companies sell sportswear made of organic cotton or other sustainable materials and score well in our Workers category.

Community Clothing works in deprived areas of the UK to help develop these areas economically.

✓ **RECOMMENDED**

Contra has good worker's rights and inclusivity policies but fell short on disclosing the origins of its materials.

Howies sells sportswear made of organic cotton and other sustainable materials but scores very low in our Workers category.

Amazon Essentials, ASDA, FILA, Saucony, Sports Direct brands

✗ **BRANDS TO AVOID**

(Everlast, Karrimor, Slazenger, USA Pro). These companies all score at the bottom of our table, with Amazon in particular being a driving force behind cheap throwaway clothing culture.



Best Buys are decided by the editorial team based on the research we have undertaken, the scoring system and the unique insight into the issues that our editorial team has.

Sportswear

Animal products in sportswear

The times are long gone when football jerseys were all made of wool. The majority of sportswear is made of synthetic materials, and some of cotton. However, there are a lot of large companies in this guide that also sell trainers and walking boots made of leather, or outdoor wear made of wool or down. Read our Outdoor Clothing and Trainers guides in this magazine to learn more. If you want to make sure that your purchase doesn't contribute to the exploitation of animals, make sure that you shop with a company that scored well in this category. In the table below we've gathered all the companies that we recommend using if animal welfare is of utmost importance to you.

Explicitly vegan	No policy but doesn't sell animal products	Only sells insignificant amount of animal products (one or two products)	Only sells secondhand animal products
Rapanui	3rd Rock	Lululemon	Beyond Retro
	Contra	Oxfam	Depop
	Girlfriend Collective	Yogamatters	Preloved Sports
	Gymshark	Gossypium	Preworn
	Scimitar		Rokit
	We Are Tala		Thriftd
			Vinted

OUR READERS' SURVEY

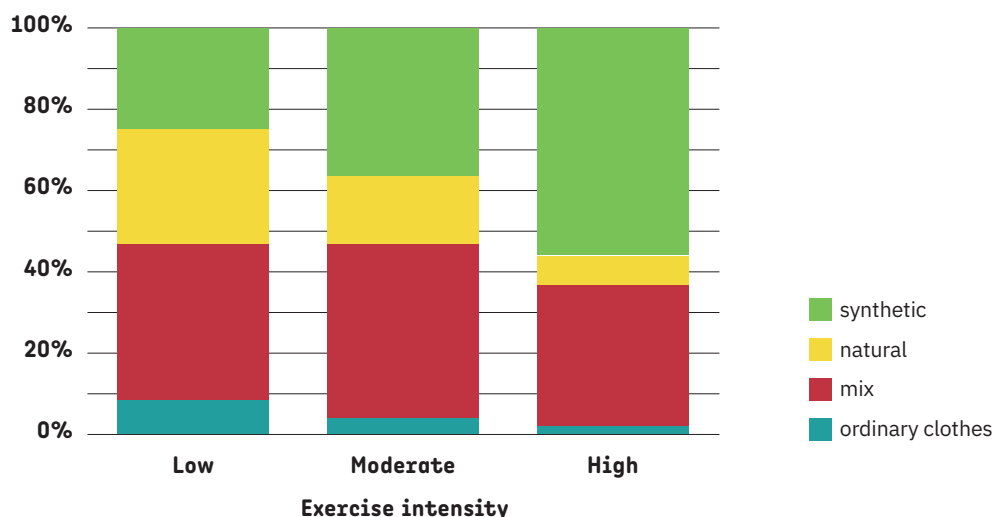
In a non-representative survey, we asked our readers about their workout fabric choices. Sports seem to be close to the hearts of our readership, in a matter of days we received over seven hundred responses!

As the chart shows, people who exercise strenuously seem to prefer synthetic clothing while natural fabrics have more appeal for those who exercise on moderate or low levels. 'Mixed' fabrics are more or less equally spread across the different intensities.

Many of you said that your synthetic sportswear is very old but you will only change it to something more sustainable once it is unusable, for which we applaud you. One person said that they are "so old so I can't read the labels".

Some of your comments alluded to broader tensions around synthetic/animal-based fibres. Vegans, for example, will sometimes turn to synthetics for certain activities, as cotton cannot provide the thermal qualities of, say, wool. Another reader explained that they need to use synthetics because they "sweat like someone put the fire sprinklers on", while several others referenced Britain's capacity for rain. The most low-impact choice was probably from the reader who said "I tend to workout from home in my underwear".

Sportswear fabric choice



Luxury greenwash?

It's crucially important that we distinguish between 'ethical' and 'luxury' when it comes to activewear. Expensive brands are increasingly presenting themselves as sustainable but, as with a lot of luxury fashion, this is often a matter of style over substance.

Take Lululemon, a Canadian-American multinational specialising in luxury yoga pants.

Its branding oozes sustainability buzzwords – the company is apparently “on a journey to address social and environmental barriers to collective wellbeing” and strives to “create value in our communities through movement, mindfulness, and connection”.

We weren't convinced how selling a pair of leggings for £148 achieves these lofty goals, especially when said leggings are made entirely from virgin plastic.

The company also received 0/100 for its approach to cotton sourcing. It did not appear to use any significant amount of organic or recycled cotton, and it is allegedly failing to remediate links to cotton sourced in Xinjiang, according to a Governing Forced Labour in Supply Chains report from 2022.

So, what exactly are you paying for? Their highest paid director's \$15.6 million 2022 paycheck, perhaps?

Lululemon's £148 nylon 'SenseKnit' leggings and right, its sustainability page.

Price comparison of leggings

For this price comparison, we looked at leggings to see how various companies fare on this front.

It was great to see that ethical companies are very competitively priced. In fact, the highest scoring brand, Rapanui's organic cotton leggings were the cheapest, apart from swecondhand ones, at £20 for a pair.

Secondhand leggings can be picked up for as little as £2 or £4 from Preloved Sports or from any other secondhand companies.

On the higher end, Lululemon wins with its virgin nylon leggings that it's asking £148 for.

The table is ranked from the least expensive starting price to the most expensive.

Brand Name	Material	Price range
 Preloved Sports	various brand secondhand	£2-£7
 Preworn	various brand secondhand	£4-£13
 Rapanui	organic cotton, elastane	£20
 Girlfriend Collective	recycled polyester, elastane	£20-£68
Puma	cotton or polyester, elastane	£21- £65
Calvin Klein	nylon, elastane	£22-£25
Gymshark	nylon, polyester or recycled polyester, elastane	£30-£50
USA Pro	nylon, elastane	£34-£90
Nike	polyester or recycled polyester, nylon, elastane	£38-£120
Lululemon	recycled polyester, nylon, wool, lyocell, elastane	£64-£148
Sweaty Betty	polyamide, elastane	£70 - £100
Pangaia	biobased polyamide, biobased elastane	£85

Companies behind the brands

The **Pangaia** brand is owned by Pangaia Materials Science Ltd. As suggested by its name, the company's brand identity emphasises materials research and design – but, make no mistake, this is a luxury, high-fashion brand. Tracksuit bottoms need some serious research credentials to warrant a £175 price tag.

The company does indeed score highly across the board, unlike fellow luxury brand Lululemon. It does appear to be doing some genuinely innovative materials research, boasting leggings made from Castor Beans, and it is using Brewed Proteins to replace animal-based fibres. However, it's hard to tell if such materials will ever be widely available to the non-ultra wealthy. Ethical sportswear shouldn't, and doesn't, have to break the bank.

One of the company's founders, Miroslava Duma, has faced several accusations of racism and transphobia in recent years, after using a racial slur in an Instagram post and commenting that transgender models were “weird [...] a little boy could see it. And that boy wouldn't understand it correctly”.

Preloved Sports is a young Community Interest Company that sells secondhand sportswear. It also distributes garments free of charge for those that couldn't otherwise afford them. It was founded by Michael Hill in memory of his dad. Michael says, “I know how important running is to a person's mental health and wellbeing. With the rising cost of living, we make running, cycling and fitness more accessible to others”. The company has a high company ethos score due to it being a non-profit.

Contra is the trading arm of Parkrun Limited. It is THE Parkrun, the company that organises free, friendly, social runs, you guessed it, in parks. It is selling various technical sports garments and all of its profits support parkrun. It also has good workers' rights policies and, as it disclosed all of its tier 1 suppliers, it scored 80/100 in this category. It is also clued up on inclusivity; it has a special B-K anonymous size labelling system for “removing the stigma that we don't believe in” and sells garments up to 5XL. However, it has no sustainability policies on its fabrics and scored 0 for both in our Cotton and Sustainable materials category, due to the lack of information, and ended up in the lower half of the table. Due to its advanced workers' rights and inclusivity stances, it is a Recommended brand in this guide.

Sweaty Betty is owned by leather giant **Wolverine World Wide, Inc.** A pioneer amongst its sister brands such as Merrel or Saucony, Sweaty Betty has its own Impact report, and it calculated its greenhouse gas emissions for the first time in 2020. It also has emission reduction targets. While this was a good step in the right direction, its emissions reporting was unfortunately inadequate. It had poor Workers policies, as well as a low Tax Conduct score. While it is very vocal about being “committed to using more recycled materials and sustainably sourced natural fibres”, it was criticised by the Center for Environmental Health that its sports bras contained “up to 40 times the safe limit of the chemical bisphenol A (BPA)” (according to California law).

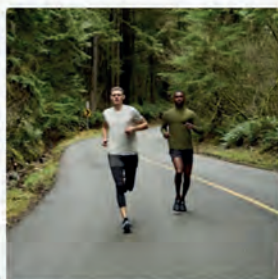
In 2019, a lawsuit was filed against Wolverine in relation to water pollution in Michigan caused by the company's disposal of industrial waste laden with PFAS since 1958 from treating its Hush Puppies brand shoe leather with 3M Scotchgard. In 2023 a judge approved a \$54 million settlement to residents but it only covered property damage claims, not personal injury or medical claims.

Global brand **Puma** had a revenue of £7.21 billion in 2022. Known for its sport clothes and trainers, Ethical Consumer readers may know it for the boycott call against it over its sponsorship of the Israel Football Association (IFA). The Boycott Puma campaign was launched by Palestinian athletes in 2018 after 200 Palestinian sports clubs sent a letter to the company. The IFA includes teams based in illegal Israeli settlements.

On 12 December 2023, Puma announced that it would end its sponsorship in 2024. Until that happens, the boycott call continues. See page 42 for more on which brands to boycott in support of Palestine and which are alternative brands to buy.

Be Planet.

Our products and actions avoid environmental harm and contribute to restoring a healthy planet.



Better Products.

We're committed to making products that are better in every way—for people and the planet. We're adopting practices and creating solutions that enhance our



Climate change and renewable energy.

We're working toward a carbon-neutral future, starting

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VEGAN

CRUELTY FREE

GM FREE

kingfishertoothpaste.com

New Ethical Vegan Styles...



VEGETARIAN SHOES

all available at www.vegshoes.com

your **coop**

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A Workers Co-operative,
Supplying Ethically Traded
Organic & Natural
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Our campaigns

Amazon campaign's election year ask

Our Amazon campaign has one ask for UK political parties in the 2024 election year: to change the law to allow public authorities to take into account responsible tax conduct when awarding government contracts.

Around £300 billion of public money is spent annually with external suppliers by the government. Hundreds of millions go to companies that use tax-avoiding strategies. We think it makes no sense for government

bodies, which desperately need revenue, to be spending it with companies which are working hard to reduce the amount of tax they pay.

The law is currently unhelpful and needs to change. Our sister organisation at Fair Tax Foundation has outlined how the law

needs to be amended. This includes permitting public sector organisations to award more points to companies:

- with clear policies not to use tax havens for tax avoidance
- which report publicly their annual income and tax paid in each country in which they operate.

What can you do?

- If you are a member of a UK political party you could talk to other members about adopting this as formal policy.
- If you are not a member of a political party you could contact your MP about this policy too.
- If your local authority is not yet signed up to the 'Councils for Fair Tax' declaration, you could contact your local councillor.



CLIMATE GAP

Continuing to explore the problems of economic growth and what alternatives there are, we wanted to highlight the Doughnut Economics Action Lab (DEAL). DEAL works to turn the ideas of Doughnut Economics (to rethink our economies to meet the needs of all people within the means of the living planet) from a radical idea, into transformative action.



You might find there is a local group or network in your area that you could get in touch with, as there are 18 throughout the UK, in Bath, Cambridge, Cheltenham, Cornwall, Devon, Exeter, Leeds, Lincoln, London, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Ottery, Oxfordshire, Pontypridd, Scotland, Stretton, and Wales. Or you can browse the events page, some of which are online.

Some local governments are even adopting tools and concepts from Doughnut Economics. In the UK this includes Glasgow, West Midlands, Bath and Northeast Somerset, Cornwall, and Worthing.

The website also gives access to a range of tools for developing the ideas, from Doughnut Design for Business, and Regenerative Economics for Secondary Schools, to how to make a 'Resilience Web' – a visual online listing of local environmental and social justice groups in your area, to help people find groups they want to support, partner with, or volunteer at.

For more details see:

- doughnuteconomics.org/discover-the-community
- doughnuteconomics.org/about-doughnut-economics

FUNDING TO FURTHER THE SPAIN CAMPAIGN

We have exciting news to share with you. We have just received a grant which will enable the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to travel to Spain. CIW transformed the tomato sector in Florida in the US from one of the most exploitative to one of the most respectful in terms of workers' rights.

They will spend five days with workers exploring the sector's suitability for a similar model, known as worker-driven social responsibility (WSR), to be developed there. (See the Jeans guide in EC207 for an example from Levi's in South Africa – www.ethicalconsumer.org/fashion-clothing/shopping-guide/ethical-jeans).

The grant will also fund online meetings between the workers in Spain and the CIW and WSR-Network to help develop this relationship. The grant is being generously provided by Healthy Food Healthy Planet, which aims to make food systems more sustainable.

This is just the first step in the process as workers in Spain explore what adapting the WSR model to their industry would look like.

Thanks to all the Ethical Consumer readers who have supported our platforming of worker voices in UK supermarkets' agricultural supply chains in Spain. It's been five years since we started publishing on the issue and researching new and impactful ways to hold corporate power to account – from one end of the supply chain to the other.



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Tax justice

Lining up to demand tax justice in government spending



MOTORWAY SERVICE STATION CHAIN RECEIVES FAIR TAX MARK

Award-winning motorway service chain Westmorland runs service stations at Tebay on the M6, Gloucester on the M5, and at Cairn Lodge on the M74 in Scotland. It also has a service station for HGV drivers at Junction 38 of the M6 and other facilities in Cumbria including Rheged café and cinema, and the Westmorland Hotel.

Westmorland, well known for trying to build local supply chains for food, became the first service stations to be awarded the Fair Tax Mark in January this year.

Also new to the Fair Tax Mark in the UK is NATS (National Air Traffic Services). It is the largest provider of air traffic control services in the UK, handling over 2.5 million flights and 250 million passengers each year.

FAIR TAX IN FINLAND AND DENMARK

The Fair Tax Mark project continues to resonate with a wide range of businesses across Europe. Fortum is Finland's biggest business by sales. It is a state-owned electricity provider with over 150 power plants in total including hydro, nuclear, solar, wind and gas. It also operates in a range of other countries including, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Poland, Estonia, Germany, the United Kingdom, India, Ireland, and the Netherlands. It became Finland's first company to be awarded the Fair Tax Mark in December 2023.

North Media A/S became the second Danish business to gain the Fair Tax Mark in February. It runs print and digital newspaper distribution services in Denmark and Sweden, and BoligPortal, the largest platform for rental accommodation in Denmark.

c.17.5%

of UK public contracts are won by companies **linked to tax havens**

According to the Fair Tax Foundation, an estimated 17.5% of UK public contracts (with a combined value of £37.5bn) are won by companies linked to tax havens. This is likely to be the highest rate in Europe.

With a likely change in government this year, campaigners are beginning to formulate some clear policy reforms for a more socially minded economic system.

The Future Economy Alliance, for example, is a collaboration between social

enterprises, co-operatives, and mutuals, as well as social investors and others. In March, it published a new report called 'Let's Fix our Future: Building A New Business Plan For Britain'.

The Plan presents a host of policy recommendations which include: "putting power in the hands of local communities; transforming public services; and creating a people-powered green transition". A core element of its public services demands is allowing them to "select service delivery partners based on alignment with their organisational purpose, how they use their profits, their commitment to pay UK taxes, and their employment practices".

The Fair Tax Foundation, itself part of the Alliance, has developed a more detailed 'Big Fair Tax Ask' for UK public procurement. It suggests that we should explicitly allow contracting authorities to reward suppliers that demonstrate a robust commitment to responsible tax conduct and financial transparency. That means those that:

- shun artificial tax avoidance, profit shifting and tax havens
- publish the fullest set of financial accounts (including a breakdown of income, profit and taxes paid across the globe)
- disclose their ultimate beneficial owners (with shell companies and nominees disallowed).

At Ethical Consumer's Amazon Boycott campaign, we are concerned by the growing amount spent by government departments on Amazon Web Services particularly. We are therefore also calling on political parties to agree to change the law in the same way to "Help public bodies avoid tax avoiding companies." More about this appears on p39.

For more information on all these campaigns see:

- www.socialenterprise.org.uk/news/fixing-our-economy-with-a-new-business-plan-for-britain
- <https://fairtaxmark.net/supporters/uk-public-procurement-reform/>
- www.ethicalconsumer.org/ethical-campaigns-boycotts/public-spending-tax-avoiding-companies

Inequality Inc

In January, Oxfam published a report called: 'Inequality Inc.: How the war on tax fuels inequality and what we can do about it.'

The report looked at how, in the last 20 years, we have seen a "war on taxation" that has benefited companies and their wealthy owners, but deprived societies of resources needed for inequality-busting policies. It found that, as a result of lobbying and influence from powerful corporations, corporate tax rates fell in 111 out of 141 countries between 2000 and 2023, and more than halved in OECD countries since 1980. Tax justice campaigns, including those listed on this page, are the beginning of a fight back. www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-inc



Coventry Building Society in talks to acquire Co-op Bank

In December 2023, Co-op Bank confirmed reports in the Financial Times that Coventry Building Society had made an offer to buy the bank.¹ Co-op Bank and Coventry Building Society have since entered exclusive merger talks.²

According to Customer Union for Ethical Banking (CUEB), a union of Co-op Bank customers which grew out of a 2013 Ethical Consumer campaign called 'Save our Bank,' both organisations have strong ethical standards.

Coventry Building Society holds Fair Tax Mark and B Corp certifications, is a Best Buy for mortgages, and is recommended in our Savings Accounts guide.

CUEB said in January: "A successful deal would align perfectly with our dual goals: preserving the bank's world-leading ethical standards and steering it back towards some form of mutual or co-operative ownership."

Coventry Building Society scored 13.5 and Co-op Bank scored 12 in our last guides.

Meanwhile in March 2024, another mutual organisation, Nationwide Building Society, reached a deal to acquire Virgin Money, under a £2.9bn agreement, BBC News reported.³ Nationwide Building Society was a Recommended buy in our Current Accounts guide, with an Ethiscore of 13. Virgin Money received an Ethiscore of 8 in the same guide.

Ethex 10-year anniversary



Since launching in 2013, Ethex, a non-profit organisation, has raised over £120 million from more than 25,000 retail investors (non-professional investors)

for projects tackling issues including climate change, social inequality, and the breakdown of communities.⁴

To coincide with its birthday, Ethex conducted a poll which found that around two-thirds (67%) of UK investors and savers want their money to have a positive social and environmental impact.

The OnePoll research found that despite these investment goals, 56% of investors are unsure how their money is used.

It also said that younger people had a greater appetite for ethical investing, with 79% of those aged between 18 and 24 favouring investments that positively impact the planet and society.

"It's encouraging that our survey shows such a high level of awareness of

the importance of investing for a positive impact, especially among younger people," said Ethex Chief Executive Lisa Ashford. "But it also shows that there isn't nearly enough transparency from the financial sector about how they use the money people trust them with."

Ethex is an Ethical Consumer Best Buy for Innovative Financial ISAs.

Call to improve climate transparency of advertising industry

A coalition of ethical investors wants advertising and PR companies to be more transparent about their climate impact, according to research by DeSmog.⁵

The investigative environmental journalism platform said that advertising corporations including WPP, Omnicom and Interpublic Group (IPG) are often favoured by green investors for their high sustainability ratings, which cover issues such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions, human rights violations in supply chains, and executive pay.

But an investigation by DeSmog found that these scores take minimal account of the climate risks for the sector, such as the reputational damage of greenwashing fossil fuel clients and the threat of legal action for climate damages.

The coalition of ethical investors, led by Inyova Impact, is calling for advertising sector-specific climate risks to be reflected in the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) scores on which green investors base their investment decisions.

"These ad companies have science-based targets for net zero that have been validated by the Science-based Targets Initiative (SBTi), but without the inclusion of their clients' emissions," an investor told DeSmog. "Yet these companies have a huge influence on their clients."

Ethical investment funds: financial performance

Top ten funds in our latest funds guide*	5-year cumulative performance to 12/03/24	Ethiscore as of 03/2023
Janus Henderson Global Sustainable Equity Fund	94.3	7.5
Jupiter Ecology	73.4	8
Sarasin Responsible Global Equity	62.7	8
EdenTree R&S European Equity	54.6	13.5
Impax Environmental Markets Plc	45.8	9.5
Castlefield Sustainable European fund	45.1	14
Triodos Pioneer Impact	42.7	14.5
FB WHEB Sustainability	39.0	16
Quilter Cheviot Climate Assets Balanced	34.5	8
Liontrust Sustainable Future European Growth	34.2	8
IA Global (for comparison)	60.9	-

* www.ethicalconsumer.org/money-finance/shopping-guide/ethical-investment-funds

NB: L&G Ethical Global Equity Index was found to be an institutional investment that was not available to retail investors. It has therefore been removed from the table.

References: 1 www.ft.com/content/4fd3d6e2-277f-4938-9b97-00431523c989 2 www.cityam.com/profit-slips-at-the-co-op-bank-as-coventry-building-society-continues-to-circle 3 www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-68499145 4 <https://cdn2.sharein.com/ethex/docs/ethex-impact-report.pdf> 5 www.desmog.com/2024/02/25/wpp-omnicom-esg-investing-climate-ratings-financial-risks-publicis-ipg-dentsu-fossil-fuel-clients-advertising-pr-agencies 6 www.triodos.co.uk/press-releases/2024/triodos-bank-uk-introduces-fund-focused-on-childrens-wellbeing-and-development 7 www.triodos.co.uk/articles/2022/triodos-bank-recognised-as-stand-out-best-buy-by-ethical-consumer

Palestine-Israel boycotts and alternative brands to buy



Millions of people worldwide are speaking out against the assault on Gaza.

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JASMINE OWENS looks at 20 consumer brands which are the target of boycotts and suggests where people could shop instead.

“At least do us no harm”, says founder of the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, Omar Barghouti. Part of what he means by this is for everyone to stop making purchases from or investing in companies that actively support Palestinian human rights abuses.

But even if we switch to a brand that isn't complicit in Israeli apartheid, it may be creating other types of harm to people, the planet, and other animals.

So, for this article, we've used recommendations from our ethical shopping guides to enable people to find alternatives all in one place. This is based on our usual ranking methodology, analysing company performance against issues such as climate, workers' rights, animal rights, tax conduct, excessive directors' pay and more.

What's in the top 20 list?

We chose 20 boycotted brands to find alternatives to, but there are dozens more that could have been explored.

The leading authority on brands to boycott in support of Palestine is the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) National Committee, otherwise known as the BNC. The BNC is a coalition of Palestinian organisations which has, since 2005, led impactful boycott campaigns against complicit brands. It sits at the centre of the global BDS movement.

We prioritised providing alternatives to brands that:

- the BNC is targeting
- are relevant to UK-based consumers
- operate in sectors we have researched for shopping guides at Ethical Consumer.

Best Buy or Recommended brands, or the 'best of a bad lot'

Secondhand or refurbished buys are nearly always our top recommendation, so you can assume that for every product type listed below we would endorse this option if possible. There are definitely secondhand options for clothing, footwear, tech, white goods and cars. Buying from a more ethical local independent business is often another good choice.

The Best Buy brands listed scored positively across most of our ethical ratings categories, and recommended brands scored better than average in some.

For products where few brands were operating ethically enough to recommend, we've named some that were at least not the worst rated.

Who	Why	Guides	Alternatives include
AHAVA	Ahava cosmetics has a production site, visitor centre and store in an illegal Israeli settlement.	Skincare (2023)	Best Buy alternatives are Austin Austin, Badger, Caurnie, Conscious Skincare, Lucy Bee, Miniml, Neal's Yard Remedies, Odylique, PHB Ethical Beauty, Pure Nuff Stuff, Queenie Organics, SESI. Recommended alternatives are Bentleys Organic, Dr. Haushka, Faith in Nature, Green People, Lavera, Lush.
Airbnb, Booking.com, and Expedia	Airbnb, Booking.com and Expedia all offer rentals in illegal Israeli settlements built on stolen Palestinian land. All were named in a 2023 UN report which listed companies involved in Israeli settlements that are considered illegal under international law.	Travel booking companies (2022)	Best Buys are Canopy and Stars, FairBnB, Independent Hostels UK, and YHA. Homestay is Recommended.

Who	Why	Guides	Alternatives include
Amazon	Amazon, alongside Google, signed a \$1.2bn contract to provide cloud services for the Israeli military and government in 2021. The BNC says “By supporting Israeli apartheid with vital technologies, Amazon and Google are directly implicated in its entire system of oppression, including its unfolding genocide in Gaza.” Read more on the No Tech For Apartheid campaign website, which is run by the organisations MPOWER CHANGE (a Muslim grassroots movement) and Jewish Voice for Peace.	Batteries (2023)	Recommended brands are GP, Philips, and Varta. Eneloop scored okay.
		Bookshops (2023)	Best Buys are Awesome Books, Better World Books, Biblio, ebooks.com, Guardian Bookshop, Oxfam, World of Books, and xigxag. Bookshop.org, Hive, and Litalist are Recommended.
		Delivery companies (2021)	Parcelforce and Royal Mail are Recommended. Deliveroo and JustEat scored okay.
		Clothing – secondhand (2024)	Preworn, Rokit, Thrifted, and We Are Cow are Best Buy secondhand clothes stores.
		Clothing – ethical (2024)	Lucy and Yak, MUD, Rapanui, THTC, and Where Does It Come From are just some of the Best Buy ethical clothing brands.
		Clothing – high street (2024)	Nobody's Child, Patagonia, and Seasalt are Recommended. & Other Stories, COS, H&M, and Marks & Spencer also scored okay.
		Streaming Services (2018)	Best Buys are Flix Premiere and Mubi. All 4 and BFI Player are Recommended.
		Tablets and e-readers (2022)	Best Buys are Apple, Kobo, and Lenovo. Acer scored okay.
AXA	According to the BNC, AXA “invests in Israeli banks financing war crimes and the theft of Palestinian land and natural resources.” The December 2023 Don't Buy Into Occupation report named AXA as the 22nd largest European investor in companies named in the UN list of businesses involved in illegal Israeli settlements.	Investment Funds (2023)	Best Buys are Castlefield, Triodos Sustainable Pioneer Fund, and WHEB Sustainability Fund. EdenTree and Impax are Recommended.
		Fossil Fuel Free Investment Funds (2021)	Best Buys are FP Wheb Sustainability and Triodos Pioneer Impact Fund. Castlefield Sustainable European Fund and EdenTree Amity International are Recommended.
		Car Insurance (2023)	Aviva and Quotemehappy are Recommended. Admiral and Covea scored okay.
		Home Insurance (2023)	Best Buys are Ecclesiastical and Naturesave. Aviva (see above) and Quotemehappy are Recommended.
Barclays	Barclays owns shares worth over £1.3 billion in companies supplying Israel with weapons and military technology. Palestine Solidarity Campaign says “Barclays is bankrolling Israel's genocidal assault on Palestinians through its financial ties with arms companies that sell weapons to Israel.”	Mortgages (2022)	Best Buys are Chelsea, Coventry, Leeds, and Yorkshire Building Societies, Co-operative Bank and Ecology Building Society.
		Current Accounts (2022)	The only Best Buy is Triodos. Cumberland Building Society, the Co-op Bank (including Smile), Nationwide are Recommended.
		Savings Accounts (2022)	Charity Bank, Ecology Building Society, and Triodos are all Best Buys. Chelsea, Coventry, and Yorkshire Building Societies scored quite well.
		Cash ISAs (2022)	Charity Bank, Ecology Building Society and Triodos are all Best Buys. Chelsea, Coventry, and Yorkshire Building Societies scored quite well.
		Business Banking (2022)	The only Best Buy is Triodos (not always available to new customers). The Co-operative Bank, The Cumberland, and Unity Trust Bank are Recommended.
Burger King, Domino's, McDonald's, Papa John's, Pizza Hut	<p>The BDS National Committee says Burger King, Domino's, McDonald's, Papa John's and Pizza Hut "are now being targeted in some countries by grassroots organic boycott campaigns, not initiated by the BDS movement. BDS supports these boycott campaigns because these companies, or their branches or franchisees in Israel, have openly supported apartheid Israel and/or provided generous in-kind donations to the Israeli military amid the current genocide."</p> <p>McDonald's for example donated meals and beverages to Israeli military personnel and promoted it on social media, according to the BNC. McDonald's Malaysia has also allegedly sued BDS Malaysia for making “false and defamatory statements” about the company, which the BNC claims amounts to “bullying solidarity activists”.</p>	Coffee Shops (2022) and Fast Food Chains (2018)	<p>Greggs was Recommended when we researched it for our guide to Coffee Shops.</p> <p>When we last rated food chains Recommended buys were Itsu, Jamie's Italian Kitchen, and Wahaca.</p>
Chevron, Texaco	The BDS National Committee says that Chevron, which owns the Texaco brand, “is the main corporation extracting gas claimed by apartheid Israel in the East Mediterranean. Chevron generates billions in revenues, strengthening Israel's war chest and apartheid system, exacerbating the climate crisis and Gaza siege, and is complicit in depriving the Palestinian people of their right to sovereignty over their natural resources.”	Diesel & Petrol (2018)	Since we want to avoid endorsing any fossil fuel companies, we haven't rated petrol and diesel companies since 2018. ExxonMobil was the worst-rated brand, so we'd recommend avoiding that.

Who	Why	Guides	Alternatives include
Disney	Palestinian cultural organisations, including theatres and performing arts centres, are calling for “widespread boycotts” of the film Captain America: New World Order which is set to release in 2025. It features a superhero who “personifies” the Israeli state, according to the BNC, with the character’s backstory including working for Israel’s government and occupation forces. The BNC says “by reviving this racist character in any form, Marvel is promoting Israel’s brutal oppression of Palestinians”.	Streaming Services (2018)	Best Buys are Flix Premiere and Mubi. All 4 and BFI Player are Recommended.
Google	Google, alongside Amazon, signed a \$1.2bn contract to provide cloud services for the Israeli military and government in 2021. The BNC says “By supporting Israeli apartheid with vital technologies, Amazon and Google are directly implicated in its entire system of oppression, including its unfolding genocide in Gaza.” Read more on the No Tech For Apartheid campaign website, which is run by the organisations MPOWER CHANGE (a Muslim grassroots movement) and Jewish Voice for Peace.	Bookshops (2023)	Best Buys are Awesome Books, Better World Books, Biblio, ebooks.com, Guardian Bookshop, Oxfam, World of Books, and xigxag. Bookshop.org, Hive, and Litalist are Recommended.
HP	Hewlett-Packard Enterprise and HP Inc are both targeted by a BNC boycott call. They collectively provide services to the Israeli government, police and prisons services. The BNC says it “provides technology for Israel’s Population and Immigration Authority, a pillar of its apartheid regime.”	Desktop computers (2022)	TCO-certified models by Acer and Lenovo were Recommended. Dell also scored better than most brands.
		Laptops (2022)	Framework, and TCO-certified models by Acer and ASUS were Recommended. Lenovo scored okay.
		Tablets and e-readers (2022)	Best Buys are Apple, Kobo, and Lenovo. Acer scored okay.
		Hybrid laptop-tablets (2019)	Lenovo TCO models were Recommended. Acer, ASUS, and Dell scored slightly better than most.
Puma	Following years of boycott pressure, Puma announced in December 2023 that its contract with the Israeli Football Association (which includes teams based in illegal settlements) would not be renewed in 2024. Until that happens, the boycott call continues.	Trainers (2024 – this magazine)	Best Buys are Ethletic, SAYE and Will’s. Recommended are Hylo, Oxfam, Preworn, Vegetarian Shoes, Veja and Vinted.
		Sportswear (2024 – this magazine)	Best Buys: 3rd Rock, BAM, Girlfriend Collective, Rapanui. Recommended: Community Clothing, Contra, Howies.
Siemens	Siemens won a contract to connect Israel’s electricity grid with that of the EU (the EuroAsia Interconnector project). This would involve an Israel-EU submarine electricity cable that connects Israel’s illegal settlements to Europe, aiding the settlements’ maintenance and expansion.	Fridges & Freezers (2021)	Best Buys are LG and Miele. John Lewis and Liebherr were Recommended.
		Dishwashers (2021)	Miele was a Best Buy. Amica and Montpellier scored slightly better than average.
		Microwaves (2018)	Miele was a Best Buy, and Belling Recommended.
		Gas & Electric Cookers (2021)	Miele was a Best Buy, and Amica and Montpellier Recommended. CDA scored okay.
		Washing Machines (2021)	Miele was a Best Buy, and LG Recommended. Montpellier scored slightly better than average.
		Coffee Machines (2022)	Aeropress was a Best Buy. Bialetti, Bodum, La Cafetiere, Le’Xpress, and Melitta were Recommended.
		Boilers (2023)	Advance Appliances, EHC, Elnur, Heatrae, Sadia, and Thermaflow, were Recommended for electric boilers. For gas boilers, Baxi, Glow-worm, Main, Potterton, and Vaillant were Recommended.
		Heat Pumps (2023)	Kensa was a Best Buy. Grant, MasterTherm, Stiebel Eltron, and Vaillant were Recommended.
		Vacuums (2021)	Beldray, Miele, and Vax were Best Buys. Bissell, Ewbank, Henry, and Numatic are Recommended.
Sodastream	Sodastream faced a global boycott due to owning a factory in the illegally occupied West Bank. In 2015, after intense public pressure Sodastream closed this factory and left the West Bank. However, the BNC says that Sodastream continues to be “actively complicit in Israel’s policy of displacing the Indigenous Bedouin-Palestinian citizens” through its factory in the naqab (negev) region and “has a long history of racial discrimination against Palestinian workers.”	Solar thermal (2021)	AES Solar is a Best Buy. Apricus, Navitron, SolarUK, and SunWin are Recommended.
		Batteries (2023)	We haven’t rated alternative brands to Sodastream, but Philips was recommended in our batteries guide. Other brands not targeted by an official BDS boycott call include Aarke and DrinkMate.
Volvo	The BNC says that Volvo machinery has been used by Israel in the “ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of Palestinians through the destruction of their homes, farms, and businesses, as well as the construction of illegal settlements on land stolen from them, a war crime under international law.”	Cars (2022)	Citroen, DS, Fiat, Opel, Peugeot, and Vauxhall are Recommended. Mazda and Suzuki score slightly better than average.

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NB: The guides listed are subject to change.

Best Buys Label update

New Best Buy pasta from Suma

In March this year, Ethical Consumer awarded its Best Buy Label to a new range of organic Italian pasta from Suma.

Suma is a worker-owned co-operative based in Yorkshire which grew up as a wholesaler of specialist ethical foods supplying the new wave of wholefood shops that began opening in the UK in the 1970s. It scores well in our Company Ethos category for its structure, as well as its approach to equal pay which it maintains across its (now) nearly 300 staff.

The business is also Fair Tax Certified (100/100 for tax) and gains points in our Climate category for being a vegetarian company too.

The pasta is manufactured for Suma by another co-operative in Italy that produces exclusively organic products, and is also guaranteed by the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) as a Fair Trade Enterprise. This, and some of Suma's own policies, gains it marks in our new Agriculture Category.

Finally the pasta range gains points in the new Packaging category that we're beginning to apply to food products. The product is plastic-free as it is packed in paper, printed with water-based ink, and sealed with lacquers that don't use solvents.



This pasta label award marks the launch of Ethical Consumer's extended Best Buy Label scheme for products and services which haven't been assessed as part of a shopping guide (for more on this, see below). Suma already use the Best Buy Label on a number of their other products from toilet paper to fruit juice. And their Italian supplier was also a sector-leading ethical company too.

Suma pasta scores 72/100 overall in our new ranking system, well over the 65 needed to get one of our new Best Buy Labels. Detailed information about how the scoring was applied can be downloaded as a PDF from the Best Buy page on our website – www.ethicalconsumer.org/promote-your-business-ethical-consumer/best-buy-label-for-business

- Buy online at www.suma-store.coop
- Find your nearest stockist at www.suma.coop/store-locator

Ethical Consumer's extended Best Buy Label scheme



We've been successfully running our Best Buy Label scheme for nearly 20 years and as a trusted name within the ethical business community we've signed up almost 50 of the UK's most ethical companies. The Label also serves to spread the message about Ethical Consumer's work to a wider audience.

However we're now increasingly being approached by companies to certify products and services in sectors that fall outside of our existing shopping guides.

For example, companies which have approached us include those selling paint, funerals and independent financial advice.

Consequently the good news is that from this April we're extending our current Best Buy Label scheme and opening up the possibility for Ethical Consumer to award the Label to a wider range of products and services.

New awardees will be announced in our print magazine, as we are doing now with Suma pasta, and they'll also be listed on our website.

The first step in this process is for businesses to ask for our Ethical Health Check Questionnaire (see below).

We're excited about where this could go, but we welcome comments and criticisms too at our usual address: enquiries@ethicalconsumer.org.

FREE ETHICAL HEALTH CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE FOR BUSINESSES

Do you think your business is ethical? Do you think it might get a high score in one of Ethical Consumer's shopping guides? Might you want to get independent ethical accreditation from our Best Buy Label scheme?

In 2023 we began trialling a free Ethical Health Check Questionnaire which companies could fill in and test themselves against Ethical Consumer's latest benchmarks. All companies are asked questions on climate, workers' and animal rights as well as on issues like tax conduct and company ethos. Then we ask some specific questions depending on the nature of the products sold.

Once you get to the end, you can perform a couple of simple calculations to see what you might score out of 100. If you score more than 65 (13.5 on our old ethiscore system) you might want to begin a conversation with us about getting the score independently checked and using our logo to promote your product.

If not, the questionnaire itself will give you some ideas of changes you could make or new policies and practices you could adopt to increase your score.

Currently the questionnaire isn't ready for all types of product, but if you're interested, do check our website below or email birch@ethicalconsumer.org telling us what you are selling, and also the size of your company, and we'll send you out a questionnaire if we can.

www.ethicalconsumer.org/promote-your-business-ethical-consumer/best-buy-label-for-business



The ethics of wool

I am writing in annoyance and frustration at your one-sided condemnation of new woollen clothing (not to mention its

other uses) as an unethical option to be avoided at all costs by the ethical consumer (EC207, p27).

Of course some Merino wool produced in bulk, mainly in the southern hemisphere, is causing suffering and environmental damage. This is then exported to factories where it is made into garments exported all over the world. These garments are easily avoided and boycotted by a glance at the label. They produce thinner wool partly because the animals feed on poor quality grass. Many unethical online clothes companies have been pressured into not selling woollen clothes because of the bad example and reputation of the bulk producers, which casts a negative shadow over all woollen clothing.

I would however like to make a few points in the defence of ethical wool produced in the UK, which you only briefly mentioned.

Most British wool, which is produced in small quantities by dedicated farmers for handknitters and small-scale clothing manufacturers (also mills, spinners), is produced with the animals' welfare in mind, as poor treatment would affect the quality of the fleece. There are many small, local and dedicated producers not mentioned at all in the article.

Wool garments, especially handmade ones, can last for decades. They are often passed down generations. They need minimal washing and give the wearer warmth when it is cold, and are cool and perfectly well ventilated in warmer weather.

You also fail to mention that wool is biodegradable when no longer usable and can be composted, after which it will harmlessly break down. Compare this to the environmental damage wrought every time a garment made from petrochemicals (whether recycled or not) is washed – harmful particles released into the water system – let alone the impact it makes when it is manufactured.

Our tradition of wool producing goes back to the iron age and beyond, and Britain has many descendants of sheep with traits of the original breeds, perfectly

adapted to the climate and able to look after themselves for much of the time with a minimum of interference.

I hope you will consider focusing some positive attention on the dedicated UK wool producers in the same way you looked at the underwear and jeans market so we can get back to using the natural biodegradable fleece that we have been using for millennia – instead of wasting time researching substitutes.

Here are some organisations that may be of use to those interested in wool: Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), www.britishwool.org.uk, www.fibershed.org.

Frances

Ed: To clarify, we didn't state that wool is "an unethical option to be avoided at all costs." At the beginning of the 'Animal-based fibres in clothing' feature we stated that for some people 'ethical' means no animal products at all, whereas for others it means ensuring animal welfare is upheld. We examined some of the possible welfare issues and climate impact associated with wool, but we also listed good welfare standards such as the Responsible Wool Standard.

It's true that some of the worst welfare issues associated with wool are less likely to occur in the UK. Mulesing, for example, is prohibited in the UK, though is still permitted and widely used in Australia – one of the world's largest wool exporters. But sheep can face terrible welfare in the UK too, as evidenced by PETA's undercover investigation in 2018 which revealed workers beating sheep on UK and Scottish farms.

While many small farms might attest to good welfare standards, so do most farms (whether they have good standards or not), so this alone cannot be seen as a guarantee that animals are treated well. This is why we advise consumers to opt for wool that has been certified by a third party, such as the Responsible Wool Standard.

It is very difficult to definitively recommend one material over another because they all have very different qualities and there are competing ethical trade-offs (eg animal rights issues vs the environmental impact of synthetics). We have examined these topics more in EC208 and we hope this is useful for readers, but individual requirements and moral differences will nearly always play a role in which material you deem to be preferable.

Ethical fashion vs secondhand

I read the recent article about ethical fashion with interest and thought it raised many interesting points; however it seemed strange to me that high-street brands selling new items were ranked as more ethical than secondhand purchases (from, for example, Depop). Despite reading the scoring criteria I was still confused that buying a new pair of jeans could ever be a more sustainable choice than a secondhand pair, whatever the tax arrangements of the secondhand marketplace.

I also found the rating in the Animals category for the secondhand retailers to be unclear – the animal welfare issues surely only applied to the initial manufacture of the products.

Paul

Ed: It is not just the product you are buying that is ethically important, but which company you are buying it from and where your money will go once you've made your purchase. Billions of pounds are lost from the public purse every year due to tax avoidance and evasion,^{5,6} which means crucial services are left without sufficient funding – so this is a very important ethical issue. However, we did list almost all the secondhand sellers in our Best Buys.

Regarding online marketplaces that sell animal products – we generally gave these a score of 60/100 because, while they weren't creating animal products themselves, the sale of secondhand animal products still supports the primary market to some extent (if people weren't able to sell secondhand products with animal derivatives then they might be less likely to buy the item in the first place).

Secondhand clothes for all sizes

In EC207, you repeatedly advise people to buy secondhand clothes, something I would be more than happy to do.

Unfortunately, I have difficulty finding even new clothes large enough for me, let alone secondhand ones, and I have yet to find a charity shop that regularly stocks clothes in my size.

Your article on underwear does at least have a section on large sizes, but it talks only about women's numbered sizes. This gives me little feel for which manufacturers and retailers are likely to be able to supply men's underwear in my

size. I don't think it's even a good guide for women – their bodies vary in shape at least as much as men's!

Even the sizes printed on the packaging are not much of a guide. I have recently purchased underpants marked “3XL” that were so small I could not get into them, and others with the same “3XL” marking that were at least two sizes too large for me. How much this is an ethical issue is debatable, but I'd welcome some discussion of sizes to enable me (and others) to make better use of your guides. **Philip**

Ed: We appreciate the difficulty of buying secondhand clothes for people that are not of ‘typical’ or ‘average’ size. There are likely to be more sizes available if you shop online at one of the secondhand clothing platforms featured in our guide, though we understand some people like to try before they buy.

We aim to cover all significant issues in our shopping guides, but there is usually so much to discuss and there is limited space in the magazine to cover all issues in depth. We apologise for only focusing on women's sizes, but we hope that this information is still useful as a proxy – if a brand does large women's sizes they often do large men's sizes too. Our main point was that most of the ethical brands weren't doing enough to accommodate for a range of sizes, and we hope they are able to address this in future.

In search of heat pump insurance

I have recently had an air source heat pump installed which I am pretty thrilled about. What I was not thrilled about is that many providers don't

appear to cover them as part of their home insurance.

I am with Aviva but I investigated several providers (using Ethical Consumer's Ethiscore table as a guide) and this is what I found:

- Aviva: the following statement was provided on request: “air source heat pump is covered under the buildings against our standard perils...We would not cover for mechanical breakdown, faults or general wear and tear.”
- Nationwide: policy is unclear, does not specifically exclude or include. Confirmed over live chat that air source heat pumps were covered.
- Virgin Money: policy is unclear, does not specifically exclude or include.
- AXA: this one is really annoying. They have multiple webpages about how they're “tackling climate change”, but if you read the policy documents available on their website it specifically excludes: “Any repair or replacement of under floor heating systems, warm air units, air or ground source heat pumps,” and: “Any heating system which is not wholly situated within your home or is shared with neighbouring dwellings.” Air source heat pumps obviously need to be outside to work.
- More Than: policy is unclear, does not specifically exclude or include, but they gave the following statement: “Providing you are responsible for insuring the buildings section of the property, you will be covered under the buildings section of the policy as we can confirm it is our intention to insure heat pumps.”

I think the recent Ethical Consumer guide to home insurance should be updated to include details on home insurance for heat pumps (as it does for solar panels).

George

Ed: Thank you for sending us this information, we'll see if we can incorporate this into our guide. It is concerning to see that many insurers are providing no or limited insurance for air source heat pumps. We would be interested to hear from any other readers if they have had similar troubles.

Identifying AI content

Regarding the article on “Temu and the world of AI-generated greenwash” (EC207), there is a website that will give you an estimate of how likely it is that a piece of writing has been written by AI: www.zerogpt.com

For example, the article from Retail Insider (“Is Temu A Good and Ethical Company?”) that you reference in your article came out with a 90% probability it was written by AI. For the sake of comparison the original Ethical Consumer article only scored 3%!

Charlie

Ed: A really useful tool. And while 3% is a very low probability, we can assure you that 0% of Ethical Consumer is AI generated!

We welcome readers' letters. Letters may be edited for reasons of space or clarity. If you do not want letters or emails to be published, please mark them ‘Not for publication’. Our address is on page 3, or email us at letters@ethicalconsumer.org



Last orders for offsetting



After an unprecedented boom, the wheels are finally coming off the carbon offsetting bandwagon, says **SIMON BIRCH**.



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Carbon offsetting flights is massively controversial, and EasyJet is one of the first airlines to drop the practice.

In recent years, vast numbers of companies have invested in global carbon offset schemes which were sold as a way to balance out their carbon emissions.

This enabled companies to claim that their activities were now suddenly carbon-neutral or even carbon negative.

Consumers too could simply sign up to offset schemes, which on paper at least, enabled them to whizz off to Australia on a carbon-neutral and guilt-free trip.

The reality though is that with little or no regulation or consensus on standards, the carbon offsetting market has operated like the Wild West with dodgy and unverifiable claims at every turn.

Now the regulators are finally clamping down

This January, the EU ruled that from 2026 companies won't be able to use terms such as climate neutral or climate positive and that there'll be a total ban on using carbon offset schemes to substantiate these claims.

Under the groundbreaking directive only sustainability labels using EU-approved certification schemes will be allowed by the bloc.

"The directive marks the end of outlandish and baseless advertisements that tell European consumers that they can take carbon-neutral flights, wear carbon-neutral clothes, and eat carbon-neutral food," says Lindsay Otis from the Brussels-based group Carbon Market Watch.

Ethical Consumer too takes a dim view on carbon offsetting

"We rank companies on their carbon performance, and we actually reduce the Ethiscore of companies who claim that they are either carbon-neutral or carbon negative as we think

these are misleading messages, and unhelpful for consumers," says EC co-editor Rob Harrison.

Confidence in offsets has taken a battering recently with a number of scandals including a report from the Guardian last autumn which claimed that more than 90% of rainforest offsets sold by Verra, the world's biggest certifier, were 'worthless'.

Many companies such as Nestlé and EasyJet have now quietly withdrawn their carbon-neutral claims and the Carbon Trust, one of the UK's biggest certifiers, has dropped its carbon-neutral label altogether.

Instead, it's now working with companies to reduce and remove the carbon from their operations which environmentally is a much better thing to do.

But given that the UK is no longer a member of the EU, what difference will

the EU clampdown have for businesses here?

"This new law will apply to any company wanting to export to the EU which accounts for 40% of UK trade," says Nusa Urbanic from the Changing Markets Foundation which works to support sustainable business practice.

"This means that many UK companies will have to adapt to EU labelling rules."

But whilst consumers in the EU will now be protected from greenwashing, who's looking out for consumers in the UK?

The good news is that the Competition and Markets Authority – the Government's competition watchdog – and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) are now both keeping a close eye on greenwashing claims including those around offsetting.

Just last December, the ASA banned an advert from leading beer company Brewdog for misleading claims around the climate credentials of its beers, with Brewdog claiming that it was 'the world's first carbon negative brewery'.

However, the bad news is that ASA still lacks the regulatory teeth of the EU when it comes to banning all potentially misleading claims around offsetting.

Like in so many aspects of environmental protection, Brexit has left UK consumers worse off than their European neighbours:

"Although the ASA has tightened rules on the use of terms such as carbon neutral and net zero, the new EU law will go even further," states Urbanic.

"Specifically, it will ban claims based on offsetting and demand officially recognised certification schemes to prove claims."

This reality was confirmed by the ASA:

"It's not the place of the advertising regulator to ban these claims outright," says the ASA's Miles Lockwood, "that's a matter for Parliament."

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