

**REGENERATIVE
AGRICULTURE**
AND TEXTILES SUMMIT 2023



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WHAT IMPACT CAN PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE PRIVATE, PUBLIC, AND SOCIAL SECTORS HAVE ON ACCELERATING THE TRANSITION TO REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE? HOW DOES YOUR OWN WORK INCORPORATE CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION?

This transition will take a herculean effort. Unfortunately, the present trajectory in the fashion industry is leading away from a more regenerative system rather than towards it. This is evidenced in many ways, including the increase of synthetic textiles derived from fossil fuels, overproduction, the lack of textile reuse and recycling, and increasing hazardous waste.

We need a giant toolkit to create the transformative, systemic change necessary to move from an extractive model to a regenerative one. And we need to utilize every tool we can to make this transition in enough time to not exceed planetary boundaries.

Each sector has incredible (and sometimes overlapping) tools to both implement the transition and accelerate it. We need deep knowledge of the extent of problems and the best practices for solutions from the social sector, and to also scale the innovative practices of social entrepreneurs. We need the private sector to give us a real understanding of the challenges around implementation and the bottom line. And we need the public sector to deeply understand all of this, and then put in place wise policies that bring about real, lasting change, making regenerative agriculture both possible and profitable.

The importance of cross-sector partnerships is also a major theme of my career and advisory work.



REBECCA BALLARD

I began my career working in the social and public sectors, however I saw that change wasn't happening at the speed and scale needed. I needed to deeply understand the inner workings of the industry's status quo and challenges around the bottom line to be able to do truly transformative work. This drew me into private sector work with a focus on innovation. I now work across all three sectors, with a major focus on partnership-building and collaboration to implement and scale best practices. In fact, my favorite work involves cross-sector collaboration, as I love the insights, innovation, and range of solutions found at this intersection.

I ENCOURAGE EVERYONE AT THE SUMMIT TO CONNECT WITH THOSE WORKING IN SECTORS AND AREAS THAT ARE VERY DIFFERENT FROM THEIR OWN. I LOOK FORWARD TO LEARNING FROM MY FELLOW ATTENDEES, INCORPORATING THEIR INSIGHTS IN MY WORK MOVING FORWARD, AND CREATING LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE COMMON PITFALLS BUSINESSES FACE WHEN BUILDING THEIR SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES?

Having a “check the box”, reactive, and soiled approach is no sustainability strategy, as sustainability should primarily be proactive.

Far too many companies are overly focused on responding to what they believe the government will be doing in the near future. Instead of waiting with panic and letting the government define the path forward in isolation, proactively engage with government and be a part of the conversation.

We are seeing a consumer push for more sustainable choices alongside consumer lifestyle change. For example, we see this in the incredible growth of the secondhand apparel market. Many companies will respond to this consumer desire for more sustainable choices, which will create competitive pressure on those who do not that is then compounded by increasing regulatory action. Thus companies are facing real risks if they don't put sustainability front and center now.

It must be part of the DNA of a business to focus on not just profit, but also people and planet; this is also a great strategy to avoid future regulatory issues. Sustainability cannot be left up to only one team, but needs to permeate the entire company. For this to happen it needs to be a value and priority of leadership and an ongoing area for learning and growth.

It's important that we center worker perspectives, and I appreciate that the Summit starts with sharing the insights of farmers. Engage directly with workers across your supply chain and take their ideas seriously.

And speaking of relationships...

I ENCOURAGE BUSINESS LEADERS TO REALLY TAKE THE TIME TO GET TO KNOW CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO ADVANCE REGENERATIVE PRACTICES. IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP REAL RELATIONSHIPS AND KNOWLEDGE-SHARING PARTNERSHIPS WITH BOTH THE NATIONAL AND GLOBAL ORGANIZATIONS AS WELL AS THE GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS IN REGIONS WHERE YOUR SUPPLY CHAIN IS LOCATED.

Connect with social entrepreneurs, innovators, and smaller businesses who are making great sustainability strides at a smaller scale. I see one of the greatest untapped opportunities in large companies partnering with social entrepreneurs who have already created strong sustainability practices, and there are so many wonderful forms for these partnerships.

HOW CAN CROSS-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN THE FOOD AND FASHION INDUSTRY DRIVE INCREASED EFFICIENCY AND PROGRESS?

We all wear clothing and eat food every day, thus we make daily choices around each. Both food and fashion are nature-based (or at least they should be!) and often focused on what we find enjoyable. Eating and wearing regenerative items can make one feel better and have dramatic health benefits.

FOOD IS AHEAD OF FASHION IN MANY WAYS. INNOVATION IS CRITICAL FOR A MOVE TO A REGENERATIVE FASHION INDUSTRY, AND WE CAN LEARN FROM THE APPROACHES ALREADY IN PLACE AND TWEAK THEM TO FIT THE FASHION INDUSTRY, SAVING MUCH TIME AND MONEY. WITH THE EFFORT NEEDED TO DRIVE PROGRESS, ANY EFFICIENCY AND SAVINGS OF TIME AND MONEY MAKES A GREAT IMPACT.

There is some overlap between crops used for textiles and food, and in a new regenerative economy perhaps there will be even more. Thus the challenges and solutions to a regenerative model that affect a food crop may be similar to those for a fashion crop. Regenerative agricultural practices may also be deeply interconnected across food and fashion crops, which may be grown alongside each other a new regenerative fashion system. We may also see agricultural workers shifting across the food and fashion industries or perhaps even working in both over their careers, especially as we consider a just transition.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPLY CHAIN TRACEABILITY?

Every year seems to bring about more tools for understanding what is needed for traceability. From Fashion Revolution's [Transparency Index](#) to the [Open Supply Hub](#), to the expertise and many tools created by Summit participants, there are many resources supporting and promoting supply chain traceability.

The fact that most of the major brands in the Transparency Index are now disclosing at least their first-tier supplier lists shows that traceability and the resulting transparency is both possible and becoming the industry norm.

Fashion supply chains are complex, and in many instances far more complex and multi-national than those for food. For example, even if you can map your entire supply chain for your materials you may still struggle with mapping for components like buttons and zippers. Additionally, there are still many fashion brands who have not caught up to the fact that this is what is required to do business in the world we live in today, and needed to not just care for our planet but to continue to stay in the market.

I AM HOPEFUL THAT THE CONVERSATION AT THE SUMMIT CAN SPARK MORE SUPPLY CHAIN TRACEABILITY IN NOT JUST THE FASHION AND FOOD INDUSTRIES, BUT EVEN OTHER INDUSTRIES AS WELL. FOR EXAMPLE, I ALSO DO WORK AROUND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND WE ARE IN A MUCH EARLIER STAGE OF TRACEABILITY THERE. THOSE IN THAT INDUSTRY ARE FOLLOWING OUR CONVERSATION AND LEARNING FROM IT.

AS CHAIR OF THE REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE & TEXTILES SUMMIT, HOW CAN AN EVENT LIKE THIS HELP FACILITATE PROGRESS TOWARDS THE TRANSITION TO A MORE REGENERATIVE FUTURE?

I am excited for the learnings, conversations, and connectivity at the Summit, which hopefully galvanizes more action than any of us consider possible at this juncture.

After a number of difficult pandemic years and the rise of work from home there are fewer in person convenings in many of our professional lives. Difficult and nuanced conversations are best in person, and without in person interactions some of them may not take place at all.

COMING TOGETHER IN WASHINGTON, DC IS A NATURAL FIT FOR THIS SEASON. WE ARE SEEING MORE POLICY ACTION AROUND SUSTAINABILITY AT THE LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL, AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, ALONG WITH THE FIRST FEDERAL FASHION BILL IN THE FABRIC ACT. I AM SEEING MORE INTEREST FROM LAWMAKERS IN POLICIES THAT ADVANCE SUSTAINABILITY, AND WE NEED FOR THESE POLICIES TO BE AS HELPFUL AND TAILORED AS POSSIBLE. THUS WE NEED TO HARNESS OUR COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL AND DRIVE BETTER POLICY TOGETHER, BOTH AT THE SUMMIT AND ONWARD.

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REBECCA BALLARD

ADVISORY

A leading speaker and writer on sustainable fashion, Rebecca partners with universities and nonprofits and advises companies around sustainability and values-based operations. Rebecca founded The Fashion Connection in 2019 to make connections across the U.S. sustainable fashion movement and is an advisor for Fashion Declares! She also founded the sustainable fashion brand Maven Women in 2016 to meet an unmet market need for socially conscious options for professional women. She is well-versed in all aspects of running a fashion company, having done it herself. Additionally, Rebecca has lived in or visited all of the top 10 garment-producing countries in our world.

Rebecca lives in the Washington, D.C. with her husband and two young children. She has a family history in the fashion industry, as her grandparents and their families worked in the cotton fields and mills of North and South Carolina during the Great Depression to lift themselves out of poverty.

Rebecca graduated cum laude from Duke University, holds a J.D. from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and she has a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from Georgetown University. She previously worked as an Attorney Advisor for the U.S. Department of Commerce and completed a post-law school fellowship in nonprofit and foundation advocacy.

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