

# LEVI STRAUSS & CO. AIMS FOR 100% IN THEIR WATER<LESS® TARGETS

The company has set a goal to reduce freshwater use in manufacturing by 50% in areas of high water stress by 2025, using 2018 as the base year. Additionally, Levi Strauss & Co aims to have 100% of its key fabric and garment suppliers meet their new contextual Water<Less® targets by 2025 through the use of designated recycle and reuse facilities.





A single pair of jeans can use up to 3,800 liters of water in its lifetime. The World Economic Forum rates water issues among the top financial risks to the global economy, and the United Nations estimates that 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress. Clean water access is a significant issue for many and varies geographically. As water stress manifests to different degrees around the world and in the apparel supply chain, there are opportunities to use available science and tools to focus efforts where water savings are most critically needed. Levi Strauss & Co sets geographically contextual water use targets for suppliers based on local water stress, increasing the number of products made in Water<Less® facilities and in facilities that recycle and reuse water. The company applies the Jeanologia Environmental Impact Measurement (EIM) platform to track and reduce water use in garment finishing, helping to increase access to clean water for local communities in sourcing locations and inspiring collective action to lessen the apparel industry's impact on water globally.

## **What Water Stewardship Looks Like at Levi Strauss**

Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) has a long history of leadership in water stewardship, beginning with the establishment of the apparel industry's first wastewater quality guidelines in 1992, which were scaled to all garment manufacturing suppliers by 1994. Proud of its contributions to advancing water stewardship, the company remains committed to future improvements. With water stress varying globally and across the apparel supply chain, LS&Co. sees an opportunity to leverage science and tools to focus reduction efforts where they are most critical, increase access to clean drinking water, and inspire collective action to mitigate the apparel industry's water impact and exposure worldwide.

The ultimate vision of LS&Co. is to use only as much water as naturally replenishes wherever the company operates. To achieve this, the company is redefining successful water stewardship in manufacturing. Since 2011, LS&Co. has met targets prioritizing Water<Less® finishing techniques and recycled water use. With the successful scaling of Water<Less®, the next step is to amplify its impact by developing manufacturing facility-level targets based on the best available water stress data. If a factory or fabric mill meets its target, adhering to a sustainable level of water consumption for its local context, it will receive the Water<Less® designation. This targeted, contextual approach aims to alleviate local water stress.



LS&Co. commits to reducing water use for manufacturing in high water stress areas by 50% by 2025, compared to a 2018 baseline. The company also aims to have all key factories and fabric mills, representing 80% of its production, become distinguished Water<Less® facilities by 2025. Additionally, LS&Co. will continue its industry-leading and collaborative chemicals management approach, scale more sustainable, less water-intensive raw materials across all brands, and transition to a circular economy. The company will advocate for policies and engage in collective action projects to extend its impact beyond manufacturing facilities, promoting access to safe and affordable drinking water in affected communities.

By making progress at each level of the product lifecycle and collaborating with other brands and partners, LS&Co. aims to significantly reduce the apparel industry's water impact.

## **Raw Materials**

To address the most significant contributor to their water footprint, materials (specifically cotton), Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) joined the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) in 2010. BCI educates cotton farmers on optimizing yields while minimizing water and chemical use, resulting in Better Cotton being more water-efficient than conventional cotton. By 2018, Better Cotton had grown from zero to 67 percent of LS&Co.'s cotton supply and nearly 20 percent of the global cotton supply.

In addition to partnering with BCI, LS&Co. introduced the Levi's® Wellthread™ collection, which initially launched as a Dockers® initiative in 2014. This collection advances sustainable fiber and design efforts by testing recycled fiber content and other innovative materials, such as cottonized hemp. LS&Co. aims to scale the use of these materials, including hemp (68%) and packaging (2%), across their broader product portfolio.



## Looking Ahead: The Long Term Approaches to Water Stewardship

Since about one-quarter of the product lifecycle impact occurs after the point of sale during the consumer use phase, Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) began sewing a Care Tag for the Planet into every pair of Levi's® jeans. This tag carries a simple message on how consumers can reduce water usage: "Care for our planet: wash less, wash cold, line dry, donate or recycle." This care label has been applied to other brands and product categories, and in 2018, a new care tag was introduced to denote Water<Less® jeans and trucker jackets. To extend the useful life of their products, LS&Co. installed Levi's® Tailor Shops in owned-and-operated Levi's® stores worldwide, offering garment repair and alteration services.

Recognizing the ability to influence water use in the manufacturing stages of fabric development and garment finishing, LS&Co. launched the Water<Less® program in 2011. This program, built on a series of technical innovations, significantly reduced water use compared to traditional methods. The success of Water<Less® highlighted the apparel industry's potential to decrease manufacturing water use, inspiring additional innovations such as low water-use washing machines and recycling systems. Building on their industry-first Global Effluent Requirement (GER) wastewater standards, LS&Co. joined the Joint Roadmap Toward Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals (ZDHC Roadmap) in 2012, initiating collective action to remove hazardous chemicals from apparel supply chains. In 2013, LS&Co. launched Screened Chemistry to prevent hazardous chemical formulations from entering their supply chain from the outset.

In 2014, LS&Co. became the first apparel brand to author a standard for manufacturing water recycling and reuse. The Recycle and Reuse Standard requires facilities to adhere to the ZDHC wastewater guidelines' "progressive" performance threshold and recycle over 20 percent of the water used in manufacturing to qualify for the program. In 2016, LS&Co. invited competitors to their Eureka Innovation Lab in San Francisco, sharing Water<Less® finishing techniques to promote open-source sustainability innovations. Screened Chemistry was also open-sourced in 2016, leading to industry-wide adoption by early 2019. In 2017, LS&Co. collaborated with the International Finance Corporation's Partnership for Cleaner Textiles (IFC PaCT) to provide low-cost financing and expert guidance for water and energy efficiency projects at apparel manufacturers. A pilot program with four LS&Co. suppliers improved facility water efficiency by about 20 percent. Recently, LS&Co. announced a \$2.3 million expansion program with the IFC to scale PaCT to their top 42 supplier facilities across 10 countries.



Since the launch of Water<Less®, it has become standard practice for companies to address water use. However, as water stress intensifies in various regions, LS&Co. recognizes that saving water where it is plentiful is less critical than saving it where it is scarce. Therefore, it is imperative to address water use based on local context. Using data from tools like the World Resources Institute's Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas, LS&Co. categorizes suppliers into areas of low, medium, and high water stress. Suppliers in low and medium stress areas receive progressive efficiency targets, while those in high water stress areas are assigned aggressive, absolute water use targets. Starting in 2021, Water<Less® qualification will be at the facility level, meaning mills and factories that meet the targets will qualify as Water<Less®, along with all fabric or products from those facilities. The existing Water<Less® techniques, Recycle and Reuse Standard, and the PaCT partnership will remain key tools for meeting these targets. Transitioning from a process-oriented approach to a contextual, outcome-oriented approach will connect Water<Less® progress to real watershed improvements.

By 2025, LS&Co. commits to reducing water use in manufacturing by 50 percent against a 2018 baseline in high water stress areas and ensuring all key mills and factories, representing 80 percent of production volume, meet geographically contextual Water<Less® targets. These goals establish a clear vision to focus water recycling and efficiency efforts where most urgent, ensuring sustainable water use contextually. LS&Co. plans to open-source the latest iteration of Water<Less® with peers, aiming for widespread industry adoption and collaboration with experts and stakeholders to develop metrics for necessary water action, similar to the Science Based Targets initiative for corporate climate action.



## The International Desalination and Reuse Association (IDRA)

The International Desalination and Reuse Association (IDRA) applauds Levi Strauss & Co. (LS&Co.) for their pioneering water stewardship initiatives. Founded in 1973, IDRA serves as the global nexus for the desalination and water reuse community, with members in over 60 countries. As a non-profit and non-political organization, IDRA recognizes the importance of LS&Co.'s efforts to minimize water usage and pollution through innovative programs such as Water<Less®, the Recycle and Reuse Standard, and the collaborative Partnerships Levi has built to help them reach their goals. These initiatives align with IDRA's mission to inform the public about sustainable water solutions and highlight LS&Co.'s commitment to using science-based targets and contextual approaches to address water stress. By setting ambitious goals to reduce water use and promote water recycling, LS&Co. exemplifies the type of leadership necessary to ensure sustainable fresh water sources globally.

## SOURCES

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