

## The Oil Drum: Campfire

### Discussions about Energy and Our Future

#### Should we be planning a new approach for producing clothing?

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on April 4, 2010 - 10:55am in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Environment/Sustainability](#)

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"Should we be planning a new approach for producing clothing?" sounds like a strange question. Should we even be thinking about it?

If the economy declines slowly, surely someone, somewhere will be manufacturing clothing, and all we have to do is buy new clothes. Besides, clothing lasts a long time. Most of us could get along with our current clothing for ten years (perhaps with a little swapping around for children's clothing). So why worry about clothing?

But it seems like we should at least do a little thinking about the subject. A transition to a new approach for manufacturing clothing would take a long time. Fossil fuels are declining, and some folks would like to phase out fossil fuels because of CO<sub>2</sub> and other issues. Furthermore, collapse related to financial issues is at least somewhat of a possibility.

If we should be considering new methods for production of clothing, it seems like there are a whole host of other items that might also need new methods of production, for example:

- a. Paper
- b. Writing implements
- c. Fences needed for farming (or hedges to substitute)
- d. Containers of various types
- e. Hoses used for transporting water

In this post, though, we will think about some of the issues to do with clothing.

Several different types of plans might be made for manufacturing clothing, considering the likely decline in the availability of fossil fuels:

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1. We might get along with whatever clothing factories currently available are able to produce, plus reusing whatever clothing we have now. Hopefully, any serious downturn is far enough away that someone else can figure out the details later, if another plan is needed.

2a. Individuals interested in sustainability might attempt to grow their own linen, or cotton or hemp, or raise sheep, and start from scratch gathering the supplies they need to first make thread or yarn, then weave it into cloth, dye the cloth, and make it into clothing.

2b. If there is a village of interested people, the functions in 2a might be divided up a bit, with some growing the linen, cotton, hemp, or wool, some making yarn from the materials, some dyeing the yarn, some weaving the yarn into cloth, and some making clothing from the cloth. Necessary tools and equipment using local materials would need to be figured out now, well in advance of the decline, and workers would need to start now, practicing their new skills.

3. We might set up some factories powered by [wind](#) or water that would make cloth, using technology that has been around for centuries. Nearby, we might start training individuals to grow the inputs needed for these factories, such as linen or hemp, using approaches that do not require fossil fuels. Some method of transportation of the goods to and from the factories would also need to be put in place, perhaps using animal power. All of the tools and equipment would be made mostly out of wood or other local materials, so they could be easily replaced when they wear out.

4. We might set up some factories powered by solar PV, and enlist some farmers nearby to grow crops that could be used to make the cloth, using electric vehicles (golf carts, or something fancier, if available) for transportation and for work in the fields. Solar panels might be used for recharging the electric vehicles as well. We might stockpile three or four sets of solar PV panels, plus a few batteries, so that the factories would have fairly long lives, even if no replacement solar panels and batteries are ever made again.

5. We might set up a network of fossil fuel powered factories around the country, first to make cloth (perhaps make synthetic fabrics from oil), and then to make the cloth into "local clothing". We might make obtaining fuel and parts for the factories a priority, and hope the factories would be able to stay in operation for quite a while.

## Questions

1. Should we even be thinking about a new method for producing clothing?
2. Is there a better approach for handling the clothing problem that I have left out?
3. What approach would make most sense to you?
4. In your selected approach, what would be needed in terms of land? Equipment? Training in new skills?
5. How would such a big undertaking be funded?
6. Extra Credit: How would handle one of the other issues besides clothing, listed at the beginning?



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