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## Patagonia: Leaders in Sustainable Fashion

There are more and more sustainable fashion brands emerging each year; at the forefront of that crusade is Patagonia. Patagonia has admitted to making mistakes in the past, but has long been trying to make up for those mistakes through education campaigns regarding sustainability, arguing for dam removals, donations, holding activist conferences, and much more in regards to the community. Not forgetting to look inward as well, Patagonia has revamped their entire supply chain to be more sustainable and reduce their carbon footprint. Patagonia really is a model for sustainable companies everywhere because despite such high demand and popularity of their product, they remain dedicated to being sustainable. They have found a way to balance cost of goods with the cost on the environment. Although Patagonia is a very environmentally friendly company, they continue to search and pursue new sustainable avenues. Their multifaceted, hands on approach to sustainability is refreshing to see in such a titan of the outerwear industry.

The brand name of Patagonia is what caught my attention at first, but it was upon further research that I felt the genuine consideration they have for the environment. Of course, part of their intentions to be sustainable rests on the fact that it is trending. The generation of millennials who put greater importance on the environmental impact rather than the cost of goods have led to a change in many companies direction and approach to sales. However, Patagonia has proven that their actions are more than just a facade. They donate 10 percent of their profits to small, grassroots groups in different areas fighting for natural habitats. This was inspired by one of their first environmental missions, to help clean and bring water flow back to the Ventura river. Ventura river also happens to be a river very close to my home in California, and to see a company, as large as Patagonia, write in their history that cleaning up the Ventura river helped

trigger their shift to become sustainable was inspiring to me. After learning that small, dedicated environmental groups can make a difference, Patagonia not only provides financial support, but also gives these individuals the tools they need through activist conferences.

Apart from community outreach, Patagonia reduced their energy use by 60 percent through solar tracking lights and radiant heating. Lighting systems in new and existing stores were retrofitted to be more sustainable. Even the materials used were mostly from recycled materials, including carpeting and rebar. In regards to the clothes they were making, Patagonia assessed the dyes they were using and eliminated any colors with toxic metals or sulfides that could be released. Even considering their entire supply chain and the lifecycle of their products, Patagonia realized cotton was having a large effect on their environmental impact. 25 percent of all toxic pesticides is used in cotton, which results in polluted soil and water. Additionally, research shows that prolonged exposure to these chemicals can cause serious harm to the health of the workers. All of these improvements were implemented in the late nineties when the company shifted direction; this is important to note because Patagonia has made sustainability a top priority since then and has only made advances towards being more eco friendly.

Today, Patagonia has extended its environmental reach exponentially. The wool that they source meets animal welfare standards and land management standards, almost all the materials they use can be traced back to the source, they are fair trade certified, they remain conscious of microfibers and pursue ways to reduce its impact, the list goes on. They constantly explore new materials such as hemp, yulex, and many recycled fabrics. Currently, Patagonia is involved in many Dam removal projects, calling for lower impact energy and water sources because of the major impact that dams have on an ecosystem.

The sheer number of sustainable projects that Patagonia is involved with is astounding. They dedicate every aspect of their company towards becoming more sustainable and reducing

their carbon footprint. Patagonia exemplifies what it means to be a sustainable company, and have been continuously inspiring companies to take on a similar business model. It is eye opening to see a company that does not just ignore aspects of design and sustainability simply because it is more difficult or costly. Their thorough approach teaches a valuable lesson in the many ways it is possible for a company to become sustainable. Despite being an enormous endeavor, Patagonia seeks to constantly improve every step in the life cycle of a product and not just put up a front for a marketing campaign. Because of the risks they took towards being more environmentally healthy, their brand is now tied closely to the concept of sustainability, which, in the end, is very beneficial to them. Finding this harmonious balance of being green, creating a lasting brand name, and making profit is what I hope to eventually achieve. One day, perhaps, my company will be the new leader in a sustainable future.