

BISHOPSTON TRADING COMPANY

Businesses urged to boost their green credentials by offering 100% organic cotton shopping bags

A company which produces organic cotton shopping bags is urging businesses to phase out plastic bags and capitalise on the growing awareness among consumers of ethical issues.

Bishopston Trading offers strong, well made shopping bags in three sizes using Fairtrade certified cotton and made in India. The bags can be printed with the customers art-work on both sides in black, or can be sold plain.

The cotton is woven on a small powerloom using organic cotton (certified by SKAL) which means they can incorporate a small strapline at the bottom saying "100% organic cotton fairly traded from South India."

Bags are screen printed by a team of 12 craftswomen in K V Kuppam, a village in Tamil Nadu, Southern India,

The minimum order for the bigger bags, at 16" by 13" with a 5" gusset (large), or 16" by 13" with no gusset (medium) is just 100. The minimum order for the small bags - 9" by 7" - is 200.

Bishopston director Carolyn Whitwell says: "We got the idea for the bags from India as we were given bags like ours in shops in the towns near K V Kuppam. It's great that they are catching on in this country. After we introduced them in our shops 20 years ago, many of our wholesale customers

asked for bags with their own logos, or bags which could be used to publicise one-off events or conferences.”

Among other companies, Bishopston has produced bags for Friends of the Earth, Farmers Markets, Bart Spices, Greenpeace, the Slow Food movement and Fresh & Wild.

In addition to the cotton bags, Bishopston also offers bags made from recycled newspapers which cost £108 for 300 and can hold up to 8kgs weight.

As well as doing away with the need for plastic bags, Bishopston’s organic offering has further benefits. Carolyn adds: “Non organic cotton is a very polluting fabric because of the huge quantity of pesticides and insecticides needed to grow it.

“We have made a long-term commitment to high ethical standards throughout the whole growing, harvesting, processing, manufacturing and retailing process.”

Bishopston Trading recently celebrated 21 years of trading links with K V Kuppam where it provides employment for more than 500 people.

Carolyn says: “We started off with one shop in Bristol and four tailors in India. Now the company - which is a workers co-operative - employs 37 people in this country and more than 500 tailors, cutters, craft workers and weavers in KV Kuppam.

“Getting a job with our producer partners in K V Kuppam can lift a whole family out of poverty and regular orders for cotton bags can provide such jobs.

“In addition to their wages, the staff have access to a provident fund for hard times, healthcare, sickness benefit and retirement.”

The ethos behind Bishopston Trading is that it will support marginalised producers in developing countries throughout the whole supply chain.

Reader contact: Bishopston Trading Company: Tel: 0117 924 5598

Fax: 0117 373 0254

Email: mail@bishopstontrading.co.uk

Website: www.bishopstontrading.co.uk

Notes to editors: Media enquiries: For more information and high res photographs contact Helen Riley, Headline Media, on 0208 348 3103 / 07931 300 425 or email helenriley@headlinemedia.co.uk

Background Notes: Bishopston Trading Company has five retail shops in the West of England (Bristol, Bradford on Avon, Glastonbury, Stroud and Totnes) plus stockists throughout the UK and Europe and a mail order catalogue.

All profits from the company are used to benefit the people of KV Kuppam through the company's registered charity, the South India Rural Development Trust. This Trust has funded an architect-designed factory in the village offering excellent working conditions for the staff.

There is a long tradition of hand-weaving in the village of KV Kuppam, in Tamil Nadu, southern India. The Bishopston Trading Company currently provides employment for more than 200 tailors, cutters and craft workers and 300 weavers. Many of the tailors and hand-finishers are women who can take advantage of the on-site creche at the factory. Employees are offered secure employment and can remain close to their families rather than seek work elsewhere.

The Bishopston Trading Company is a member of IFAT (The International Fair Trade Association) and BAFTS (British Association for Fair Trade Shops) and licensees of the Fairtrade Foundation.