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MARCI ZAROFF LAUNCHES THE YES AND BRAND

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# MARCI ZAROFF & ECOFASHION

## WEAR THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD

BY SUSAN LANIER-GRAHAM

Chatting on Zoom from her New York City home amid the pandemic, Marci Zaroff, the founder and CEO of ECOfashion Corporation, remains enthusiastic about her life and her businesses.

“I was wired as an entrepreneur from the get-go,” she says. “From the time I was a kid, I had businesses I was starting.”

For the past three decades, Zaroff, who is based in New York City, has emerged as a leader in promoting eco lifestyles, environmental leadership, and social justice.

She received a degree from the Haas Business School at University of California, Berkeley, and made her way to New York to start a business. In 1990, she co-founded a health and environmental education center. The Institute for Integrative Nutrition is now the largest professional “health coach” certification program in the world.

About a decade into her business, which included natural/organic food and beauty, Zaroff realized that fashion was the missing link in the wellness industry. She trademarked the term ECOfashion® and set out to find a way to offer organic and sustainable apparel and home textiles.

Zaroff laughs, “I wanted a way to bridge the tree hugger and fashionista.”

Her first venture was Under the Canopy, which she founded and led until 2009.

“We established UTC to lead with great design,” she explains. “We wanted to add value by taking people into a new world and explaining it to them. We worked hard to marry lifestyle and consciousness with fashion by starting with quality and comfort,” she says. By 2009, Zaroff wanted to get back into the trenches and drive innovation.

### METAWEAR TAKES SUSTAINABLE STYLE TO NEW HEIGHTS

Zaroff founded MetaWear in 2012 as a turnkey, sustainable apparel manufacturing company. She intimately understood the issues that brands faced when trying to get sustainable supplies. It was difficult to remain fully transparent across the supply chain. She set out to create a solution.

MetaWear became the first Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)-certified and Cradle-to-Cradle® certified turnkey

apparel manufacturer in North America. GOTS certification requires that apparel be 95% organic fiber, contain no bleach, use only nontoxic dyes, and follow social and environmental standards. Cradle-to-Cradle gives brands a score based on commitment to the circular economy—reduction of waste and hazardous chemicals, efficient use of resources, reuse of materials, energy efficiency, and social responsibility.

To ensure they get the best organic cotton and keep the supply chain transparent, MetaWear works directly with the sources, building a supply chain in the U.S. and India. They work with the 40 certified organic farmers of the Texas Organic Marketing Co-op. They also have specialists on the ground in India. It



opened the first GOTS-approved manufacturing facility in North America. The Fairfax County, Virginia-based facility uses solar and geothermal power and has a closed-loop production to recycle wastewater. Cutting, sewing, screen printing, and embroidery all take place in-house.

### ECOFASHION CORPORATION BECOMES A GREENHOUSE FOR SUSTAINABLE BRANDS

Zaroff created ECOfashion Corporation in 2019 to be what she terms a “greenhouse” for more sustainable brands. Along with MetaWear, Zaroff added RESET as a regenerative in-conversion-to-organic cotton farm project; Farm to Home as an organic lifestyle brand sold on QVC; and a new direct-to-consumer ECOfashion brand, YES AND.

RESET helps grow a transparent supply chain, working with farmers to transition from toxic chemicals to organic farming practices. Zaroff describes a dire situation in India, where farmers face life-threatening circumstances if they choose to not work with the major chemical companies.

“Every half hour, an Indian cotton farmer commits suicide,” Zaroff says. “International chemical companies give farmers GMO seeds, which attract the bugs and destroy crops. The farmers must then take out loans at 50%-60% interest.



Obviously, they can't pay those loans and they lose everything.”

Zaroff hopes to break a vicious cycle by teaching regenerative organic farming practices and helping farmers build soil health to eliminate toxins. It is a three-year project to go from a chemical operation to an organic operation.

“By setting up RESET,” she explains, “we start with zero budget natural farming. It takes the farmers off all chemicals, teaches regenerative practices, and helps rebuild the soil to naturally increase the yield.”

Farmers save money by not buying expensive chemicals. They learn to rotate the cotton with food for a second cash crop.

Zaroff's goal is to have at least 15,000 farmers in RESET, but they are less than two years into the program at this point. Unfortunately, Zaroff acknowledges that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact during what is typically the sowing season. She has confidence that RESET will continue to attract more farmers, with support of both small and major brands.

Zaroff has had fun creating Farm To Home, an organic lifestyle brand offered on QVC. Like her earlier businesses, Farm To Home offers organic options that are affordable, accessible, and authentic.

“People don't want to give up style and pay a lot more,” Zaroff emphasizes. “By overcoming that, we hope that sustainable fashion at home will be the norm.”

Zaroff's newest project is her first direct-to-consumer ECOfashion brand, YES AND.

“This is MetaWear's baby,” says Zaroff. “We go farm-to-finished fashion. We want YES AND customers to purchase not because it's sustainable,” she explains. “We want you to love it and it's sustainable.”

YES AND is a style that brings together all of Zaroff's visions.

“YES AND defines who we are,” she says. “It's about collaboration, creativity, consciousness, community, and connection.”

The garments are stylish and versatile.

“We want them to be wearable, soft, easy, comfortable, and fun. But also, stylish. These are lasting products,” Zaroff explains.

YES AND is the culmination of everything Zaroff worked so hard for from the first ECOfashion company she started: value plus valued with no compromise. She believes that society must adapt a new consciousness to solve today's problems or continue to have the same problems. “You don't have to give up anything to get more,” explains Zaroff. “If we remove the stigma of sustainable clothing, why wouldn't you wear them? We want everyone to wear the change you wish to see in the world.”

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