



## *Frequently Asked Questions*

### *What is certified organic wool?*

The USDA National Organic Program certifies livestock, and the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) certifies wool and the subsequent textiles produced from it. The feed and forage of the sheep must be certified organic. The land they graze on (which undergoes a 3 year transition process) and any supplemental feed they consume must be certified. Use of synthetic hormones and genetic engineering is prohibited. Internal, external and pasture synthetic pesticides are prohibited. Sheep cannot be dipped in insecticides to control external parasites such as ticks and lice, and organic livestock producers are required to ensure they do not exceed the natural carrying capacity of the land on which their animals graze. Organic is priced higher as more labor is required to manage problems that chemicals can quickly manage in conventional farming. In addition to the important environmental regulations, there are also regulations regarding animal welfare and working conditions for farmers and textile mill workers. This is a very simplified summary of the detailed requirements involved in certification - please read the USDA NOP and GOTS websites for more information, or contact me and I will point you in the right direction.

### *Where does O-Wool's merino wool come from?*

I source USDA/GOTS certified organic merino from farms in South America. Wool production in the USA is an extremely small industry, and even smaller is the organic wool industry. However, with a recent renewed interest in consuming items grown and produced in the USA, this market is growing. Someday I hope to source all of my fiber from North America, both to support our textile industry and to minimize the environmental impact of shipping over long distances.

### *Where does O-Wool's other fibers come from?*

The certified organic cotton is grown in Texas. The alpaca fiber comes from small family farms within an hour radius of Philadelphia. I have personally met the majority of the alpacas and they are extremely well cared for.

### *What information can you share on the welfare of the sheep?*

I love animals. Purchasing wool from animals that are treated respectfully is very important to me. The sheep are free-range and non-mulesed. Mulesing is a cruel practice performed on Merino sheep that involves cutting strips of flesh off their hindquarters without anesthesia, in a barbaric attempt to control "fly strike". Please bear in mind that certified organic wool is a byproduct of certified organic meat production. However, USDA/GOTS organic has strong animal welfare components built in to its certification in addition to its environmental components. Regulations address a wide variety of animal welfare issues. Accommodation is required for their health and natural behavior in regards to shade, shelter, direct sunlight, clean water, fresh air, and room for exercise which greatly reduces stress and illness. They must also have continuous access to outdoor pasture during grazing season (the duration of which is determined by the climate and geography). Additionally, these sheep are not live-exported which is a serious animal welfare concern. Live-export is not a part of controlled organic husbandry.

### *Where is O-Wool produced?*

The USA! My yarn is spun in either Massachusetts, Wisconsin, or Maine, and skeined and dyed in Maine or Philadelphia, PA, a short drive from my warehouse. I am extremely happy to support what is left of the once thriving Philadelphia textile industry. I am also able to minimize O-Wool's carbon footprint by simply driving down the street to get my product.

### *How is O-Wool cleaned?*

My scourer/comber is GOTS accredited, and processes O-Wool according to the GOTS standards. It is scoured with biodegradable soaps and combed to remove vegetable matter - conventional wool is "carbonized" where vegetable matter is burned out in an acid bath. Because our wool is combed, short fibers are removed which dramatically reduces the amount of pilling in your finished handmade item.

### *How is O-Wool spun?*

O-Wool is spun according to the GOTS standards - these standards include using vegetable based spinning oils (biodegradable) as opposed to synthetic, and clearing all conventional wool from machines before processing to prevent contamination.

### *How is O-Wool dyed?*

I use GOTS certified low-impact acid dyes. These dyes do not contain heavy metals and have a high absorption rate. Less water is required to rinse out these dyes, and less dyestuff is left in what wastewater is produced. The wastewater at the dye house is tested regularly to ensure minimal environmental impact. Additionally, it is common practice to bleach yarn before dyeing. We do not use bleach.

### *O-Wool is Merino wool - why doesn't it feel softer?*

Many commercial hand knitting yarn producers chemically soften their yarn. That plush, buttery, amazingly soft feeling is predominantly Siloxane. Siloxane forms the chemical backbone structure of Silicone (think grease for your car brakes or bike chain). I think wool should speak for itself and not be coated in chemicals to alter the hand. O-Wool does not contain softeners, and likely won't feel as soft as the Merino you're used to. While knitting with O-Wool, the warmth, touch, and oils from your hands will begin to subtly soften the wool. When you are finished knitting, wash your masterpiece by hand in a gentle detergent like Soak (<http://www.soakwash.com> - biodegradable, non-toxic, and has eco-friendly packaging) or Dreft (<http://www.dreft.com> - it is formulated for babies so it is gentle).

### *What makes O-Wash machine washable?*

O-Wash uses a GOTS certified organic compound to create machine-washability. The compound holds the fibers still during washing so the scales cannot interlock and felt. Conventional "superwash" processes burn the scales off the fiber with an acid bath, or coat the fiber in a resin, or both. O-Wash both has its scales *and* uses a certified organic compound!

### *Why doesn't O-Wool bear the USDA certified organic logo?*

The USDA NOP only certifies livestock and produce - it does not certify textiles. My wool is USDA certified organic but yarn does not fall under its jurisdiction. GOTS, however, does certify textiles. The processors of the O-Wash line are all GOTS certified and I am working towards this yarn line bearing the GOTS label. For the other yarn lines, though, I work with processors who follow GOTS processing guidelines but are not certified. I am one of their only organic customers and it is not yet worth the investment for them to become certified.

Thanks for taking the time  
to read this important info!



[www.o-wool.com](http://www.o-wool.com)