

North Carolina Draws Big-Time Textile Investments

By [Arthur Friedman](#)



North Carolina State University's College of Textiles serves as a hub for textile research and development.

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The state of [North Carolina](#) is seeing a revival of its textile heritage, with a host of investments, factory openings and expansions breathing new life into the industry.

Between January 2020 and December 2021, new and expanding textile operations have created 1,400 new jobs and announced more than \$285 million of investments in [North Carolina](#), according to the North Carolina Community Investment Report.

Data supplied to Sourcing Journal from the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) showed employment in the state's textile industry was 35,813 as of the second quarter of 2021, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics "Quarterly Census of

Employment and Wages.” This compares to about 33,000 people in 2019, EDPNC said. These workers are employed in 828 [textile manufacturing](#) facilities compared to 600 in 2019.

North Carolina State University’s College of Textiles serves as a hub for textile research and development, a supplier to the talent pipeline and an asset for industry partnerships throughout the state, EDPNC noted. Among the largest companies in the textile and nonwovens industries are Berry Global, Unifi, Hanesbrands, Gildan Activewear and Kimberly-Clark.

“I believe we’re seeing a strong textile investment across the entire Southeast,” [Mount Vernon Mills](#) CEO Bill Duncan told Sourcing Journal. “There is still a very good skilled workforce in the textile trade, along with the fact that there are several facilities that are either underutilized or have been mothballed. We’ve found these readily available assets to be much easier to revitalize and begin operating again rather than a greenfield project.”

In January, Mount Vernon Mills agreed to [acquire](#) Wade Manufacturing Company’s yarn spinning and weaving facility in Rockingham, N.C. The move will make Mount Vernon vertically integrated from yarn production to finished fabric in certain products and give the company greater control of its supply chain.

“The Rockingham facility is a modern, cost-efficient operation with an experienced and stable workforce, making it a great fit as we increase the amount of control that we have over our yarn supply, weaving operations and overall costs,” Duncan said. “We are also proud to expand our footprint in the U.S. and build upon our [made in America](#) commitment and heritage.”

Mount Vernon Mills said it plans to hire substantially all the current workforce in the Rockingham facility and may look to add additional positions in the future to bring the plant to full capacity. Initially, the Rockingham facility will produce open-end spun yarn for Mount Vernon Mills and woven greige goods for the company’s flame resistant (FR) products.

Duncan said the company already has a presence in North Carolina with Mount Vernon Chemicals and “we’ve found that the readily available skilled workforce in the state is very attractive to us and others.” He said hiring or retaining workers is a concern and “a top priority for us.”

“There has been increased interest in [Made in America](#),” he said. “I think the current supply chain issues have made people realize how dependent America has become on imports.”

[Children’s wear manufacturer LT Apparel Group](#) said in December it was expanding operations in North Carolina with an investment of at least \$57 million in Greensboro.

The company’s project will add a minimum of 116 new jobs to the community and will help increase industrial capacity at the Reedy Fork Corporate Park. LT Apparel Group, with headquarters in New York City, designs, sources, manufactures and markets children’s apparel.

The company's family of brands includes Adidas Kids, Carhartt Kids, and its owned brand, French Toast. The company will maintain its design center in Greensboro as it adds new capacity and warehousing space in the city.

"Our operations here in Greensboro have come full circle," Richard Sutton, CEO of LT Apparel Group, said. "From designing products in Revolution Mill to warehousing and distributing them from Brown Summit, LT Apparel is part of the fabric of this community and we're committed to remain so. After a long search for our new home, it became clear that Greensboro was the right choice for us. We appreciate the support we've received from all the state and local partners, and we look forward to growing our company in North Carolina."

Once the project's new jobs are in place, the local region will benefit from a more than \$4 million payroll impact in the community, each and every year, officials said. A performance-based grant of \$200,000 from the One North Carolina Fund to the company is a component of the project in Greensboro. Company performance targets tied to the grant include the creation of 88 jobs and an investment of \$17 million.

The One NC Fund provides financial assistance to local governments to help attract economic investment and to create jobs. Companies receive no money upfront and must meet job creation and capital investment targets to qualify for payment. All OneNC grants require a matching grant from local governments and any award is contingent upon that condition being met. A \$500,000 grant to the City of Greensboro from the state's Industrial Development Fund-Utility Account will also support the project, providing water and sewer accessibility that will also benefit other customers in the Reedy Fork Corporate Park area.

Also in January, [Bast Fibre Technologies](#) Inc. (BFT), a manufacturer of premium natural fibers for the global nonwoven and textile industries, entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Lumberton Cellulose (LC), a natural fiber processing facility located in Lumberton, N.C., from Georgia-Pacific Cellulose LLC.

"Acquiring this state-of-the-art natural fiber processing facility and integrating the great team at Lumberton enables BFT to immediately establish North American manufacturing operations to meet the rapidly growing demand for our sustainable natural fibers," BFT CEO and chairman Noel Hall said. "Following our recent acquisition of German-based fiber processor FVT, this is another key step in our long-term strategy of building significant, high-quality manufacturing capacity for our global customers supporting our core mission of 'grow local, process local, sell local.'"

Ideally located to serve BFT's North American customers, BFT plans to grow and invest in the operation, establishing LC as its flagship U.S. manufacturing site and opening new opportunities and markets for North American hemp and flax growers.

“This acquisition is a key strategic milestone in our mission to build out significant manufacturing capacity, while supporting the vast potential of North American-grown hemp and flax,” BFT president Jim Posa said. “Lumberton Cellulose is a top producer of quality fiber and with the current infrastructure and excellent, highly experienced team at Lumberton, we expect to significantly expand the facility’s production capabilities over the next few years.”