

Fort Payne Fears Worst With Chinese Imports

The hosiery industry may be divided on imports of socks from China and other Asian countries, but not in Fort Payne, Alabama.

In a town of 13,000 that has 6,200 people employed in hosiery companies, there is unanimous determination to fight the rising tide of socks from China. Charles Cole, president of Alabama Footwear Inc. in Fort Payne and past chairman of The Hosiery Association, has led the efforts to get the Bush administration to put controls on the flood of socks.

Recently, the Associated Press focused on Fort Payne after the THA's Domestic Manufacturers Committee which filed a request with the U.S. Department of Commerce calling on quotas to limit the growth of Chinese imports. The people of Fort Payne are running scared, the article concluded.

Fort Payne is home to 95 hosiery mills. The town proclaims itself as "the Sock Capitol of the World." The industry there ships 14 million dozens of socks each week.

Cole says that employment fell by 12 percent over the past year as mills go out of business or modernize with more technologies.

U.S. companies – large hosiery manufacturers, retailers, and dis-

tributors – imported 264 million pairs of socks from China in 2003 and the wholesale price of those goods dropped 50 percent during the same period.

At the same time, according to the domestic manufacturers, U.S. socks production declined from 2.5 billion pairs in 2001 to 1.9 billion pairs two years later. An estimated 40 percent of these goods were made in Fort Payne.

With imports quotas on WTO countries scheduled to expire on Dec. 31 of this year, there is real fear in Fort Payne the socks industry there could be on the verge of shutting down.

Bob Thomas, a manager with Prewett Mills, said Fort Payne's industry could be swamped with Chinese-made goods. With 2,200 employees, Prewett is the town's biggest employer. Thomas knows imports will continue, but he believes a gradual phase-out of quotas will give the industry time to adjust. In the meantime, THA leaders are trying to figure out how to hold the industry association together in face of strong feelings on both sides of the issue. Faced with angry responses from large manufacturers, THA sent an email insisting the petition was filed by the Domestic Committee – not THA.

York Joins HTC Staff



Linda York

Linda H. York has returned to the hosiery industry and is the administrative assistant to Hosiery Technology Center Director Dan St. Louis.

Ms. York served as assistant director of the Carolina Hosiery Assn. (previously CVHA) while employed at Inform Inc. More recently she has been employed with a Hickory-based travel agency.

During her career at Inform, she planned special events, staffed committee meeting, and coordinated educational programs, including the scholarship fund. She also wrote news releases and assisted in marketing.

"We are happy to have Linda York in our operations," St. Louis said. "Her experience is going to be especially helpful as we expand our services."



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