

Fair labor apparel a 'natural fit' for Maggie's

BY BRIAN VERHELLE

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For nearly 20 years, Maggie's Organics in Ypsilanti has been among the nation's top producers in organic apparel. With its spring line, Maggie's hopes to extend its appeal with customers.

Maggie's has produced the first clothing collection in the world to obtain independent certification for Fair Labor Practices and Community Benefits. The certification means all levels of production for Maggie's spring line meet the global standards for fair labor.

"Fast and foremost, it's priced for the average customer to purchase," said Maggie's founder and CEO Bona Burda. "We try to make organic affordable. It's well-designed, and customers love it. We try to do the right thing that's alternative to traditional sweating coats."

The spring line includes rompers, tanks, T-shirts, wrapups, hoodies, wide-leg pants, leggings, knit dresses and scarves. Prices range from



RECOGNITION — Bona Burda, founder of Maggie's Organics in Ypsilanti, helped her company achieve certification recognizing the company met fair labor standards. File photo | AnnArbor.com

\$44 to \$55.

"Customers are very excited that there's something like this," said Maggie's vice president Doug Wilson. "We can sleep at night knowing that everyone in the process has not only been treated fairly, but is making contributions to their community."

The detailed certification process is monitored by Scientific Certification Systems, one of three organizations that

verify fair labor practices. It required Maggie's to identify each level of the apparel's production from the organic cotton grower and cotton gin and spinning mill cooperatives in Nicaragua to the knitting and sewing factory in Costa Rica to the screen printing, office and warehouse operations in Michigan.

Burda accompanied the inspectors to each location, but had to sit out when it came

time to interview management and workers.

"That process for me was a really big learning experience," Burda said.

Certifications for fair labor or fair trade usually extend to commodities such as bananas, coffee and tea, but Maggie's becomes the first apparel company in the world to receive certification of this kind. Burda hopes fair labor catches on with other apparel makers.

"We think this is groundbreaking work, and the momentum behind the lesson are driven by customers," Burda said. "Our customers care what goes in their body, and now what goes around their body. I think out of the concerns for how food is grown is a greater concern for how a product is produced, so it's a natural segue to ask how workers are treated."

"With the anti-unionism movement, this seems to be a natural fit."

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