

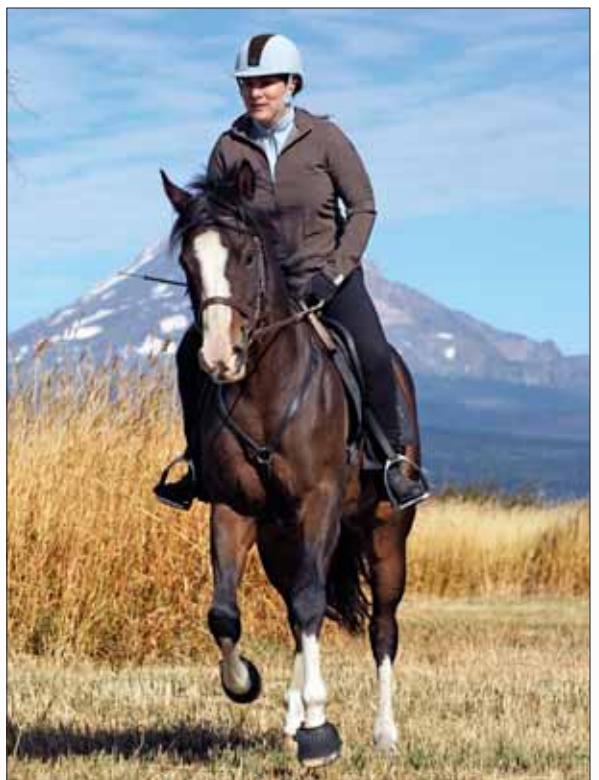


# Eco-friendly g.r.a.s.s. Goes Green

Equestrian apparel maker challenges the competition  
with an environmentally conscious line

By Carol Gustafson

**K**ERRI KENT IS ON A MISSION. The hybrid-driving, geothermal-home-dwelling eco-evangelist is hard at work establishing the first brand of sustainable riding apparel in the equine industry. In launching **g.r.a.s.s.**—which stands for green riding apparel for sustainability—Kent left no stone unturned. Not only are all g.r.a.s.s. garments made exclusively from organic and recycled materials, but Kent has also examined every decision necessary in building a business, including manufacturing and shipping practices, product packaging and advertising strategies, in order to develop a model for running an earth-friendly company.



Rancher, rider, mother and businesswoman Kerri Kent, shown at left and above on her Hood River, Ore., ranch, has launched the equestrian industry's first line of sustainable apparel.



Kerri Kent, founder of Kerrits and g.r.a.s.s.



As a rancher, rider and outdoor enthusiast living in Hood River, Ore., the recreational Mecca of the Columbia River Gorge, Kent's desires and initiatives are rooted in her respect for and stewardship of the land and other natural resources. As a mother, her determination to lead the charge and create lasting, positive change for the environment is intensely personal as well.

g.r.a.s.s. was introduced this past January and shipped to retail stores in the spring. In less than one year, the brand has gained a respectable following and is carried in 150 retail stores across



“ WE KNOW THAT g.r.a.s.s. NEEDS TO STACK UP AGAINST EVERY OTHER LINE A STORE CARRIES, IN EVERY ASPECT INCLUDING PRICE, STYLE, DURABILITY AND PERFORMANCE. ”

the country. Better still, according to Kent, g.r.a.s.s. has inspired a “passionate” following among many retailers and consumers.

#### PROVEN TRACK RECORD

Kerri Kent has made a habit of parlaying her passions into profitable businesses. First, as competitive ski racer and windsurfer and then as a lifelong horse lover and rider, Kent has, in the space of 22 short years, founded a succession of profitable apparel companies. Within the industry, most will readily associate Kent with her company, Kerrits, an equestrian apparel manufacturer known for making fashionable, yet technically functional clothing.

In this, her latest venture, Kent and her 14-woman team intend to strike the perfect balance between garment performance, style and sustainability. She predicts that the brand will continue to gain awareness and acceptance with people interested in purchasing environmentally friendly products.

A recent survey substantiates Kent's belief. The 2007 National Technology Readiness Survey reported that American's appetite for environmentally friendly technologies and consumer products is grossly underserved. The annual survey, conducted by the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business, found that 83 percent of adults want to preserve and protect the environment and that 71 percent are interested in green technology. The survey goes on to point out that there is a large gap between the number of eco-friendly products consumers now own and the number they say they would like to own.

#### STACKING UP AGAINST COMPETITION

“We know that g.r.a.s.s. needs to stack up against every other line a store carries, in every aspect including price, style, durability and performance.” While current prices run about 10 to 15



g.r.a.s.s. Climate Shirt



g.r.a.s.s. Eco Zipover

percent more than comparable goods in the Kerrits line, Kent believes that prices will adjust as increased demand for recycled and organic fabrics causes fabric mills to expand their production. "Once people begin choosing organic and recycled goods not just in the equestrian niche, but across the board, prices will come down."

From the outset, Kent has emphasized conscious consumption over conspicuous consumption. As a result, Kent edited the g.r.a.s.s. product line to just eight items including a climate shirt, an organic cotton tee, a vest and zip-over, plus two styles of tights and breeches. She started small in order to determine demand. "It would just be wrong to have excess production of a brand dedicated to sustainability."

From a fabric standpoint, Kent says that even though she was interested in using organic and recycled fabrics for many years, "It wasn't until about four years ago that the fabric technology proved itself to be durable and barn-worthy."

Piggybacking on technology demanded by Patagonia and other climbing apparel manufacturers, Kent now uses a variety of fabrics in the line, including pesticide-free organic cotton and woven bamboo, which has natural antibacterial attributes making



g.r.a.s.s. Eco Vest

it ideal for the demands of riding apparel.

Recycled fabrics in the g.r.a.s.s. line are made from plastic bottles. The resulting fabric is soft, durable and moisture-wicking. And, for every yard of recycled poly used, g.r.a.s.s. keeps eight plastic bottles out of a landfill. In addition to the organic and recycled fabrics, Kent uses eco-friendly, low-impact dyes and recycled zippers on g.r.a.s.s. products.

## ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS DECISIONS

The products themselves are only part of the equation necessary to create a sustainable brand. Kent also made mindful decisions regarding production and packaging. "It takes tons of energy to produce garments outside the U.S. and then ship them back to this country," observes Kent. Because of that, Kent determined that all g.r.a.s.s. products would be made domestically.

All the merchandise is packaged in recycled poly bags made from post-consumer and post-industrial scrap. Even g.r.a.s.s. hangtags are printed on recycled paper, which has been infused with wildflower seeds. The tags can be planted, and as the paper degrades, the seeds sprout.

Printed marketing materials have been kept to a minimum. Instead, Kent relies on an informative Web site at [www.gra-ss.com](http://www.gra-ss.com) to spread brand awareness. She also intends to use sites

such as YouTube for training and advertising.

Kent completes the circle of sustainability by giving back to the community through participation in "1% for the Planet," which is a global movement of hundreds of companies that donate one percent of their sales to a network of more than 1,500 environmental organizations. Kent has earmarked the g.r.a.s.s. contribution for the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource, a group dedicated to raising awareness and attracting funding to conserve land and preserve trail access for horse-related activity.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

Not surprisingly, Kent has yet another development up her sleeve. In January, Kent will launch a new, as yet unnamed, environmentally friendly line of equestrian underwear to the market. Hold on, did she say "equestrian underwear"?

Absolutely. "I can't tell you the number of times we've had

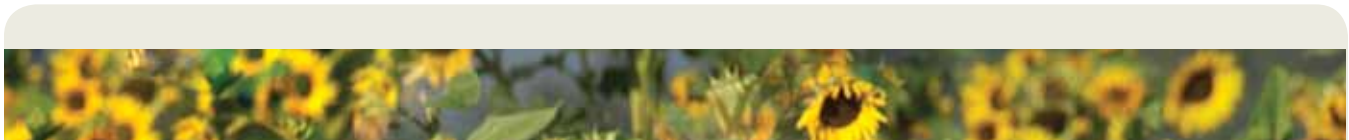
women who ride tell us what they really need is rider-specific, performance-enhancing underwear," says Kent. "These are Olympians, ranchers and riders who have suffered in silence with comfort issues for long years."

Banking on her company's expertise in designing great-fitting, high-performance garments, Kent and her team have created a line that will be welcomed by female riders. The tagline for the underwear sums up the product's primary benefits. "Good for your seat and better for the environment." Look for the line to be unveiled at the upcoming Denver Market well as at the AETA and SPOGA. 

*With 20 years of marketing experience at some of the industry's biggest companies, writer and blogger Carol Gustafson brings a unique perspective of business realities to every story she tells for Western & English Today.*

## resources

**g.r.a.s.s.:**  
(800) 274-7946  
gra-ss.com



## KERRI KENT'S EASY WAYS TO GREEN UP YOUR BUSINESS



ent has transferred many of the lessons learned in developing g.r.a.s.s. to internal operations at the **Kerrits** corporate office. Her practical, win-win suggestions for making a business more environmentally friendly not only benefit the planet and result in cost savings, but also increase employee morale and customer loyalty.

1. Set up easily accessible recycling bins throughout your office. "This one's is a no-brainer," says Kent. "It's good for the environment and will lower your company's trash bill as well."
2. Give employees incentives to take alternative transportation to work. "Carpool, hike, ride a bike," says Kent. "We even had an employee cross country ski to work!" Kent gives employees points for making good choices, which can be redeemed for gift cards at the end of the month.
3. Reduce your paper usage. Ruthlessly look to cut down on the printing of reports, marketing materials, invoices and statements. You'll save paper, printer cartridges and money. Go the electronic route whenever possible. And, suggests Kent, add the following message to the bottom of every email you send: "Please consider the environment before printing this e-mail."
4. Whether manufacturer or retailer, evaluate the products your business carries or uses. Work with suppliers to minimize shipping distances and excess packaging. Ask suppliers to "ship complete." Buy in bulk, look for concentrated formulations and buy locally when possible.
5. Reward employees for good ideas. The suggestion box or roundtable discussion can reveal the issues people are concerned about. Reward employees for good ideas by giving them an extra day off.
6. Offer a discount when customers recycle their old goods. Kent gives the example of a riding shop that promises to give customers a five percent discount on the purchase of a new horse blanket, when they trade-in in their old. The used blankets can be washed and then passed along to a therapeutic riding program or the Humane Society. On a grander scale, when Kent built her new geothermal house, she donated the doublewide trailer that had been on the land to her local Habitat for Humanity, keeping it out of the landfill and benefiting a family in need.
7. Invest in a water cooler for your office. Kent made this move so employees could fill their own glasses rather than toting single-use plastic bottles to work.
8. Support other businesses that embrace earth-friendly business practices. As consumers, we vote with our wallets, so if you want to see positive change trickle down faster, you've got to make the investment.
9. Remember that old question, "Paper or plastic?" Kent says the answer is neither. She suggests creating your own reusable bag with your company logo. "We gave g.r.a.s.s. bags away at a trade show. They were a great advertisement for the brand and will be used over and over."
10. Resolve to make little changes every day on the path toward running a greener, earth-friendly business. "It's all about changing your mind and then changing your habits," concludes Kent.