

United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

GLOBAL COMMODITIES FORUM
9-10 December 2024, Geneva

Impact of sustainability standards and consumer preferences on the fashion and textiles market

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD.



CONSUMERS, FASHION & COTTON



**GHERZI TEXTILE
ORGANISATION**

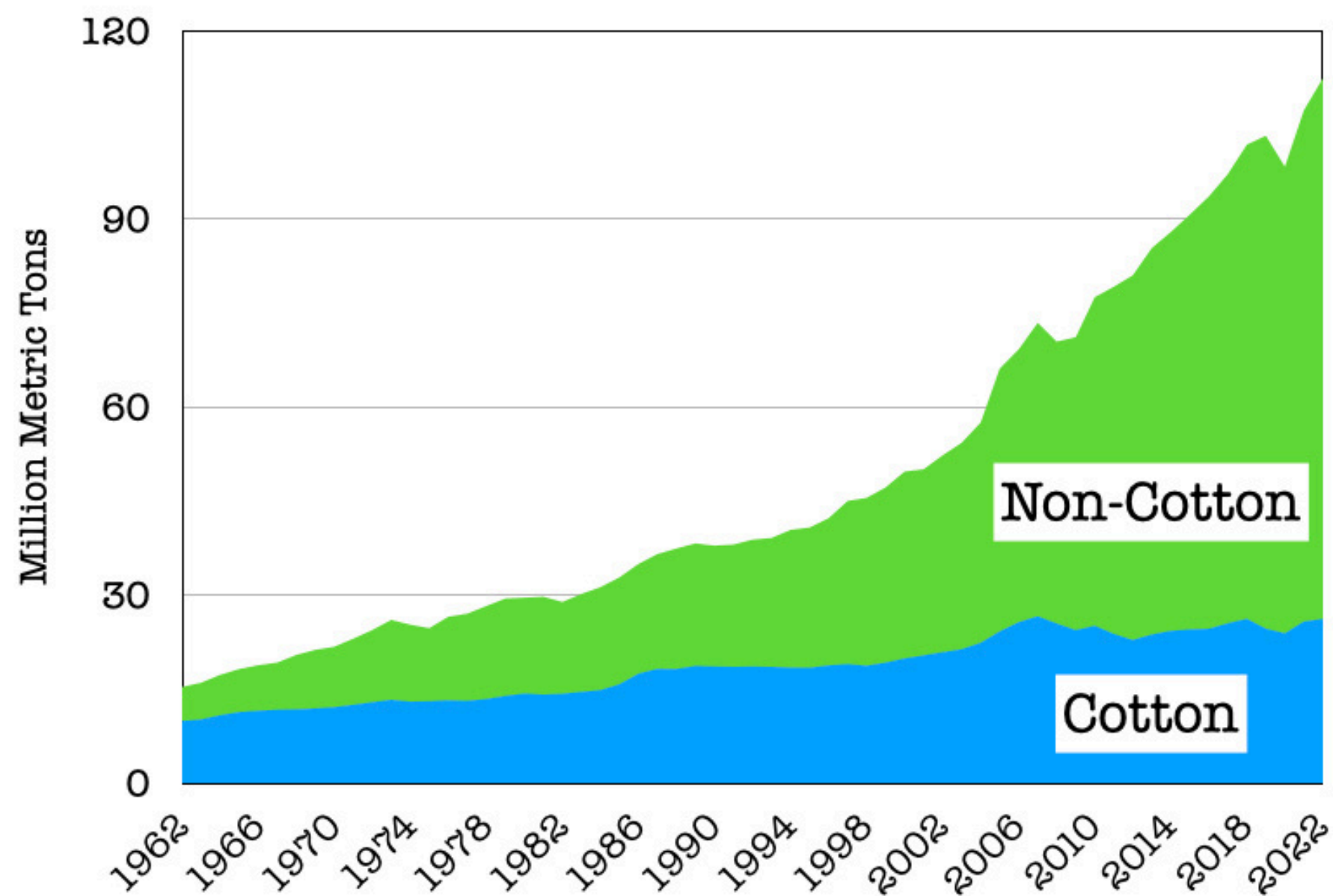
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UNCTAD
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FORUM**

DEC. 9, 2024

COTTON IS IN A DITCH.

Global Fiber Consumption.



Source: OECD, ICAC

% Cotton

1962: 65%

1970: 56%

1980: 48%

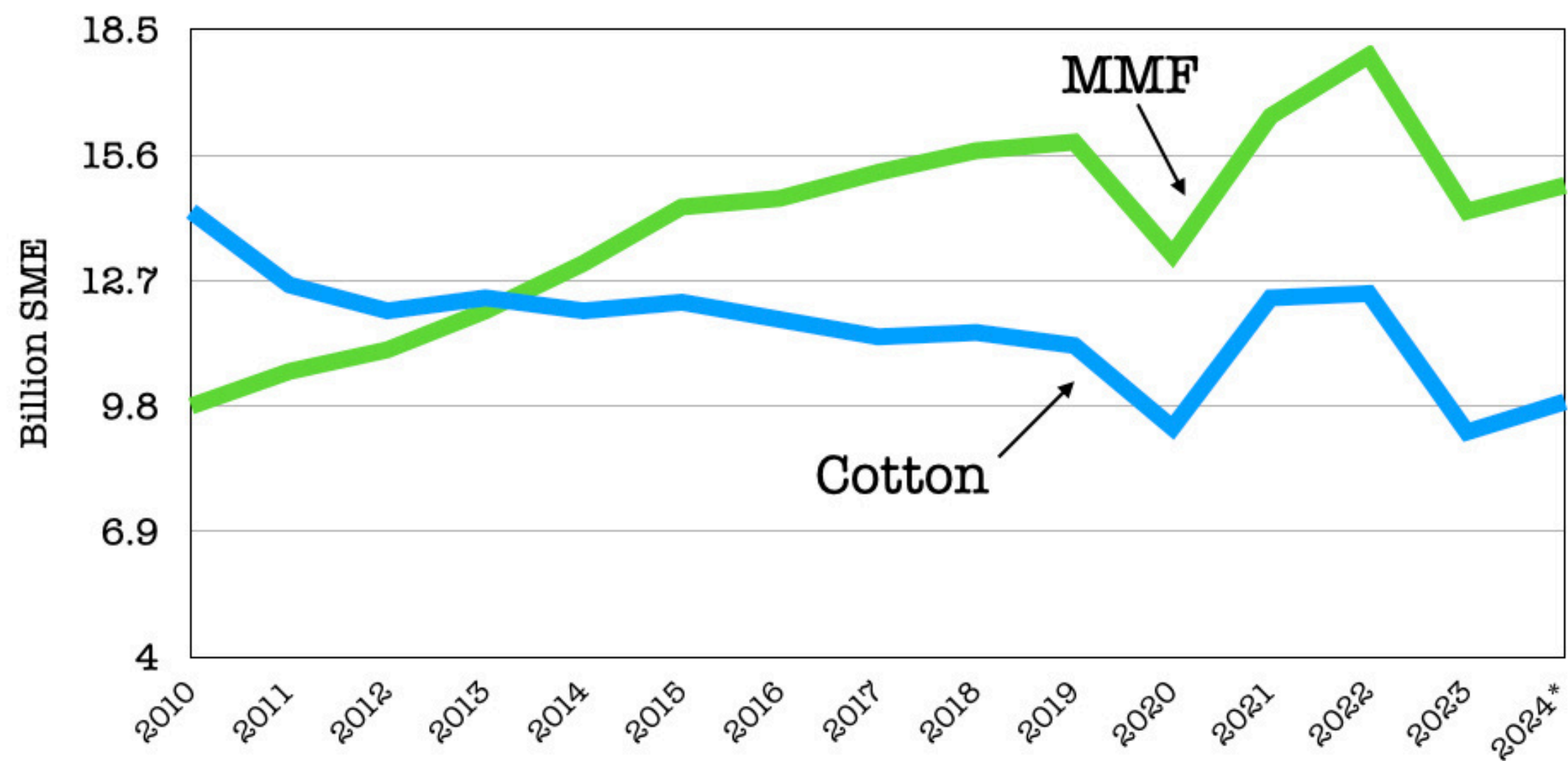
1990: 49%

2000: 40%

2010: 32%

2022: 23%

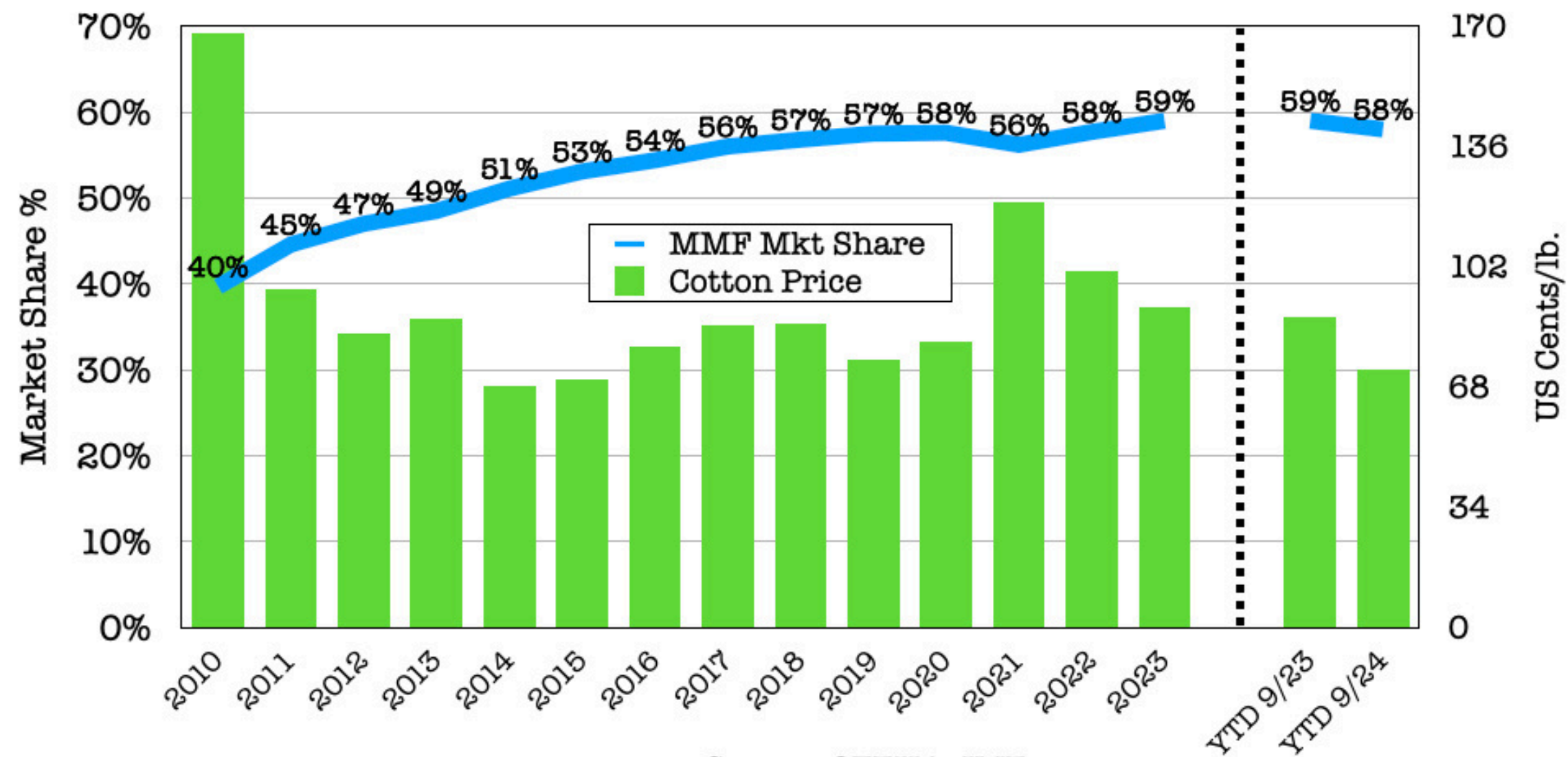
US Imports of Apparel: Cotton vs. MMF



* Annualized YTD 9/24

Source: OTEXA

US Imports of MMF Apparel vs. Cotton Prices

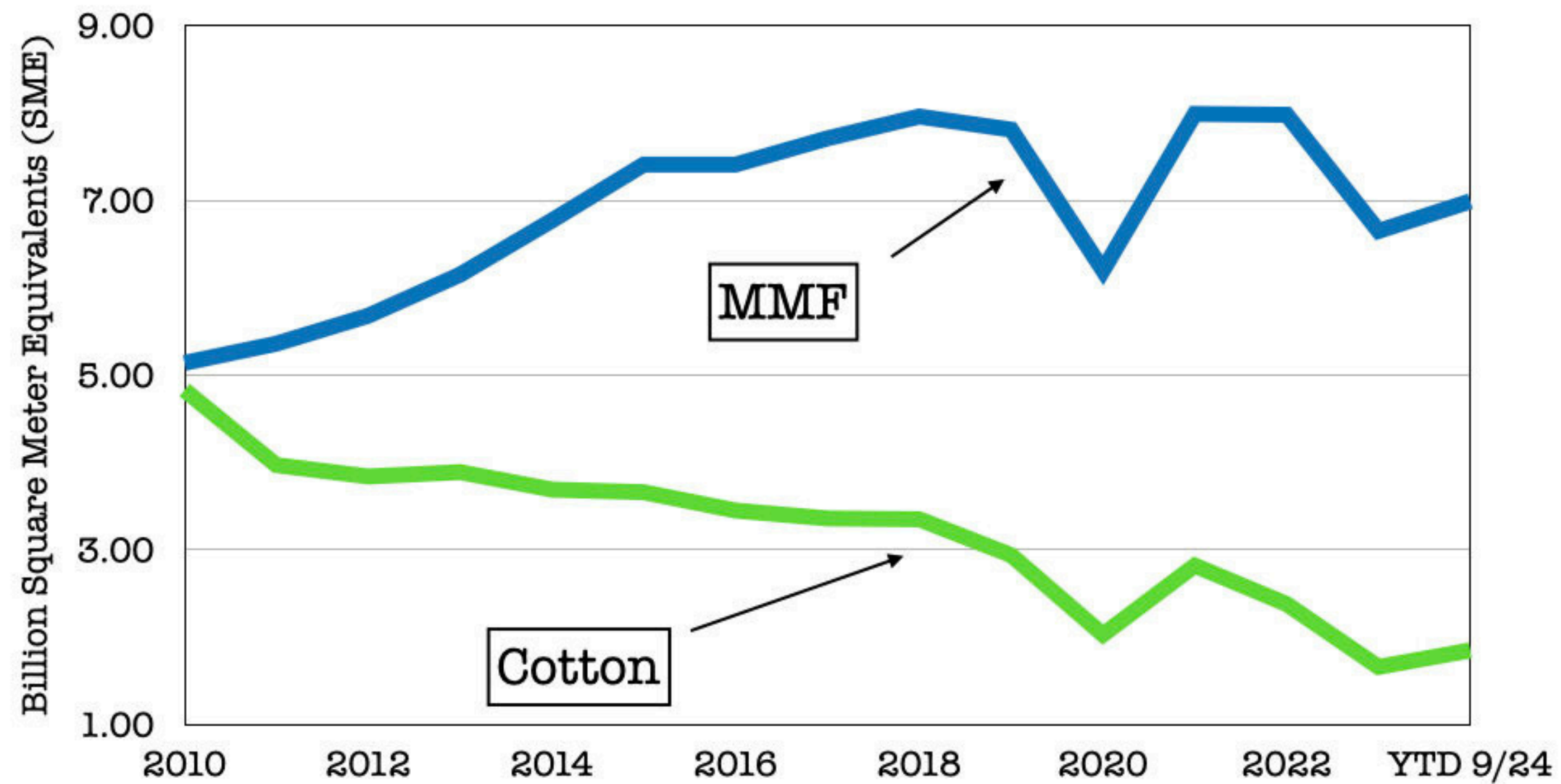


Source: OTEXA, IMF

Notes: MMF % Share to Total Apparel Imports From the World (SME)
Cotton price @ December 1st of each full year; Last trading day in
September for YTD 2023 and 2024

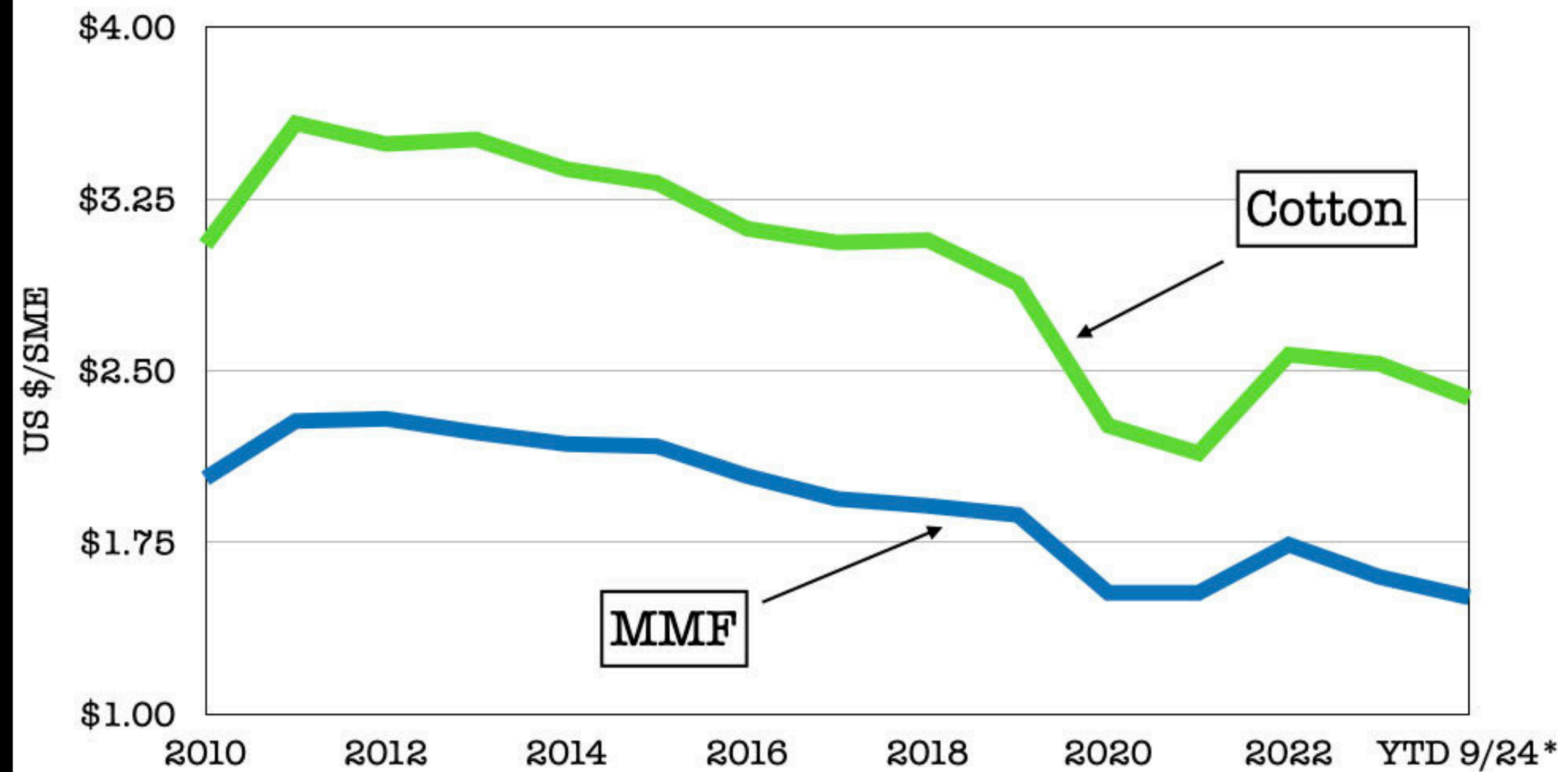
**AND GOV'T POLICY MAY
HAVE MADE THINGS
WORSE.**

U.S. Imports From China: Cotton vs. MMF Apparel



Source: Office of Textiles & Apparel

Average U.S. Import Prices From China: Cotton vs. MMF Apparel



Source: Office of Textiles & Apparel

* Annualized

**BUT THERE'S STILL AN
ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.**

A photograph of a severely overcrowded closet. The space is filled from floor to ceiling with clothing. Numerous items are hanging on hangers, including sweaters, shirts, and jackets in various colors like blue, yellow, and grey. The shelves are also completely covered with large, messy piles of folded clothes, including sweaters and t-shirts. The overall impression is one of extreme clutter and excess.

FASHION MAKES ALOT OF STUFF.

100,000,000,000 garments a year

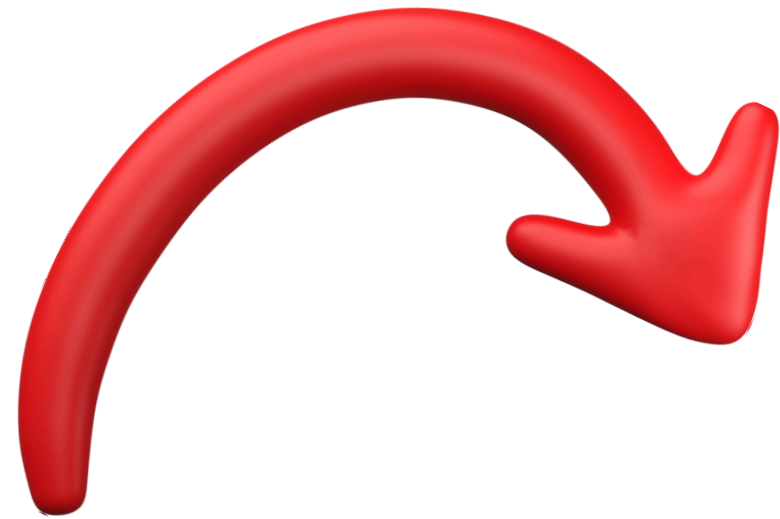
**AND FAST FASHION
PREFERS
SYNTHETICS.**



THE DILEMMA:

Fast Fashion vs. Slow Fashion

FAST FASHION GROWTH.



12,000 new styles/year



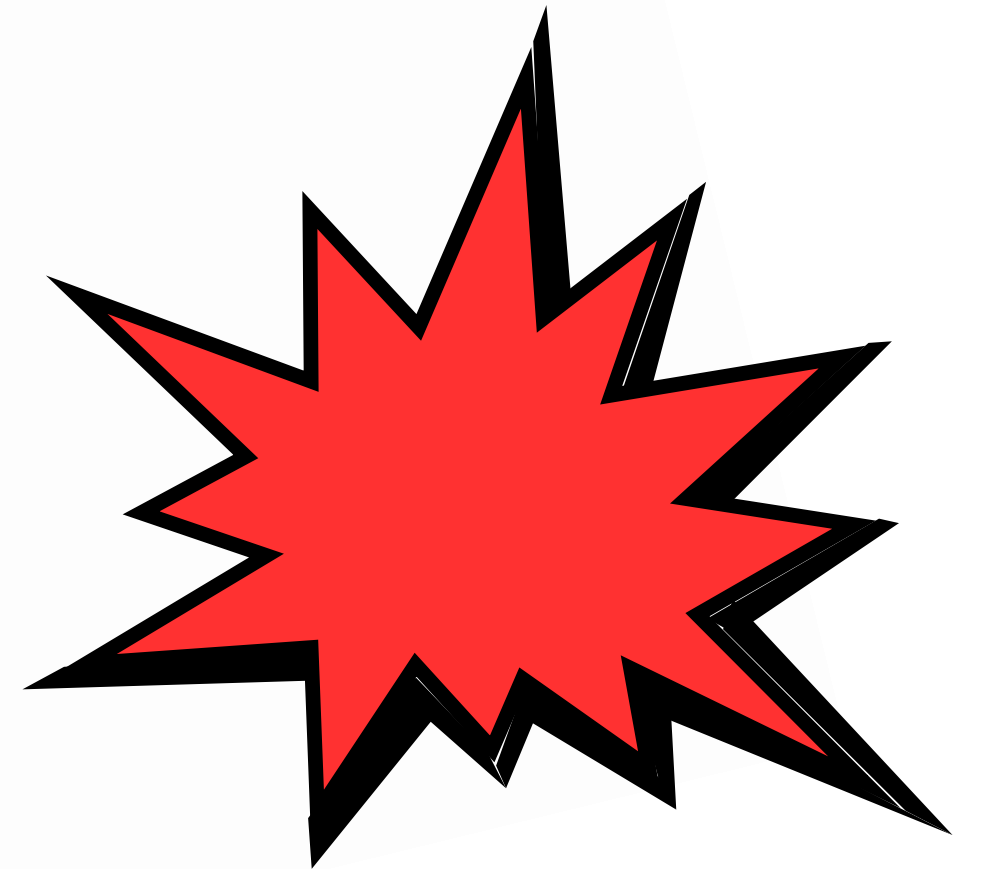
25,000 new styles/year



36,000 new styles/year



SHEIN

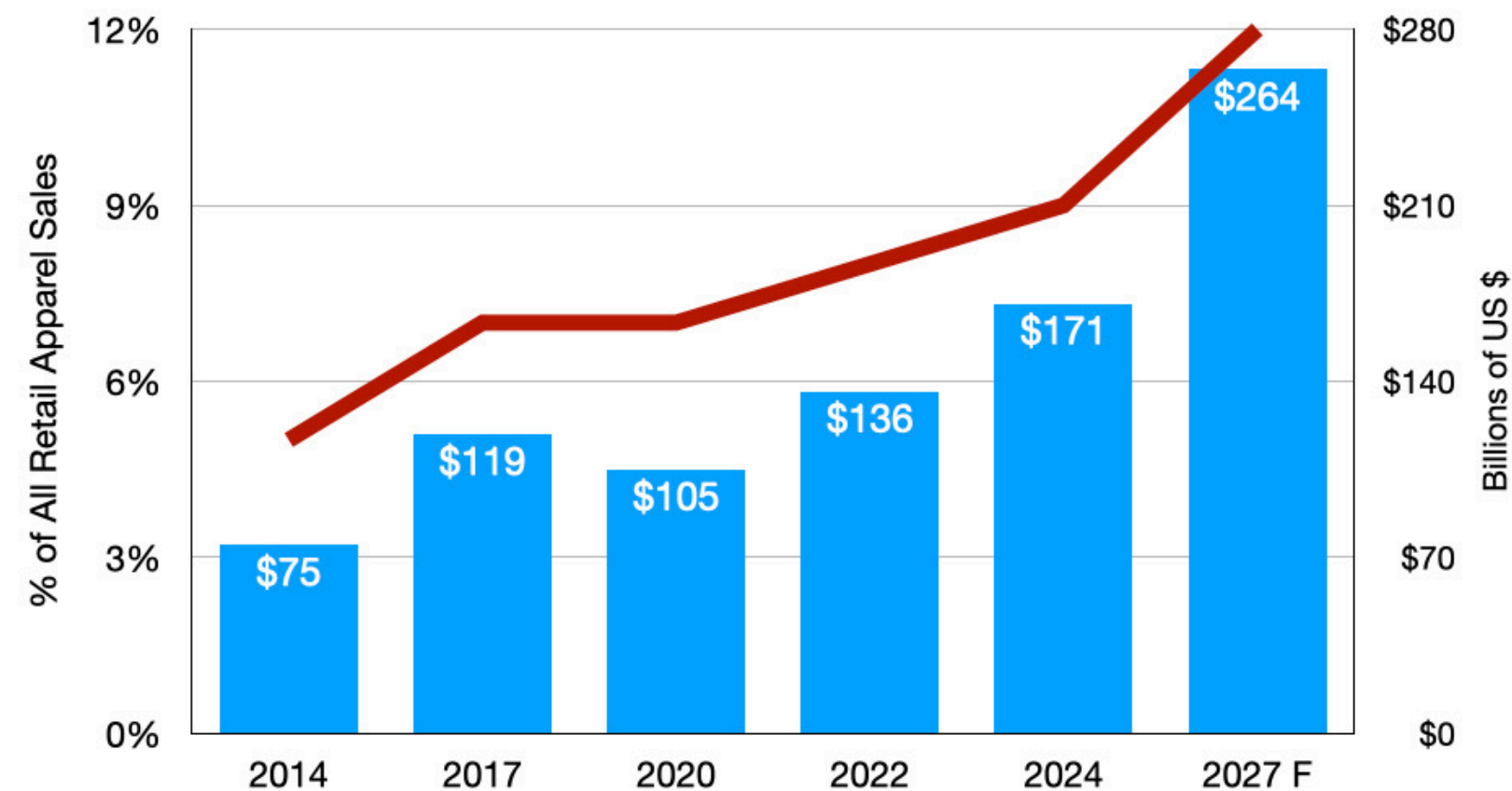


1,300,000 NEW STYLES PER YEAR!

**THE “CHURN”
KEEPS FOLKS BUYING.**

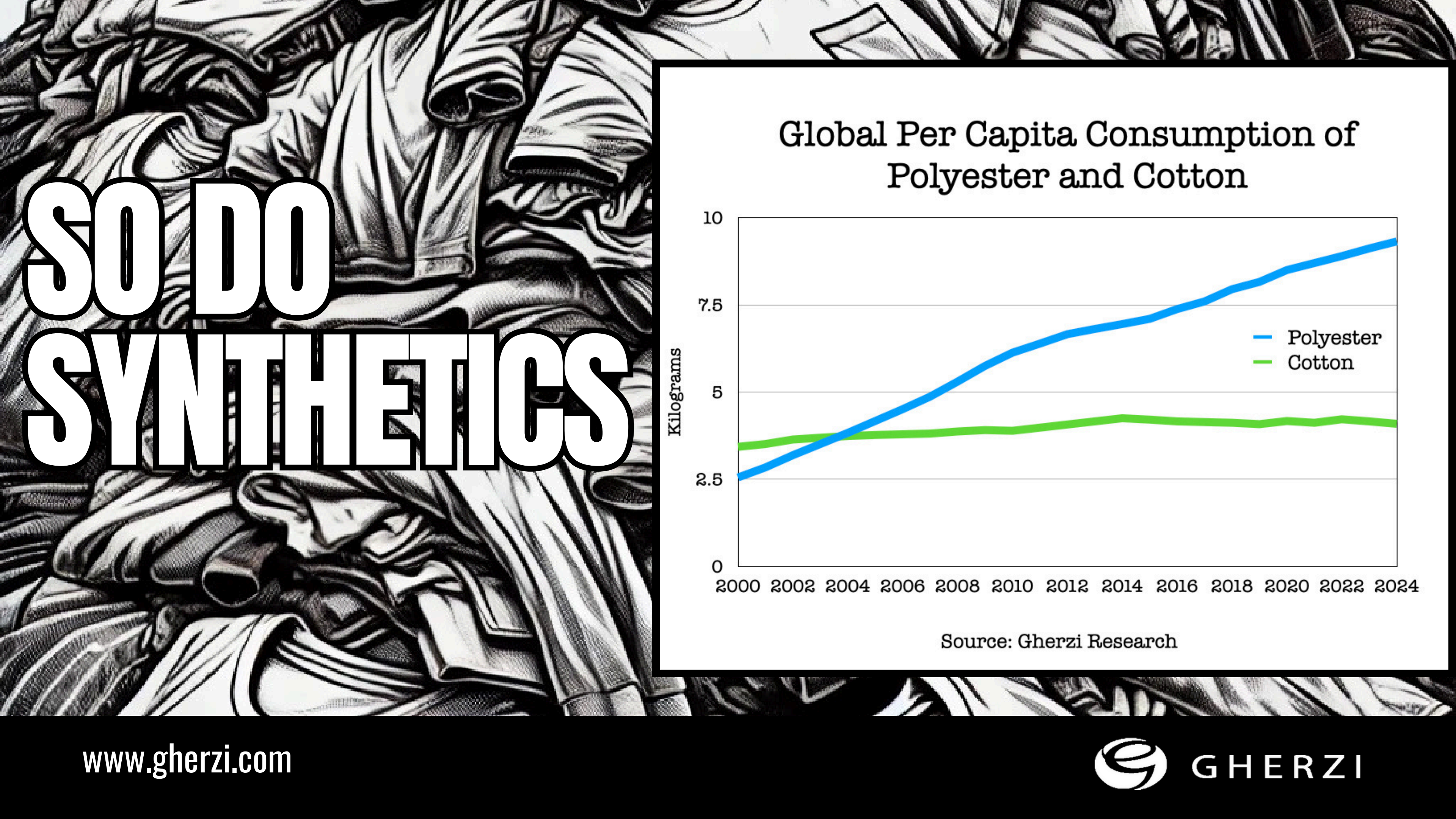
AS FAST FASHION GROWS...

Fast Fashion Sales vs. Total Retail Apparel Market



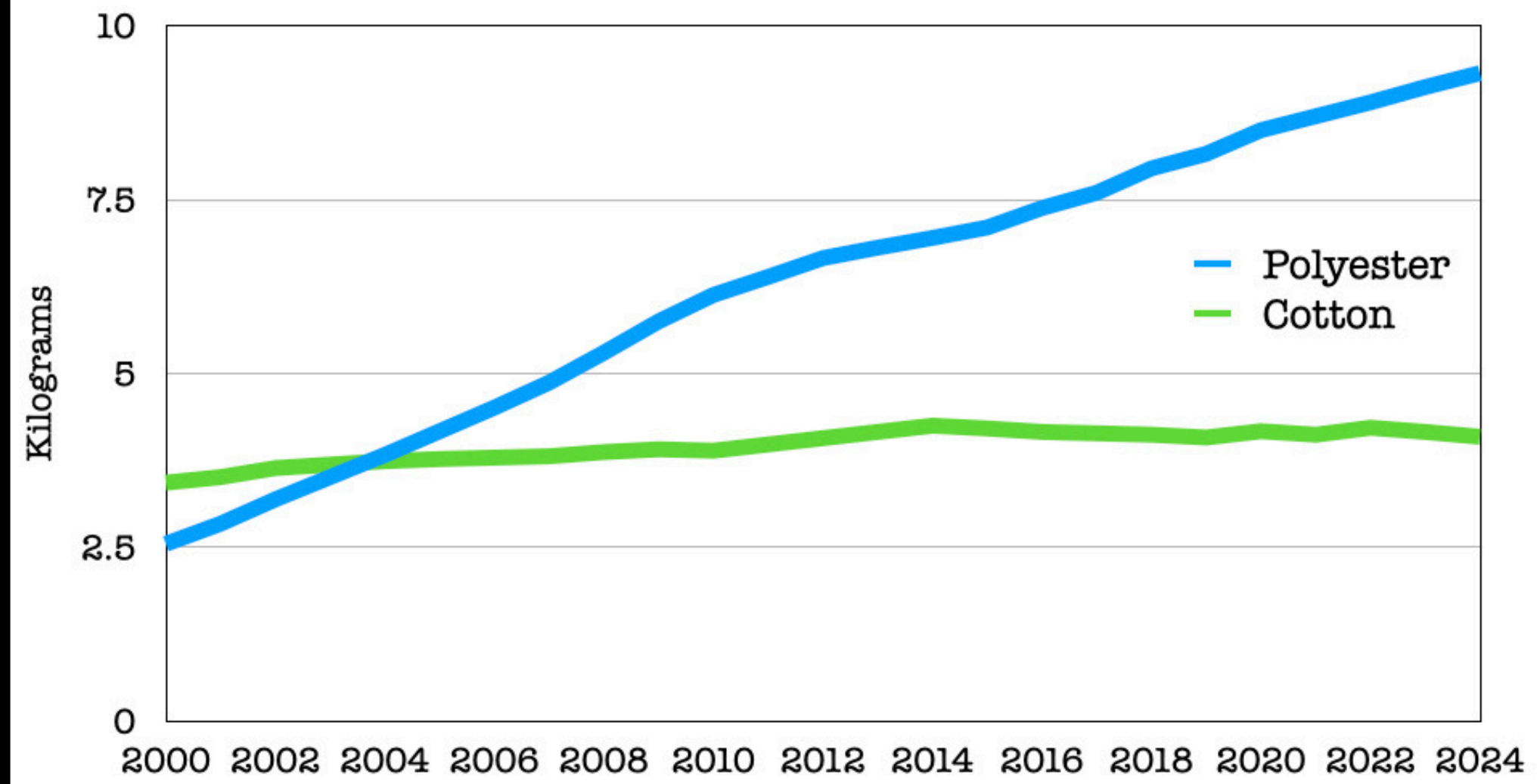
Source: Gherzi Research

- Fast fashion sales more than doubled in 10 years.
- Market share grew from 5% in 2014 to 9% in 2024.
- Forecast for fast fashion will reach \$264 billion in 2027 with a market share of 12% of retail apparel sales.



SO DO SYNTHETICS

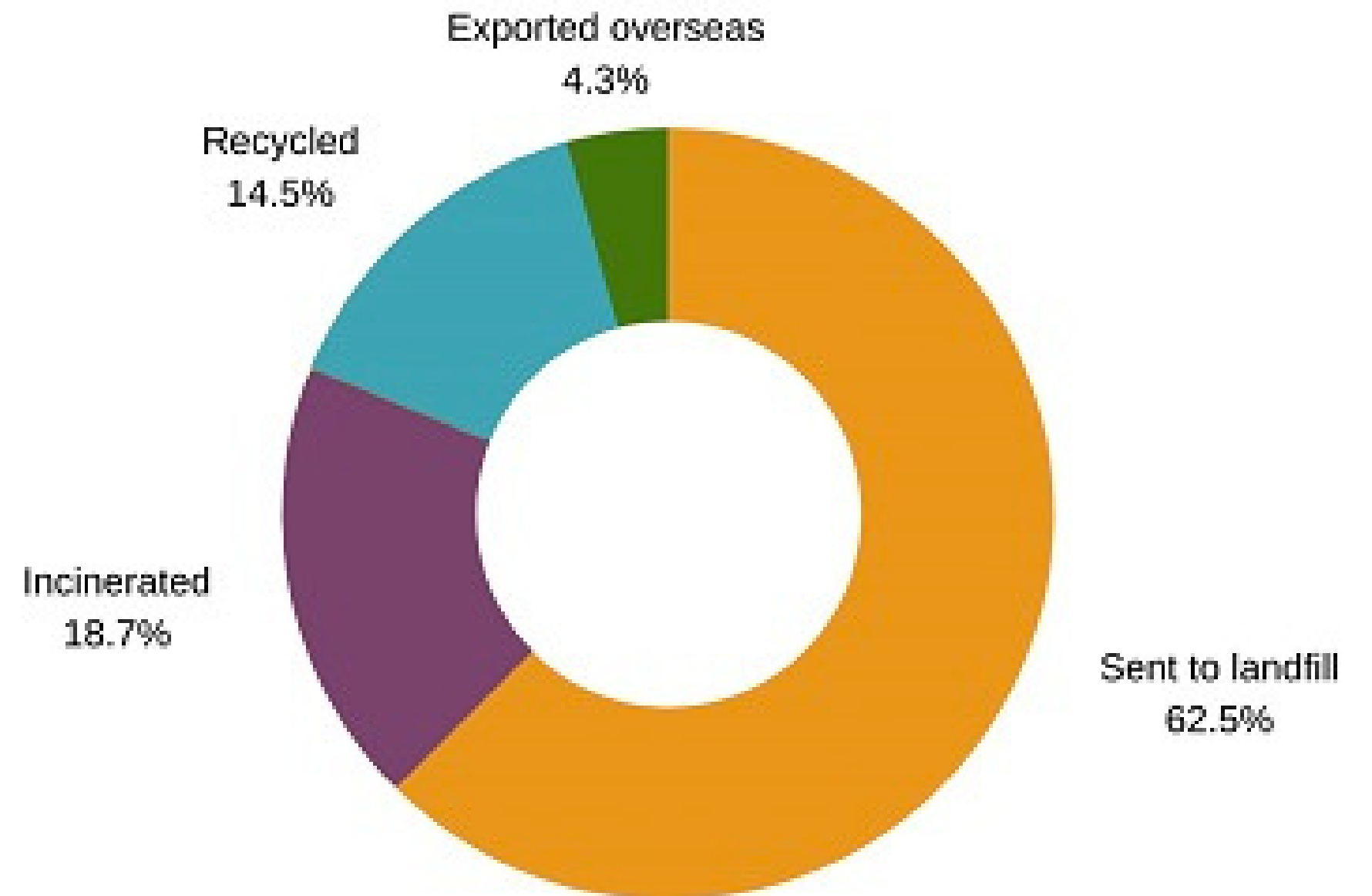
Global Per Capita Consumption of Polyester and Cotton



Source: Gherzi Research

AND WASTE.

The EPA reports that Americans generate 16 million tons of textile waste a year. On average, 700,000 tons of used clothing gets exported overseas and 2.5 million tons of clothing are recycled. But over 3 million tons are incinerated, and a staggering 10 million tons get sent to landfills.



Source: US EPA

**MEANWHILE, COTTON
STRUGGLES ...**

COTTON ISSUES FOR BRANDS.

PRICE

01

Be real: this is the garment business. Nothing is more important than price.

02

Some brands take this seriously, But for way too many, this remains a convenient marketing tactic.

POLICY

03

Unforeseen gov't policies can have unintended consequences: Example: UFLPA.

04

Supply shortages, weather, shipping disruptions

AVAILABILITY

QUALITY

05

Does the fiber help our fabrics?

SUSTAINABILITY

COTTON ISSUES FOR CONSUMERS.

PRICE

01

In surveys, consumers often say that sustainability matters most and they are willing to pay more. That is, until they go shopping. Price wins out with most consumers.

02

Where was it made? How was it made? I hope it fits, it makes me look good and it was cheap!

INDIFFERENCE

PERFORMANCE

03

If a garment wears out, I'll get another one. They're cheap!

04

Fit and style matter, but I'd like it for a discount price.

QUALITY

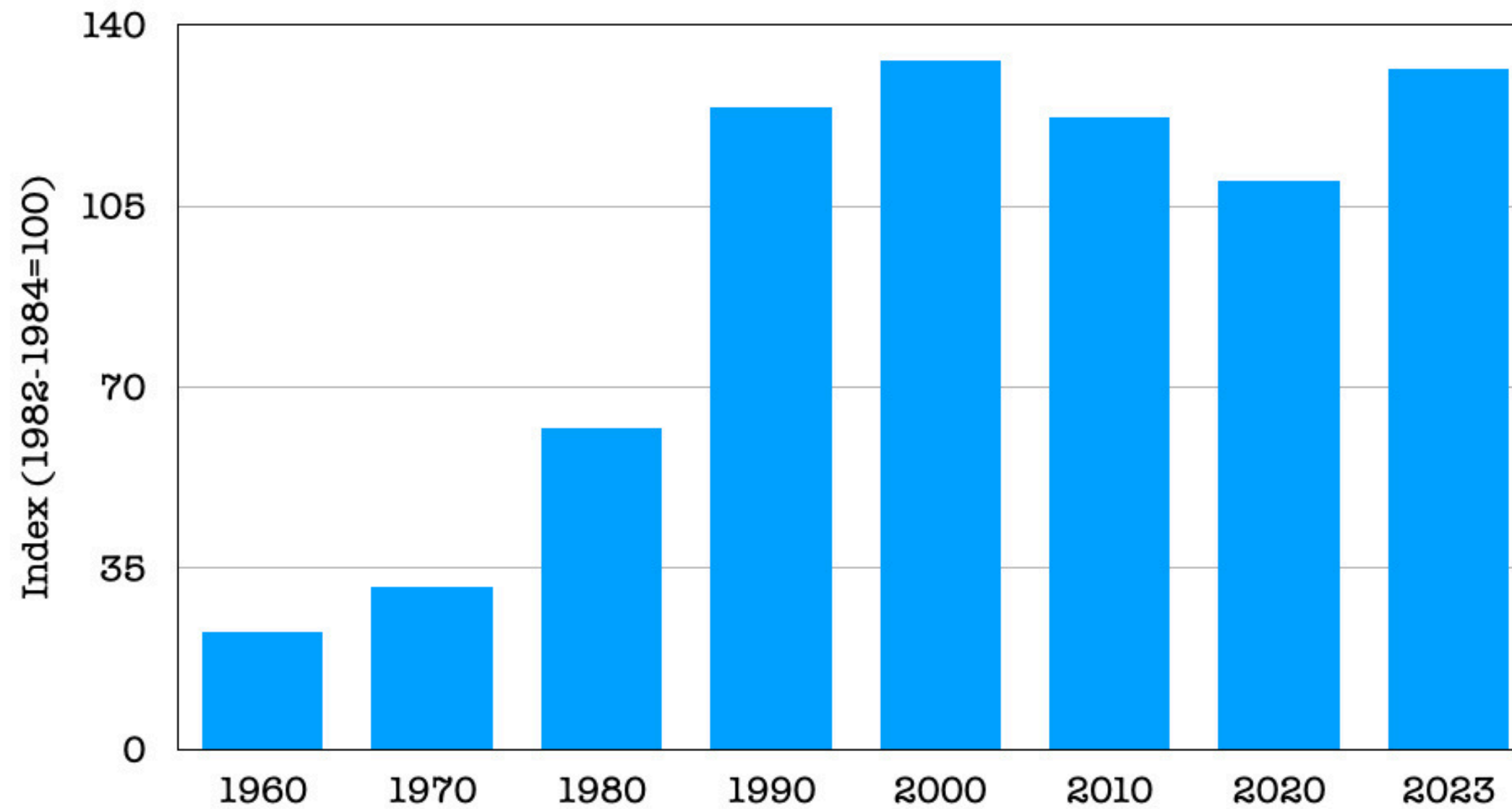
LACK OF KNOWLEDGE

05

Cotton, polyester, viscose? I don't know and don't care. Is the style right for me? Does it fit correctly?

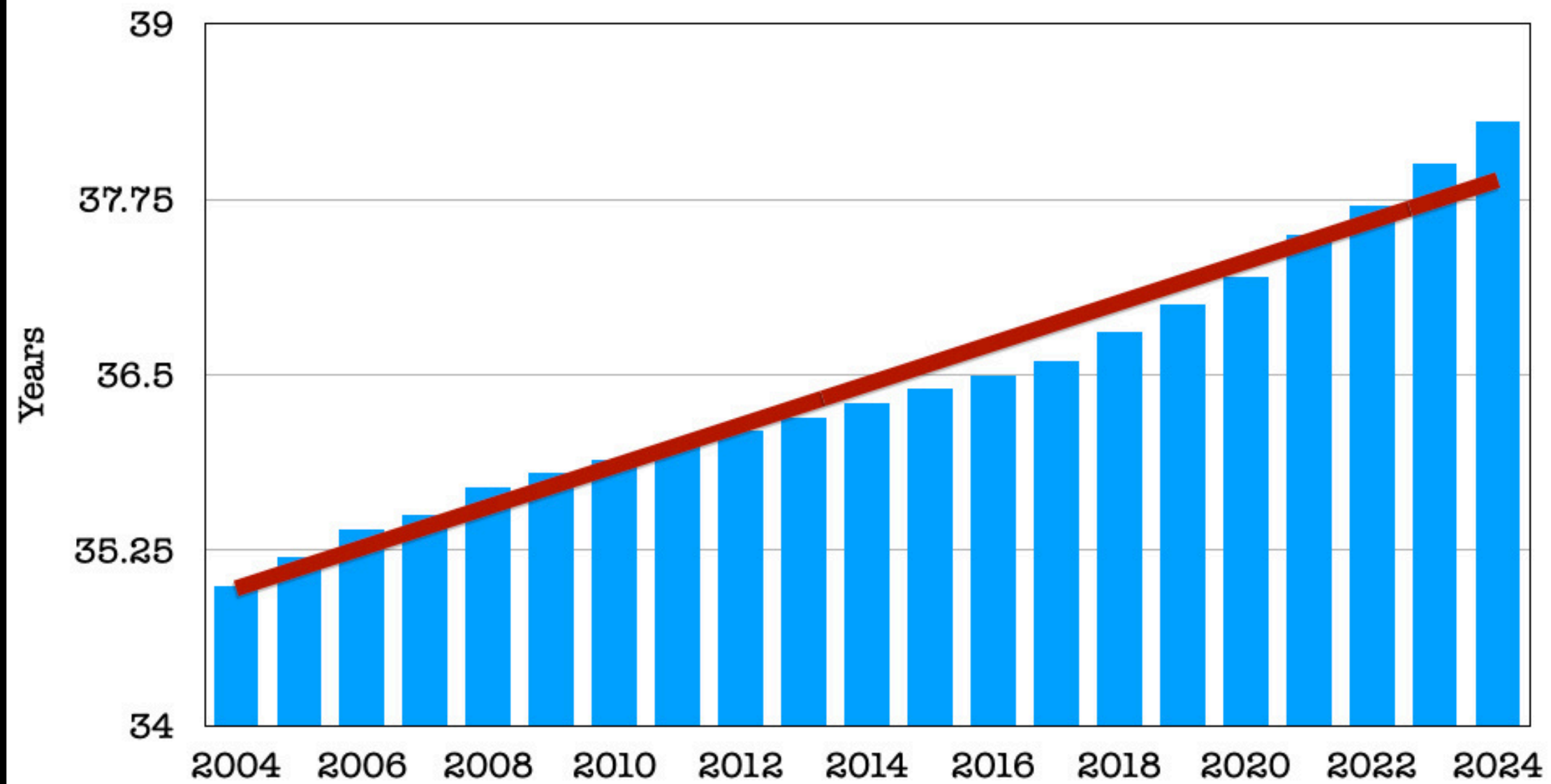
**BUT THE CONSUMER
MARKET IS DAUNTING.**

U.S. Consumer Price Index for Clothing



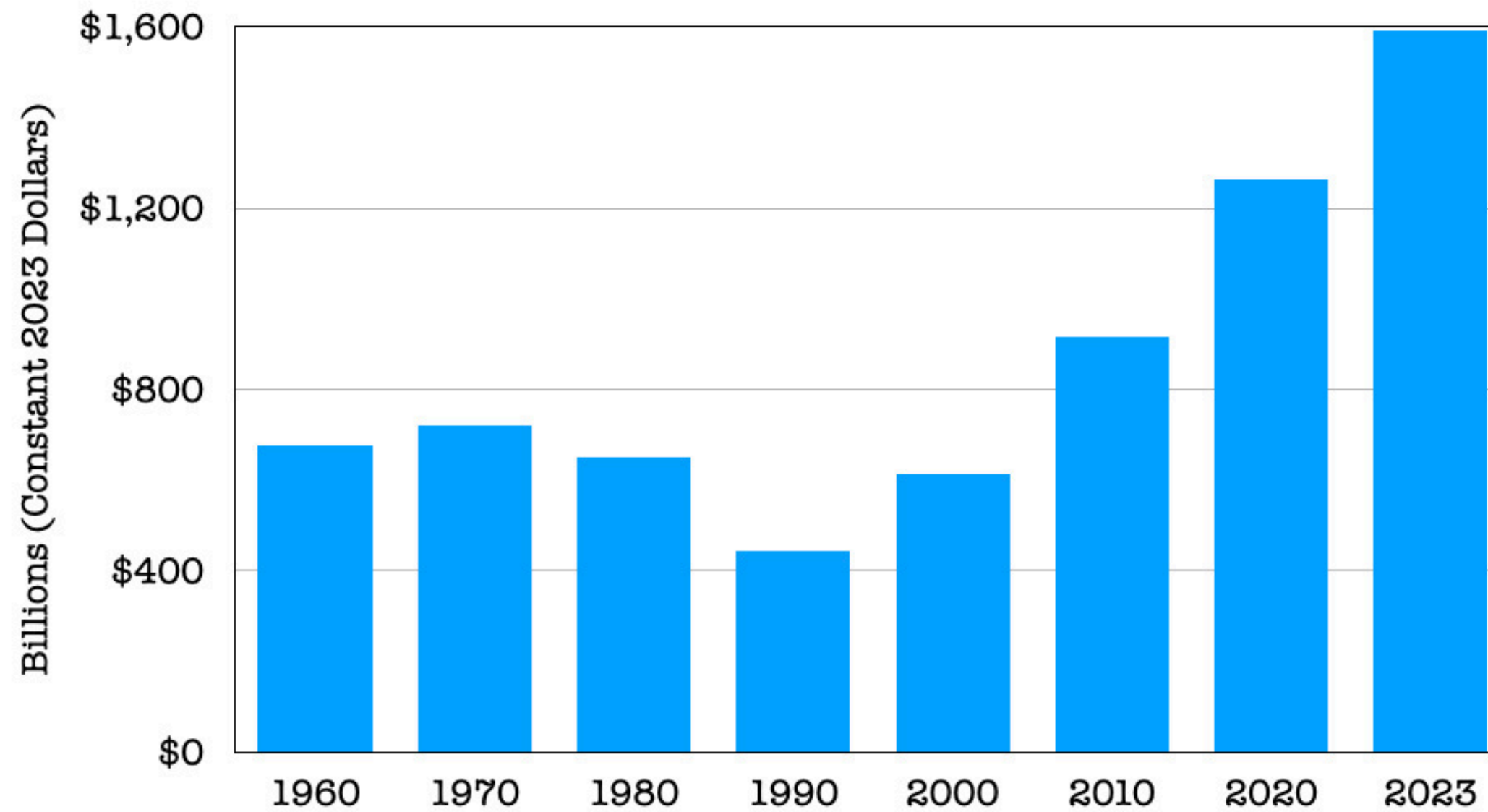
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Getting Older: Median Age of U.S. Population



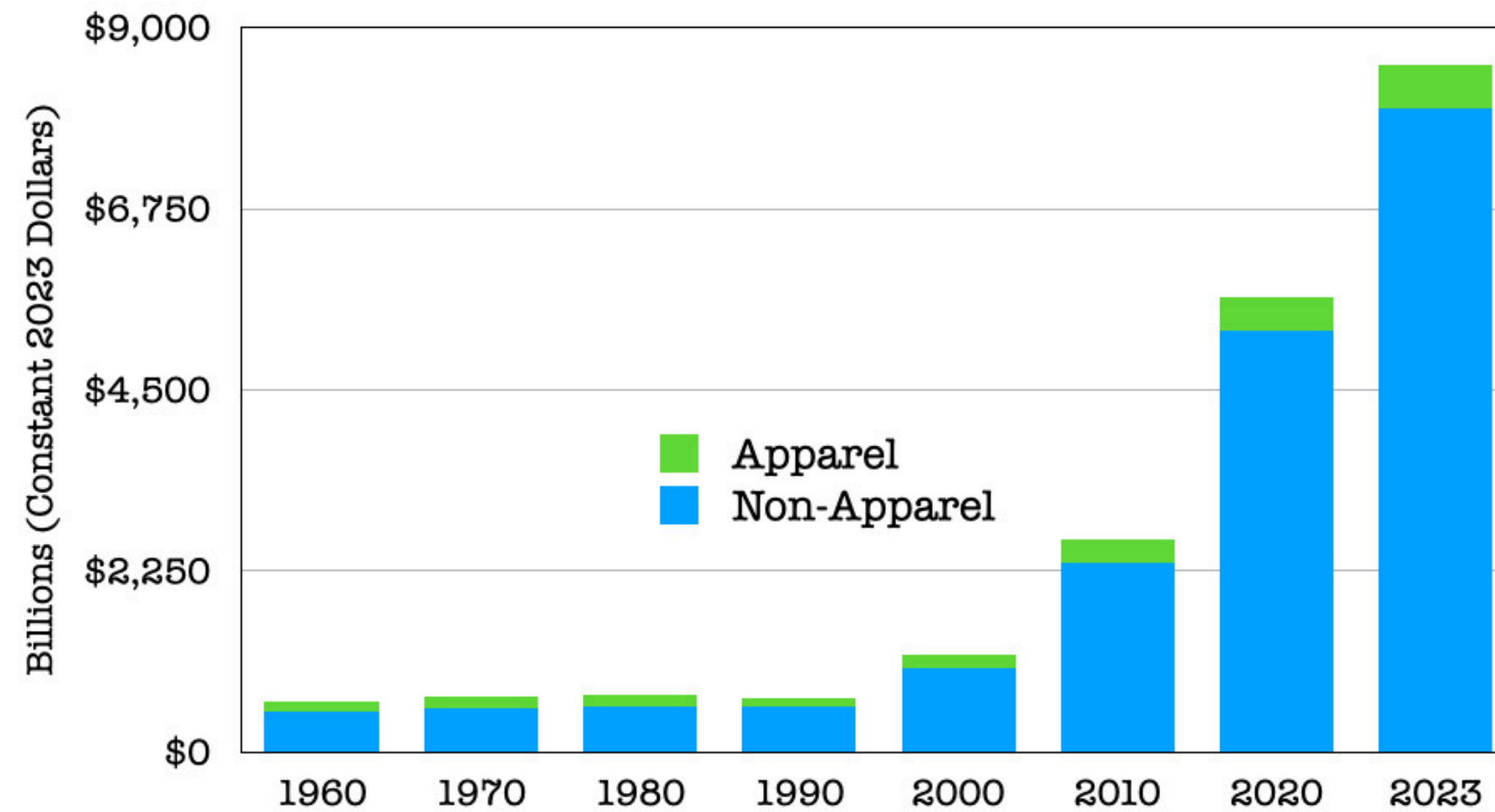
Source: Database.Earth

Per Capita U.S. Consumer Expenditures on Clothing



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

U.S. Consumer Expenditures on Clothing and Non-Clothing



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

SO, WHAT NOW?

RUMINATIONS ...



- **FAST FASHION ISN'T THE SOLE CAUSE OF THE DEMISE OF COTTON, BUT IT IS THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE ENDLESS PURSUIT OF GROWTH.**
- **SYNTHETICS WILL ALWAYS HAVE A PRICE ADVANTAGE OVER COTTON, AS WELL AS SOME PERFORMANCE BENEFITS.**
- **MARKET PRESSURES ARE ALWAYS PRESENT.**
- **COTTON SUFFERS FROM UNKNOWNNS LIKE WEATHER.**
- **COMMUNICATIONS REMAINS A CHALLENGE FOR COTTON -- FROM BOTH IN THE INDUSTRY AND WITH CONSUMERS.**

ARE WE LEFT WITH THIS?



NO. WE CAN DO BETTER.



- **I BELIEVE TECHNOLOGY WILL HELP SETTLE THE FIBER WARS.**
- **BETTER INDUSTRY PRACTICES HAVE TAKEN THE RIGHT STEPS.**
- **REMEMBER: SLOW FASHION STILL EXISTS, AND MUCH OF THE CREATIVITY IN THE INDUSTRY ORIGINATES FROM TRADITIONAL SOURCES.**
- **IN THE END, STANDARDS WILL HAVE TO BE DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED.**
- **PERHAPS THIS COULD BE MANAGED BY THE INDUSTRY, ALTHOUGH IT MAY REQUIRE GOVERNMENT TO STEP IN.**

THANK YOU!

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