Many people think naturally occurring materials are better than synthetic fibres for the planet. But as this infographic shows, in addition to involving horrific cruelty to animals, wool production is extremely damaging to the environment.

The wool industry also inflicts a great deal of suffering on the animals it exploits: PETA affiliates have released exposés of nearly 100 wool-industry operations across four continents — including in the UK — that show sheep being mutilated, abused, and even skinned alive.

Shearers tend to work recklessly, leaving large, bloody wounds on sheep's bodies. Industry schemes such as the “Responsible Wool Standard” haven’t reduced or prevented suffering — they’ve simply created a veil for the wool industry to hide its cruel practices behind.

Eyewitnesses have documented that workers kick, punch, and stamp on sheep to restrain them for shearing.

Pollution isn’t the only way that the wool industry damages the land — forested areas are cleared to make room for sheep, with devastating consequences: Sheep grazing alters the vegetation and causes soil erosion, resulting in the formation of heavily eroded areas known as badlands.

In Patagonia, Argentina, widespread sheep farming led to such severe soil erosion that it triggered a desertification process that currently threatens an estimated 93% of land in the region.

Wool farming can have a serious detrimental effect on the surrounding land, air, and water: PETA affiliates have released exposés of nearly 100 wool-industry operations across four continents — including in the UK — that show sheep being mutilated, abused, and even skinned alive.

Wool farmers commonly try to protect their profits by using lethal measures against local wildlife: In Australia, many landowners kill kangaroos, who are considered “pests” because it’s believed that they compete with sheep for resources.

In the US, farmers and the federal government slaughter millions of coyotes every year to prevent them from preying on farmed animals like sheep.

Farmers commonly cut off lambs’ tails and castrate male sheep, all without any painkillers.

The most significant impact of wool farming on the environment is its contribution to climate change: Sheep are second only to cows in the global production of methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Over the last 250 years, the concentration of methane in the atmosphere has increased by 151% worldwide. In New Zealand, methane emitted by animals — primarily sheep — accounts for over 90% of the country’s total methane emissions.

In one incident, just one cupful of used sheep dip (which contained cypermethrin, a noxious chemical) was dumped into a river, killing 1,200 fish downstream.

Sheep “dip”, a toxic liquid used to rid sheep of parasites, is difficult to dispose of safely and commonly ends up in local waterways.

The wool industry is trying to survive by pointing to a false dichotomy between wool and synthetics. But in reality, many synthetic fabrics have a lesser environmental impact than wool, and numerous eco-friendly, natural alternatives to wool are available, including the following:

In 2019, there’s simply no need for animal-derived wool.