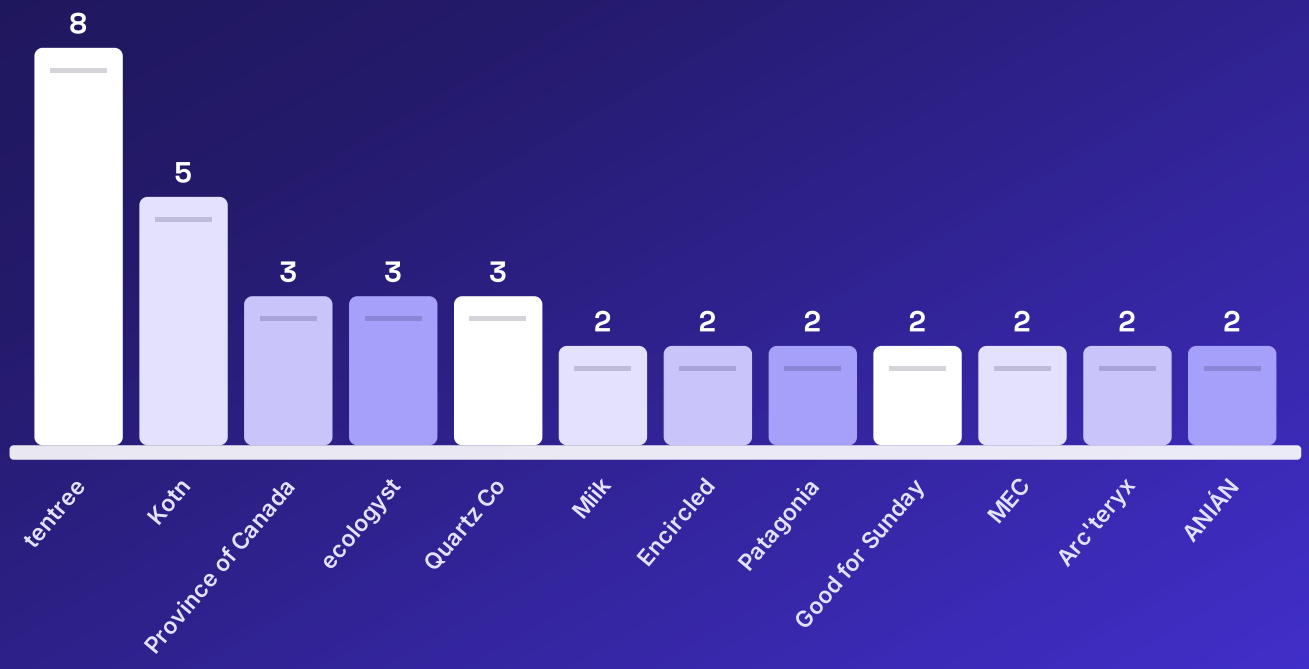
The AI Shelf: Sustainable Apparel

Which sustainable apparel brands do AI assistants put in front of Canadian shoppers, and what earns them the spot?



Brands named or linked in 16 AI answers to shopping questions that didn't mention any brand

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24 answers from ChatGPT and Google AI Mode
Collected October 22, 2026

The short version

When a shopper asks an AI assistant for sustainable clothing, it doesn't return ten blue links. It returns a short shelf of three to seven brands. I asked ChatGPT and Google AI Mode the same 12 shopping questions to see who makes that shelf, and why.

8 of 16

One brand owns the shelf. tentree appeared in half of all answers to questions that named no brand, in both assistants, and was named first more often than anyone else.

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Two assistants, two shelves. Asked for affordable ethical brands that ship in Canada, ChatGPT and Google named no brands in common.

91 vs 26

Google listens to more voices. Google AI Mode linked 91 sources, most of them not brand sites. ChatGPT linked 26, and 24 were brands' own sites.

20 of 24

Proof has a vocabulary. "Recycled" appeared in 20 of 24 answers. The rating site Good On You appeared in 9, often as the referee.

2 of 2

At the decision, referees decide. Both assistants picked the same winner in a head-to-head comparison, leaning on third-party scores.

What it means for e-commerce brands: the AI shelf is built less from what you say about yourself and more from proof others can check, clear product data and programmes with names.

Why the AI shelf matters

Search used to give shoppers a page of options to sort through. AI assistants do the sorting for them.

Ask an assistant for "sustainable hoodie brands in Canada" and the answer is a short list with a sentence of reasoning for each name. That list is the shelf. A brand that isn't on it isn't really in the running, and the shopper may never know it exists.

For e-commerce brands this changes the question. It's no longer only "do we rank?" but "do AI assistants put us on the shelf, at the right moment, for the right reasons?"

What are the best sustainable hoodie brands in Canada?

Google AI Mode

Showed three product cards: a tentree TreeFleece hoodie, a Sans-Façon hooded sweater and an Oraki hoodie, each linked to the brand's store.

ChatGPT

Listed tentree, Kotn, Province of Canada, ecologyst and Patagonia, each linked to its own site.

Three questions this study answers

Who makes the shelf?

Which brands appear at each stage of the shopping journey, and how often.

Is it the same shelf everywhere?

Whether ChatGPT and Google AI Mode recommend the same brands.

What earns a place?

Which sources and proof points the assistants use to decide.

How the study worked

Twelve questions a real shopper might ask, four at each stage of the journey, run in two assistants on the same day.

1

Write the questions

Four per stage, in a shopper's own words. Only the decision questions name a brand.

2

Ask two assistants

ChatGPT in a temporary chat, and Google AI Mode. One fresh conversation per question.

3

Record the answer

Brands named and in what order, sources linked, and the proof points used.

4

Compare

By stage and by assistant, across all 24 answers.

Awareness

Exploring the idea

- What are some sustainable clothing brands from Canada?
- Is it worth paying more for sustainable clothing?
- How can I tell if a clothing brand is actually sustainable and not greenwashing?
- What should I look for in an eco-friendly winter jacket?

Consideration

Comparing options

- What are the best sustainable hoodie brands in Canada?
- Recycled polyester or organic cotton: which is better for the environment?
- Which affordable ethical clothing brands ship within Canada?
- Which Canadian outdoor clothing brands use recycled materials?

Decision

Checking a brand

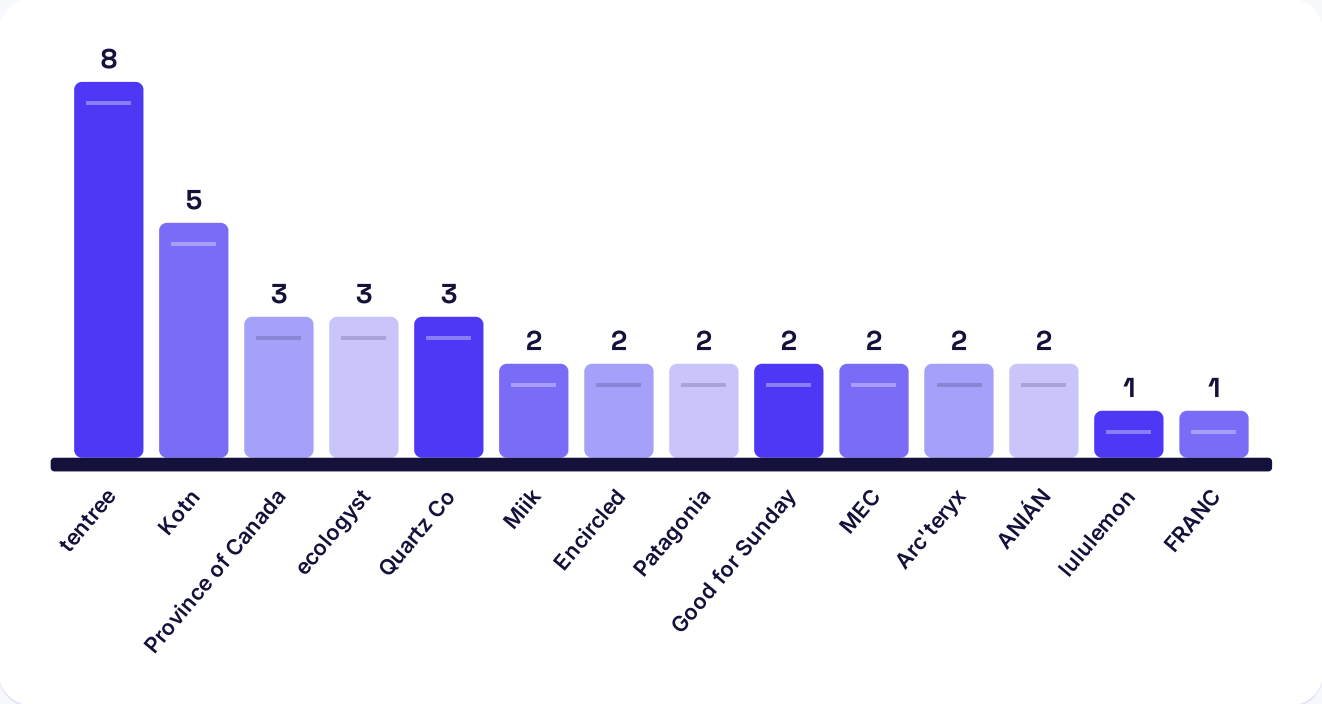
- Is tentree legit and good quality?
- tentree vs Patagonia: which is more sustainable?
- Does Herschel Supply use sustainable materials?
- How does the Arc'teryx repair and resale program work?

Collected on October 22, 2026 from Vancouver. ChatGPT temporary chats don't use saved memory; Google AI Mode ran signed in, so some personalization is possible. Both assistants used location. AI answers change from run to run, so treat these results as a snapshot, not a ranking. Brands and proof points were detected by automated matching of names and keywords in each answer, plus the brand sites it linked; a few brands were picked up from a link rather than the answer text.

Finding 1

One brand owns the shelf

Across the 16 answers to questions that named no brand, 26 different brands appeared. One of them appeared far more than the rest.



Number of answers (out of 16) naming or linking each brand. Twelve more appeared once: The Good Tee, Indyeva, Kanuk, Frank And Oak, Sans-Façon, Kindred Coast, Oraki, Abaka, Danali, FIG Clothing, Wuxly and Renewt.

tentree is the category default

tentree appeared in **8 of 16** unbranded answers, four in each assistant, and was the first brand named in four of them. Kotn came second with five. When an assistant needs one example of a sustainable Canadian brand, tentree is the safe choice.

The shelf is narrow at the top

Only five brands appeared three times or more. Most of the shelf is a long tail of brands that appeared once, often pulled in by a single article or listing. Being on the shelf once is common; being on it consistently is rare.

Finding 2

Two assistants, two different shelves

Same questions, same day, same city. ChatGPT and Google AI Mode built noticeably different shelves.

Question	ChatGPT	Google AI Mode
Sustainable clothing brands from Canada	Kotn, tentree, Encircled, Province of Canada, ecologyst, Miik	tentree, Kotn, Frank And Oak, Miik, Encircled
Is it worth paying more?	*No brands named*	Kotn, tentree, ecologyst
An eco-friendly winter jacket	*No brands named*	Quartz Co
Best sustainable hoodie brands in Canada	tentree, Kotn, Province of Canada, ecologyst, Patagonia	tentree, Sans-Façon, Oraki, Kindred Coast, Good for Sunday
Affordable ethical brands that ship in Canada	Kotn, tentree, Province of Canada, FRANC, Good for Sunday, The Good Tee	FIG Clothing, Abaka, ANIÁN, Danali
Canadian outdoor brands using recycled materials	Arc'teryx, tentree, Quartz Co, Kanuk, MEC, Indyeva	tentree, ANIÁN, MEC, Wuxly, Quartz Co, Arc'teryx, Renewt

In both | ChatGPT only | Google only

Overlap is the exception

Of the eight questions that named no brand, only **three** shared any brand between the two assistants. For affordable ethical brands, the overlap was **zero**: ChatGPT chose established names such as Kotn and tentree, while Google chose smaller labels such as FIG Clothing, Abaka and ANIÁN.

Visibility in one isn't visibility in both

A brand tracking only one assistant sees only half the picture. The two draw on different sources, so they reward different work.

Finding 3

Google reaches for brands earlier

At the start of the journey, ChatGPT often teaches without naming anyone. Google AI Mode brings brands in sooner.



Answers that named at least one brand, out of four per stage.

Education questions are a brand opportunity

For three "how to choose" questions, ChatGPT named **no brands at all**: whether sustainable clothing is worth the price, what to look for in an eco-friendly jacket, and recycled polyester versus organic cotton. Google named brands in two of them, pulling in Kotn, tentree, ecologyst and Quartz Co alongside the advice.

Is it worth paying more for sustainable clothing?

ChatGPT
Explained cost per wear and certifications, and named no brands.

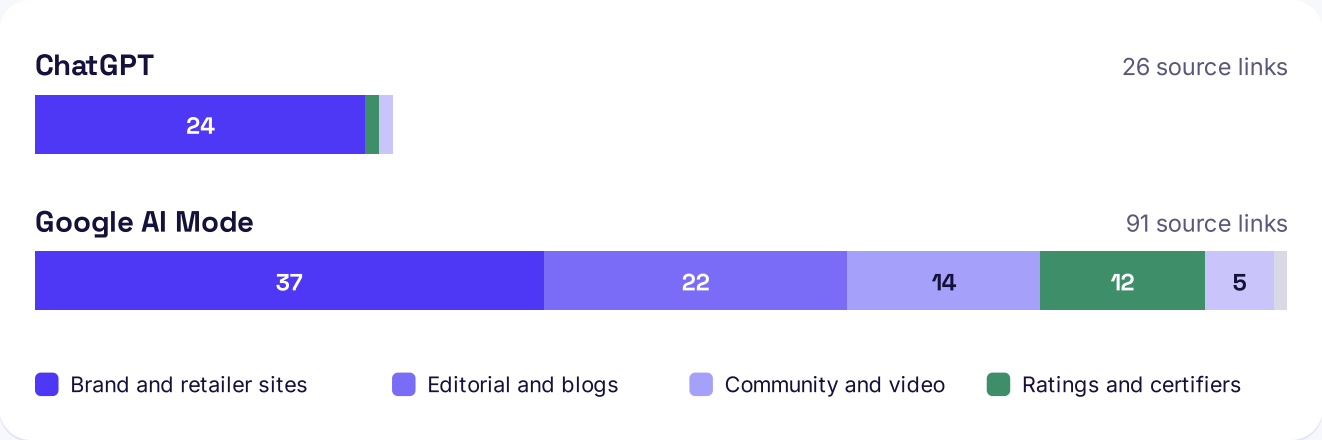
Google AI Mode
Gave the same advice, with Kotn, tentree and ecologyst as examples.

Products, not just brands. Asked for the best sustainable hoodies, Google answered with product cards for specific hoodies. On Google, product data is part of the shelf.

Finding 4

Who the assistants listen to

The sources behind each answer show where the shelf is really built.



Distinct source links across all 12 answers from each assistant, grouped by type.

ChatGPT quotes the brands

24 of ChatGPT's 26 links went to brands' own websites. Its recommendations lean on what brands publish about themselves, so a clear, specific website does a lot of the work.

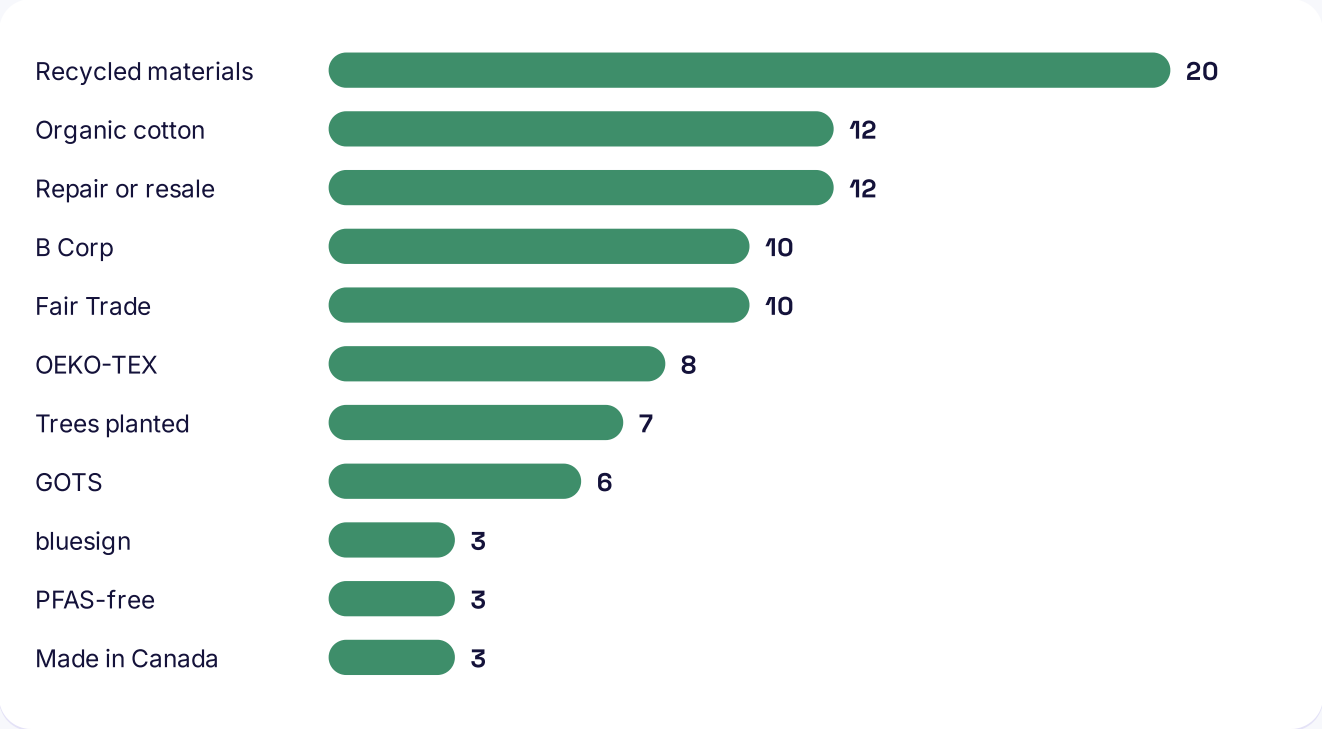
Google wants a second opinion

54 of Google's 91 links were not brand sites: Elle Canada, the My Green Closet blog, Good On You, Trustpilot, Reddit, YouTube, B Corp's directory, and trade press such as Hypebeast and WWD. On Google, others have to talk about you.

Finding 5

The vocabulary of trust

How does an assistant decide a brand is sustainable? It reaches for the same proof points again and again.



Number of answers (out of 24) mentioning each proof point.

Verifiable beats vague

The words that recur are specific and checkable: a material, a certification, a programme. Phrases such as "eco-friendly" or "conscious" rarely carried an answer on their own.

Good On You is the quiet referee

The ratings site Good On You appeared in **9 of 24** answers, as a source or as the judge in a comparison. Third-party ratings give assistants something neutral to point to.

Finding 6

At the decision, referees decide

When shoppers check a specific brand, both assistants answered confidently and in close agreement, using outside evidence.

Is tentree legit and good quality?

ChatGPT
"a legitimate Canadian clothing company, and its quality is generally good," with notes on pilling and price.

Google AI Mode
"a completely legitimate Canadian apparel brand," citing Trustpilot, Reddit and YouTube reviews.

Reviews answer "is it legit?"

Trustpilot and Reddit settled trust questions in both assistants.

tentree vs Patagonia: which is more sustainable?

ChatGPT
"Patagonia is the more sustainable choice overall," citing its repair programme and Good On You's ratings.

Google AI Mode
"Patagonia is generally considered more sustainable overall," quoting each brand's B Corp score.

Scores settle comparisons

B Corp scores and Good On You ratings decided the head-to-head.

How does the Arc'teryx repair and resale program work?

ChatGPT
Explained ReBIRD's repair, trade-in and resale options, linking Arc'teryx's own pages.

Google AI Mode
Explained the same three options under the ReBIRD name, with the same sources.

Names make programmes visible

A programme with a name and its own pages, like ReBIRD, was explained the same way by both.

What e-commerce brands can do

Six moves that follow from the evidence. None of them is a trick; each makes a brand easier for an assistant to recommend with confidence.

Earn proof others can verify

Certifications, B Corp status and ratings on sites like Good On You, shown clearly on product and about pages.

The evidence: Recycled appeared in 20 of 24 answers; Good On You in 9; B Corp scores decided a comparison.

Give your programmes a name

Repair, resale, take-back and impact initiatives, each with a name and a page of its own.

The evidence: Both assistants explained ReBIRD the same way, from Arc'teryx's own pages.

Answer the education questions

Materials guides, how to spot greenwashing, how to choose a winter jacket, written with your product expertise.

The evidence: ChatGPT named no brands in three education answers; Google pulled brands in.

Give Google your product data

Complete product feeds, Product schema and reviews, so products can appear as cards.

The evidence: Google answered the hoodie question with product cards.

Be talked about where AI listens

Editorial coverage, sustainability blogs, review sites and community threads.

The evidence: 54 of Google's 91 sources were not brand sites.

Track the shelf in more than one assistant

A monthly check of your questions across ChatGPT and Google, by stage.

The evidence: Only 3 of 8 unbranded questions shared any brand between the two.

Limits, and what’s next

Read this as a snapshot

- 24 answers from one day, one city and two assistants. A larger sample would sharpen every number.
- AI answers vary between runs, so a brand's position can change from one day to the next.
- Google AI Mode ran signed in, and both assistants used location, which may shape results.
- Counts show how often a brand was named or linked, not traffic or sales. I had no access to any brand's analytics.

Next in the series

The same method, applied to two more categories: **outdoor gear and skincare** in e-commerce, and **Canadian B2B SaaS**. Together they'll show which patterns hold across industries.

Independent research

This is an independent analysis based on publicly available AI answers. I have not worked with, or been endorsed by, any brand mentioned. Brand names are used only to report what the assistants said.

SEO Girl

Where AI meets search, I make brands visible.

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