

Innovation Was the Word. Risk Was the Problem.

TECHTEXTIL NORTH AMERICA · RALEIGH · AUGUST 4-6, 2026

The word innovation got a workout in Raleigh last week.
Budget for it, less so.

COURTNEY CANEER-WILLIAMS

Consultant, Gherzi Americas



Techtextil North America ran three days at the convention center downtown. Small show. That's the appeal.

"For a relatively small show, the breadth of exhibitors is rather remarkable. It's not often you see Kevlar recyclers, coating line manufacturers, hemp fiber producers, and sewing automation companies in the same room."

CRAIG LINDEMAN, FABRIC THEREAFTER, LLC

He also said this:

"Given the instability of current economic conditions, the attitude seemed to be centered around mitigated risks related to market uncertainty, making it a difficult environment for innovation to flourish."

That matched what I heard walking the floor. What's new? Did you hear who just gutted their innovation team? Are we ever going to make more product in this hemisphere? The last one being the most talked about.

Meanwhile, NCTO's 2026 State of the U.S. Textile Industry report, out May 31, counts \$34.3 billion in advanced manufacturing investment in the United States from 2017 through 2024. In 2024 alone, the most recent year with data, the industry put \$5.5 billion into new plants and equipment.¹

So somebody's spending, though where is the focus?

Hemp and circularity got the money

The IND Hemp booth stayed busy all three days. Renaissance Fibers turned their lights on last week, due in part to David McAlister of Texoligy. Once the show closed, the Textile Innovation Engine, powered by The Industrial Commons, hosted by NCSU Wilson College of Textiles, ran a Hemp Symposium on where cottonized hemp actually stands. YUJ LABS came out of it with the most attention, on the strength of its newly patent pending AviraCEL™ clean degumming process.

Circularity money is mostly foreign money. CYCLONE is shopping for localization opportunities in the Americas. EVRNU skipped the booth but worked the show looking for collaboration partners as NUCYCL scales recycled-cotton man-made cellulose around Spartanburg. Cyclone has also tied up with CiCLO®, Intrinsic Materials, and Parkdale Mills on MICROLESS, which goes after microplastics.

The best thing at the show was a party

Trade shows earn their airfare on the people, and the people were at the SPESA-sponsored event run by Maggie and Michael McDonald. The “Alphabet Soup Collective” pulled

together 15 industry associations, backed by the North Carolina Textile Foundation, Dunbartex LLC, Mezger Inc., and Messe Frankfurt. It sold out.

Brands ended up across the table from mills. Chemical suppliers got cornered by policy people, and a few consultants worked the room hard enough to earn their week. Innovation starts there, months before anybody signs off on equipment. The next Shindig will likely be in Atlanta at the joint Texprocess Americas/Techtextil North America show in May 2027.

Christina Rapa, acting president of AATCC, came away with the same read. She pointed to NC State and Thomas Jefferson University connecting alumni with working experts, and to the Shindig for putting people together away from the booth. AATCC also exists to push new testing standards, and shows like this one generate the arguments that produce them. Her example was TM218, Determination of Tactile Sensations of Textiles, which finally gives the industry a way to measure hand-feel with numbers.

That conversation continues October 4–6 at the AATCC Summit in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Automation is the actual answer

Sophie Hall's Fibonix Inc. is working the polymer end. Its Textrusion™ 3D printing technology builds localized durability and engineered stretch into the fiber, aimed at sportswear, medical, and industrial work.

The bigger swing is automation. It's what people mean when they ask whether this hemisphere will ever make more product. One of the Textile Talks I sat in on was led by Lei Lin, CEO and founder of Syniform Inc. Syniform runs end-to-end garment manufacturing, fabric bolt to printed sublimation. Six years of robotics development and AI training on garment production later, the first stage is turning out single-knit underwear at 30 seconds a unit.

SINGLE-KNIT UNDERWEAR, COST PER UNIT

\$1.29

UNITED STATES

\$1.67

CHINA

Roughly 23% cheaper, accounting for the 30% duty on Chinese imports and utilizing the Reshoring Initiative TCO model.

This was Syniform's first show. Lei walked out with connections at the Wilson College of Textiles, Gildan, and Henderson Sewing, and said what struck him was how willing people were to hand over resources and contacts. I wasn't surprised.

With this type of collaboration and automated innovation, we can create the next micro factory and inspire the next generation.

Stacy Flynn quoted Chief Seattle in her recent EVRNU TEDx talk: "Man does not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. What he does to the web, he does to himself." Her own addition also stuck with me. "Our strong minds have to bow to the innovation inside our hearts", she said, "instead of staying stuck in the what-ifs".

TTNA, Raleigh had no shortage of what-ifs. The innovation already exists—the key is directing capital strategically to where it can deliver the greatest impact.

1. *Bureau of Economic Analysis, Investment in Private Fixed Assets, Textile Mills and Textile Product Mills/Apparel and Leather and Allied Products.*