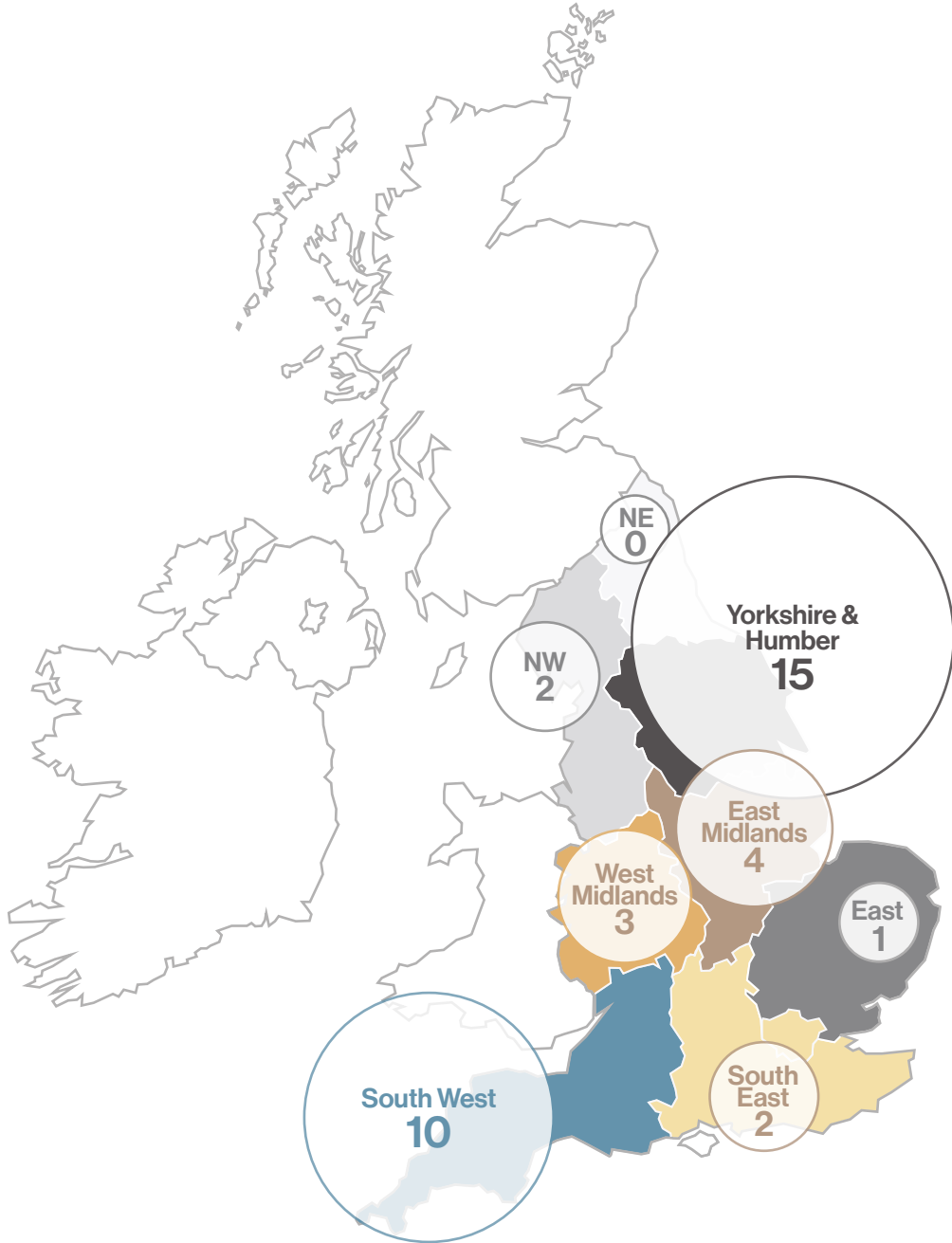


Homegrown Fibre and Fashion Feasibility Study

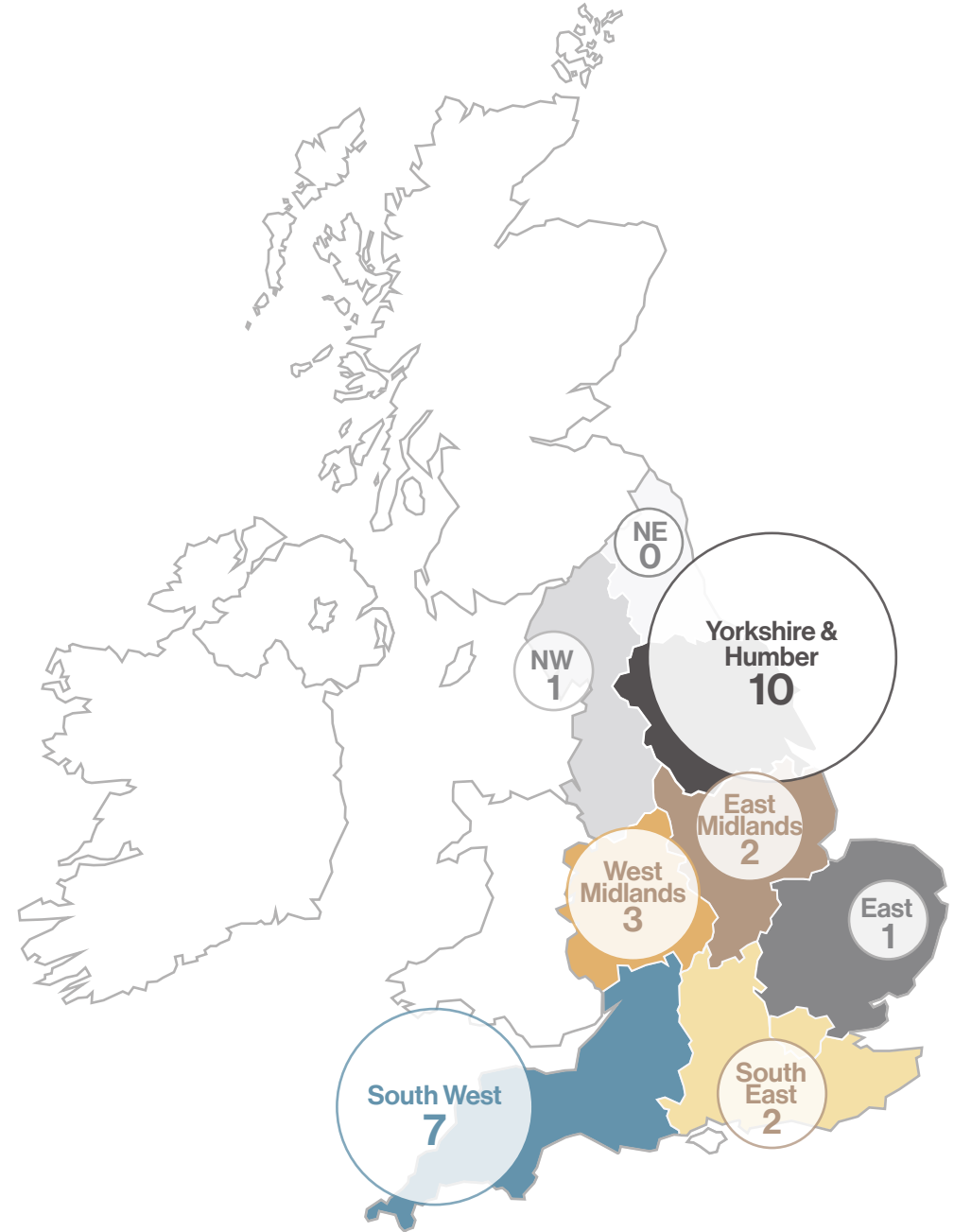
(Phase 1)



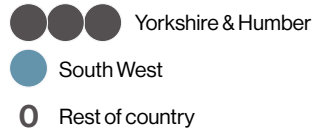
Distribution of fibre processing facilities in England



Distribution of fibre processing facilities in England accessible to small fibre producers



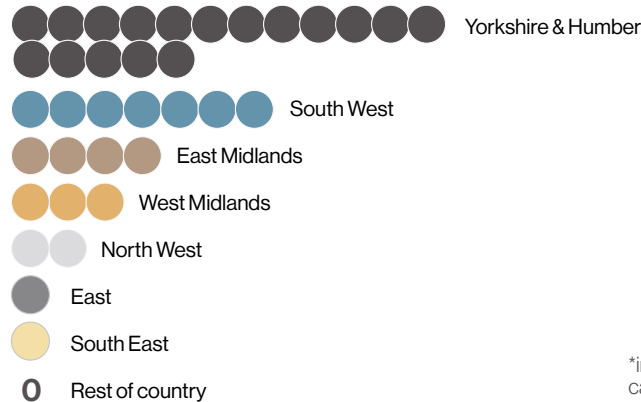
Number of facilities with official trainee / apprenticeship program



Number of facilities with organic, biodynamic or regenerative certification



Number of facilities that process protein fibres*



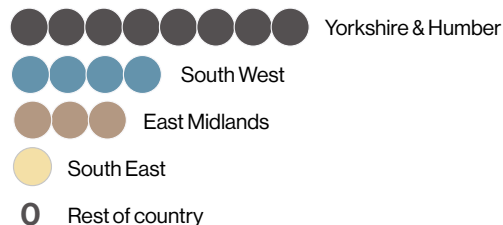
*including wool, alpaca, cashmere, angora and mohair

Number of facilities specialised in cellulose fibre processing*

0

*including flax, hemp and nettle

Number of facilities that process protein and cellulose fibres



Project Background

This is the result of a short research project undertaken in 2021 to map facilities in England that process natural fibres, as well as their location by region, their accessibility to small producers, whether or not they offer an official traineeship program, and whether they are certified to process organic, biodynamic or regeneratively farmed fibres.

The purpose of this project was to better understand our national fibre processing infrastructure; an important first step in understanding the feasibility of developing a bioregional model for textile and fashion production on a regional or national scale.

Key Findings

- Nearly 70% of the 37 facilities reviewed are located in one of just two regions - Yorkshire & Humber or the South West. Of those in Yorkshire, the majority are concentrated around Huddersfield and Bradford, representing a potential geographic vulnerability with could be strengthened through provision of decentralised facilities in outlying regions.
- Facilities certified to process organic, biodynamic or regeneratively farmed fleece form just 13% of those surveyed, representing a key bottleneck in our system for premium fibres with some lead times for processing being up to two years.
- Facilities with formalised vocational training or apprenticeship schemes represent just 10% of those surveyed, with many expressing concern about lack of access to training for new generations of fibre and textile workers. Moreover, many of our small mills are family-run and operated by later stage career workers who do not have plans or programs in place for transferring their knowledge and businesses to younger workers, representing a high risk of knowledge and expertise being lost from our fibre processing system within the next ten years.
- Cellulose fibre production is a newly emerging area for homegrown fibres and fashion but currently lacking specialised commercial processing facilities.

Research Notes & Methodology

- Data was collected by desktop review and verified with phone calls, emails or in person meetings wherever possible.
- Due to the pandemic, many facilities were found to be closed or operating with skeletal staff, and in these instances we were not able to collect data. For this reason the study is not exhaustive, but provides a fair, high level representation of our national fibre processing infrastructure.
- Facilities are included if they provide one or more natural fibre or dye processing services, from scouring through to finishing, and are able and/or willing to work with domestically grown natural fibres or dyes.
- Facilities able to process in quantities less than 150 kilos are considered accessible to small producers.
- Tanneries are included only if they are organically certified and/or offering vegetable or oak bark tanning.
- Individual artisans are not included in this instance as there are too many to list individually and their production capacity tends to be very low, yet most fit well with the fibreshed model of production and are receptive to working with homegrown fibres on a commission basis.

Future Steps

Subsequent phases of this feasibility study need to examine both our fibre production capacity and market demand for homegrown textile fibres. Systems analysis will help to join the dots between what is viable to grow, process and manufacture into clothing, including how our processing infrastructure needs to be improved and strengthened to facilitate a more bioregional model of production.

A close-up, macro photograph of wool fibers, showing their intricate, crimped structure and natural texture. The fibers are light beige or off-white, with some darker spots and variations in thickness. The background is dark and out of focus, making the wool fibers the central focus of the image.

Contributors

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Thank you too to all the facilities who took the time to talk with us at length.

www.southwestenglandfibreshed.co.uk