



THE ASSOCIATION & VOICE OF THE US SEWN PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

## **SEAMS members eye growth in 2025 amid policy shifts, domestic investments**

**By Devin Steele**

The U.S. textile/cut-and-sew industry is entering 2025 with cautious optimism, as manufacturers, suppliers and brands navigate a shifting economic and policy landscape, according to SEAMS members who participated in this Review & Forecast feature. While 2024 presented ongoing challenges – including inflation, global trade competition and supply chain disruptions – many companies found opportunities to invest in domestic production, automation and strategic partnerships. With a new administration signaling strong support for American-made goods, industry leaders are hopeful that reshoring efforts, policy shifts and increased consumer demand will fuel growth in the years ahead.

Across the sector, businesses reported mixed results last year, with some experiencing slowdowns due to global competition and economic uncertainty, while others capitalized on strategic investments and new market opportunities. Companies such as America Knits are betting on rising consumer interest in US-made products, while suppliers such as Champion Thread Company and Shuford Yarns are positioning themselves for an anticipated rebound. Meanwhile, equipment providers such as Henderson Machinery and Henderson Sewing Machine Co. see renewed interest in automation and efficiency as the industry looks for ways to remain competitive.

Our *Review & Outlook* takes a closer look at the current state of the U.S. textile industry, examining key trends, business strategies and the impact of shifting trade policies. With a renewed focus on domestic manufacturing, workforce development and technological innovation, the industry faces both challenges and opportunities. Can American textile companies capitalize on the momentum, or will economic pressures and policy uncertainties temper growth? The coming year will be critical in shaping the future of our sector.

Following, in alphabetical order, are reports from SEAMS members who responded to our survey questions, though some requested to remain anonymous and are positioned at the bottom of this article.

### **America Knits**

America Knits LLC, based in Swainsboro, GA, reported that business was slow in first quarter of '24, but picked up only marginally through the year, despite pressures from cheap de minimis violators along with the usual fast fashion brands.

“Our in-house brand Seeds2seams helped with our continued messaging of sustainability and American-made quality,” said company President Steve Hawkins.

America Knits has its budget set for this year and expects massive growth year over year with the addition of some major projects that are USA-made iconic brands, he noted. “We are extremely excited and particularly with the new administration’s push for American Made!”



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Hawkins said. “Our customers are doing well, which transfers to our plants, both cut/sew, screen print/embroidery, and in-house laundry.”

Hawkins added that he believes the next four years will be momentous in creating more capacity across our industry. “I’m always encouraged to see other American manufacturers, and we should all do everything we can to help each other, including sharing best practices and attending events with our USA trade organizations like SEAMS and the Southern Textile Association.

### **Champion Thread Company**

Even though 2024 demand was weaker than historical trends, Champion Thread Company (CTC), Gastonia, NC, recorded one of its best years ever for new client acquisition,” according to Jim Lee, Vice President of Sales. “We attribute this to several things, including increasing sales staff, aggressive investment in flexible domestic manufacturing and automation, strategic new product introductions, and business agility strategies we have undertaken in recent years.”

The addition of CTC’s domestic dyehouse in 2023 and its subsequent expansion has enabled the company to become more flexible and more responsive to customer needs, he said. It also took more efficient product inventory positions, allowing the thread manufacturer to fulfill orders faster and gain market share.

“We have been experiencing an uptick in business in the past few months and are optimistic that 2025 will mark measurable improvements in demand for our products,” Lee said. “Of course, significant uncertainties remain, particularly around trade and potential tariffs. Generally, our anticipation for a better year directly reflects the optimism that many of our customers currently express for their business and the manufacturing industry. We see good potential for a shift in demand to more normal levels for the remainder of this year.”

While he and his colleagues do not see reshoring progressing as rapidly as we had hoped, they do anticipate continued opportunities for nearshoring sewn products, he added.

### **Henderson Machinery, Inc.**

Last year was slower-than-usual, and “we saw our customers struggling with the same issues,” said Sean Burke, Director of Business Development at Henderson Machinery, Inc., Greensboro, NC “The volatility of the pandemic finally settled, and we saw a lot of manufacturers being very lean and tight when it comes to new equipment and even stocking parts in house. Inflation, company acquisitions, personnel changes and the overall uncertainty of what the next few weeks played a huge role in the lower-than-expected equipment sales.”



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He added that as its traditional customer base got very tight, the company saw a huge growth in the technical textile and medical textile industries. “Those entities seem to move a lot faster when it comes to adopting new technologies, but they are very secretive in what they are actually making. In the latter part of the year, we had a good deal of private workshops at our Greensboro facility and had a number of our technicians tailoring a training and R&D workshop onsite at factories or branded headquarters.”

Turning to this year, Burke said he’s “very optimistic. We are in a unique position where we see nearly the entire textile supply chain, and in November we saw our yarn customers get large/increased orders and forecasting numbers for the new year. That momentum remained towards the end of the year, and we hope to see that trickle down to the supply chain at the end of Q1. LinkedIn has exposed us and our expertise to a wider audience. That alone has my schedule filling up with training programs and process engineering jobs in the next three months.”

He posited that the election was a deciding factor in how most manufacturers viewed 2025. “Good or bad, it seemed like most people just wanted something different, and the results gave them the feeling of light at the end of the tunnel. Only time will tell, and we hope to be around to assist our customers for as long as possible.”

He cautioned that US manufacturing still has its uncertainties with the new administration when it comes to tariffs. “We are seeing a more conscious consumer, and that may be the perfect opportunity to earn some lifetime customers and educate them that US manufacturing isn’t stuck in the early 1900s.”

Burke went on to offer advice for anyone looking to raise their profiles and expand their businesses. “You have to go to events such as those hosted by the SEAMS, the Southern Textile Association (STA) or the Advanced Textiles Association (ATA) and network with people at those events or on LinkedIn. The list goes on, and you will have the opportunity to meet some people that could be suppliers or end users of your products. I cannot stress this enough – if you are looking for a specific yarn, fabric or even someone to help with some product development, talk to your suppliers! They know a lot of people and can easily connect you with someone or point you in the right direction.”

### **Henderson Sewing Machine Co., Inc.**

Last year presented significant challenges, including a consequential election, geopolitical instability, inflation, a staggering national debt and an urgent need for sound judgment and world peace, reported Frank Henderson, CEO of Henderson Sewing Machine Co., Inc, Andalusia, AL.



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“In this context, Henderson Sewing Machine stands as a beacon of innovative ideas, practical solutions and a commitment to making a positive impact on our industry,” he said. “We attended trade expos, conferences and speaking engagements to stay informed and actively engaged. Most customers and vendors in the textile space saw a rough year with even or reduced sales, as overall volume decreased in our industry. The bright spot for our business has been automation and robotic integration into the textile sewn products space.”

The outlook for the balance of 2025 appears positive, though customer comments and job markets reports will remain critical to the year’s overall success, he added.

“There are positive changes such as the government looking to close the de minimis loophole, Henderson said. “But workforce development is tough; interest rates are too high; manufacturers do not have enough orders to stay ahead; and automation & technology have not been widely adopted by manufacturers because their business volumes have been down. The new Trump Administration will make sweeping changes but will take time to implement.”

Henderson, who has spent decades in the industry, offered his further take on things with sage insights and advice.

“Nearly 20 percent of Americans aged 65 and older are employed – double the share from 35 years ago,” he said. “Many of these workers remain in the workforce for mental stimulation, camaraderie, flexibility, etc. And many found they cannot live on Social Security alone and were never meant to. These are people who can mentor younger employees. This approach helps address current workplace challenges and contributes to alleviating labor shortages. Some companies offer phased retirement programs, an opportunity for reduced hours while staying actively engaged.”

The textile industry needs to adopt many of these principles and have a little government assistance to help it play on a level playing field, he continued. “Local manufacturing can work in America and rebuild many towns and cities across our land, and we can rebuild our factories with automation, technology and robotics. We can teach and train the next generation of the workforce what we all learned over a lifetime. And we can find ways to all be a part of the vertical supply chain by partnering, cooperating and collaborating to help each other manufacture in the USA.”

He added: “My concern is that Washington will ‘get in the way’ of manufacturers growing their business and will continue passing trade legislation that hurts manufacturing in the USA and picks industry winners and losers, just as they have for years.”



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## **MMI Textiles**

Based in Brooklyn, OH, with narrow weaving operations in Lenoir, NC, MMI Textiles was able to buck the trend of mediocrity in 2024, according to President Nick Rivera.

“While we recognize that the textile market has been impacted by plant closures and other factors, MMI was fortunate and blessed to see significant growth in 2024,” he said. “Our world-class team, combined with our comprehensive product line, has created a single-source solution for our customers. We strive to build strong partnerships with our suppliers and invest heavily in innovation, which have been major contributors to our growth.

Based on those factors, as well as its recent acquisition of Jason Mills, LLC, the company is optimistic that 2025 will be another great year MMI, he added. “We understand that there may be further disruption in the textile supply base. However, our team is well prepared to pivot where necessary. We also look forward to strengthening our distribution partnerships with companies such as Velcro, Milliken & Company, Trelleborg and ITW, to name a few.

Rivera added that the company has had several productive conversations with brands and manufacturers looking to reshore opportunities based on the current marketplace. “Our team is committed to supporting our customers navigate the changing supply base, and leadership will continue to focus on pursuing strategic acquisitions.”

## **Shuford Yarns LLC**

Shuford Yarns LLC, Hickory, NC, saw a significant improvement in sales in 2024 over previous years, according to President & CEO Marvin Smith. “This was accomplished by entering new markets with legacy products as well as various new yarn products that we developed with our customers. We saw more consistent running schedules due to the improved business.”

He added that the company is cautiously optimistic with sales projections for 2025. New markets and new products will highlight the improved business conditions, he noted.

“We are seeing an increased excitement due to the recent election,” Smith said. “With possible interest rate cuts over 2025, we expect that to generate new business opportunities. When the energy sector is opened up, we think all business will respond with an overall positive impact on business.”

Shuford Yarns continues to see its business gain back the business it lost due to the pandemic, he added. “We are just now experiencing more normal sales prior to the pandemic years. Overall, we have still not gotten back to pre-pandemic volumes, but we have seen much improvement.”



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### **Anonymous fabric supplier**

“While we’re coming off our best year ever driven by increased product lines and a strong supply chain base, 2025 is poised to be even bigger. Recruitment numbers within the Armed Forces along with this administration’s efforts to grow our military are already resulting in larger requirements on existing programs. In addition, consumer confidence will provide a great uptick in US textile requirements along with increased costs overseas.”

### **Anonymous industry resource**

With business better in terms of an increase in demand for advanced manufacturing and training solutions, a leader of this organization said she expects 2025 to be flat for brands and retailers due to potential for increased volatility related to changing trade and compliance policies. In addition, brands and retailers are not committed to transformation yet, she said, and the prospects for US manufacturing to grow is largely contingent on their commitments, she said. “It is slow going but we are starting to see some optimistic breakthroughs,” she said.

She added that “We need a moonshot that secures a commitment by government to match brand and retailer commitments to reshore with investment in advanced manufacturing – think solar, EV, chips and private/public programs.”

### **Anonymous textile dyer & finisher**

A textile finisher noted that the level of business was down in 2024 due largely to less expensive competition, mostly imported products, but she is expecting a better 2025. “We are ready to take on additional business. We have a great operation, excellent management and workforce. We continuously improve our operations.”

She pointed out that there was a lot of uncertainty in 2024 with inflation, higher interest rates and the presidential election. “There is still uncertainty with the federal policies that will be put in place with the new administration and the effect on manufacturing and the economy.”

She added that she is hopeful that the de minimis loophole will be closed this year. “Eliminating it is an obvious and easy way to increase tariffs and stop dumping cheap products into the USA,” she said. “Proposed tariffs could negatively impact the business. There are some fabrics and raw materials that are not available in the USA. Increasing/adding tariffs will increase US manufacturers’ costs that rely on imported raw materials.”



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### **Anonymous yarn producer**

Business was down about 50 percent last year, due to the poor economy and absence of military business, according to a representative of a yarn manufacturer. However, this year is starting out to be probably twice as productive as last year, he added.

The company is preparing for it by installing new equipment and moving unnecessary equipment to other facilities. He added that customer orders have increased, and their projections are increasing

“With current administration implementation of reciprocal tariffs, we expect our business to improve dramatically for at least the next four years,” he said.

Saying the US textile industry is “currently fragile,” he said he even wants its competitors to stay in business to keep the industry strong. “The US cannot afford to lose much more of this industry to remain viable and keep Berry [Amendment].”