

Yvon Chouinard is founder and owner of Patagonia, Inc., based in Ventura, California. He began in business by designing, manufacturing, and distributing rock climbing equipment in the late 1950's. His tinkering led to an improved ice axe that facilitated the French ice climbing technique and is the basis for modern ice axe design. In 1964 he produced his first mail order catalog, a one page mimeographed sheet containing advice not to expect fast delivery during climbing season. Business grew slowly until 1972 when Yvon added rugby shirts to his catalog and his clothing business took off.

In the late 1980's, Patagonia's success was such that Yvon considered early retirement. In some ways he would have preferred to disappear into the South Pacific with his fly rod and surfboard. However, he decided to continue directing Patagonia's course, in part to use the company to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis. As part of this goal, Patagonia instituted an Earth Tax, pledging 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of the natural environment. In 2001, Yvon, along with Craig Mathews, owner of West Yellowstone's Blue Ribbon Flies, started One Percent For The Planet, an alliance of businesses that contribute at least 1 percent of their net annual sales to groups on a list of researched and approved environmental organizations.

Yvon spends much of his time in the outdoors and serving on the boards of numerous environmental groups. "I work every day of my life. My job is to be the 'outside' man, studying lifestyles around the world, coming up with ideas for new products, new market trends, seeing that Patagonia stays relevant in a rapidly changing world."