

### Global Organic Cotton apparel and home textiles market tops one billion dollars

Organic production is based on a system of farming that maintains and replenishes soil fertility without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers or genetically modified seeds. Global organic cotton apparel and home products market tops one billion dollars in 2006, according to results of a report from Berkeley, CA-based Organic Exchange (OE).

According to the Organic Exchange Organic Cotton Market Report 2007, a Global retail sale for organic cotton products increased 85% to \$1.1 billion in 2006, up from \$583 million in 2005, and is projected to increase 83% to \$1.9 billion by the end of 2007. OE projects that this market will increase to \$3.5 billion in 2008, \$4.5 billion in 2009 and \$6.8 billion in 2010.

According to a survey by Swiss textile machinery manufacturer Oerlikon Textile, organic cotton represents less than 1% of the total cotton cultivation and the leading countries, where organic cotton was grown during 2004-05 are Turkey (40%), India (25%), United States (7.7%) and China (7.3%).

The top ten organic cotton producing countries were (in order by rank): Turkey, India, China, Syria, Peru, the United States, Uganda, Tanzania, Israel, and Pakistan. Nearly half (44.9%) of the organic cotton was grown in the Middle East (Turkey, Syria and Israel), while approximately one-third (32.9%) of organic cotton was grown in Southeast Asia (India and Pakistan).

The shift towards sustainable production and farming will continue and consumers will continue to demand organically grown food, wear clothes, use personal care products and bed linen made with organic cotton. On the other hand, due to unclear organic cotton standards, just because the label on certain textile product read 'made from organic cotton' does not mean that that methods used to produce those meet the environmental and social compliance standards. It imperative to note that even though the cotton producing countries start growing organic cotton, they will still have certify that they are helping the environment by following labor laws, environment friendly processing techniques and hiring workers who are of working age.

The organic cotton market has also seen the standardization of processing standards, i.e. Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), Oeko-Tex, and health, safety and social standards, such as SA 8000 and Fair Trade. Despite the growing demands of organic cotton, cost of certification and labeling, and complexities in standardization processes are not favoring most of organic cotton growing countries. Certification and labeling are the areas that also need attention, as they are considered as an additional cost by some growers. The de-facto organic cotton produced in many countries could be easily certified as organic if the awareness and certification services are made available at reasonable rate.

In early 1990's many countries produced organic cotton, but did not continue due to high benefit-cost ratios. International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) claims that fiber quality is similar in both conventional and organic farming systems. Organic cotton production yields are not higher than inorganic cotton production. Without a price premium, organic cotton is not profitable to the farmers. If the market demand for organic cotton increases and leading brands and retailers assure premium prices to organic cotton growers, then organic farming in the long run can be assured.

While talking about the organic cotton apparel, Rebecca Calahan Klein, OE program director and primary author of the above mentioned report says that organic apparel has become more fashion-forward, with a wider variety of products across product categories. Apparel represented 85% of total market demand in 2006, with home textiles (bedding and towels) amounting to 10% and personal care products 5%. Growing number of retailers and brands like Marks & Spencer, Walmart and Carrefour have adopted business strategies aligning with sustainability objectives.

Consumers increasingly prefer "green products" and have heralded a significant market growth for the organic cotton products. The future will be mutually decided by the strategy of the brands and retailers, who should work in coordination with their manufacturing partners and farming community.

In Pakistan a successful example is the Organic Cotton project started in January 2000 by Kings Group who are one of the largest apparel manufacturing units in Pakistan. Kings Organic Cotton project yields 80,000 kg of organic cotton lint and supplies garments made of Organic Cotton to customers in Europe and the United States.

The project is based in Winder a small village 72 km from Karachi in the fertile Las Bela district in the province of Balochistan which was chosen to grow organic cotton. The village is accessible from Karachi by a major highway. Today cotton of the highest quality is grown on 3000 acres of land cultivated on the principles of organic agriculture. This project is supervised by Mr. Tadeu Caldas, Chief Consultant of ECOTROPIC, an Organic Agriculture Consultancy based in Germany and has been certified by Ecocert International.

The company partners 40 local farmers in the production of organic cotton. These farmers are evaluated for their suitability and induction into the program. Historical records of the cultivation of their land are assessed and status of the land is determined. The farmers are trained continuously and agricultural scientists work with them throughout the year. Onsite laboratories in Winder nearby ensure healthy crops and monitor the quality of cotton.

This undertaking by Kings Group is a good model for Pakistan's textile industry to diversify into the highly lucrative market of organic textiles. ♦