



Interview Mr. Bruce Atherly, Executive Director, Cotton Council International

Mr. Bruce Atherly, Executive Director, Cotton Council International recently met with the editorial team of Pakistan Textile to discuss Pakistan as an important market for US Cotton. This meeting was attended by Mr. Mazhar Hussain Mirza.

Mr. Bruce Atherly, Executive Director, Cotton Council International.



PTJ: It's a pleasure to meet you Mr Atherly. Please tell me about the Cotton USA (Cotton Council International) and how does it is organised?

Bruce Atherly: Cotton Council International is formed in October 1956, almost 60 years ago with a mission to combat the growth of synthetic fibre. It is interesting to note that 60 years later it still remains an issue for cotton. Cotton Council International's job is to promote US cotton fibre and other products overseas. We export 95% of our cotton either in raw fibre form or yarn. CCI around the world works with mills, manufacturers, brands and retailers to promote US Cotton.

PTJ: It's very interesting what you just mentioned about cotton being threatened by manmade fibre even after 60 years. You have done well to defend this very important crop which has shaped the industrial world. How much of a threat is it today in your opinion?

While the cotton consumption over the last ten years has basically remained flat around 110 to 112 million bales per year, the synthetics have continued to grow. Our share volume is flat but stable which is good but our share of total fibre has fallen, as 4 to 5 percent annual growth has gone to synthetics. I consider this as a long-term threat, as fibre

consumption moving to synthetics could ultimately impact our total volume. What we would like to see is the total cotton consumption growing again as it was in the 70's, 80's and 90's.

PTJ: The cotton industry in the US is what really started the trend in the world. Tell me how is the industry going in the US. We heard that a lot of spinning mills are now back in operation again?

Bruce Atherly: Yeah it's actually good news that after losing much of our textile industry in 1980s and 1990s, we have experienced a resurgence in this millennium. Right now we actually consume about 3.5 to 3.7 million bales of cotton in the US cotton, which is spun in the US which means that 25% of the total US crop is actually spun in the US.

PTJ: Coming to Pakistan, do you see Pakistan more as a market or competition because we are a cotton producing country so how does it work?

Bruce Atherly: It's a great question. I think because of the terrific growth in the Pakistani textile industry over the decades, and this growth is seen in everything, starting from spinning to fabric weaving or knitting to cotton garments. So all the way through, Pakistani industry has shown terrific growth in textile. In fact, this growth has



Mr. Mazhar Hussain Mirza with Mr. Bruce Atherly.

outpaced the ability of Pakistan's cotton agriculture to keep up with the demand, which is a great opportunity for other high-quality cotton to be imported into the country including US cotton.

We have cotton that is contamination free and very consistent in quality. When we talk to our customers and mill owners in Pakistan, they tell us is that they are already aware of this trait with the US Cotton, they can count on getting what they order because every single bale is tagged with complete information.

One mill owner told us that he can sleep well at night knowing he has US Cotton. So I think as long as that awareness and growth are there in Pakistan, the textile business will continue to offer an opportunity for imported high-quality cotton and we would certainly like to have a bigger share in that imported high-quality cotton.

PTJ: What makes US Cotton and interesting option besides the lack of contamination? What about the staple size?

Bruce Atherly: The biggest single characteristic of US Cotton is lowest values of contamination as compared to cotton from other countries and that is the biggest single thing that the mills in Pakistan and worldwide are looking for when aiming for high-quality cotton spinning. In addition, mills need uniformity because they buy according to various specifications, such as the fibre length and strength. What they ultimately want in the bales, which are being ordered is to be able to get highly consistent cotton according to their specifications depending upon what they want to make, for example, denim pants or woven shirts. They need these specifications to be consistent, and this is something that US cotton provides them diligently.

PTJ: There are certain fabrics that are not made with Pakistani cotton, for example, the fabric for ladies fashion that we call "Lawn". How much of the US Cotton is being used for that segment?

Bruce Atherly: A big part of US crop is Supima cotton which is inherently longer, almost 1.5 inches long. So that's the perfect length for that kind of application. I believe Pakistan is an important country for Supima for exports. So yes, US cotton is suitable for very fine high count fabrics as well as for all other applications.

PTJ: What is your impression on Pakistani mills, are they forward looking? Are they doing what they need to do and is that something you would advise them to do better?

Bruce Atherly: It's a really interesting question and I can share with you, early impressions of this very important market. I am very impressed by the professionalism, the knowledge base and the expertise of textile companies in Pakistan. I would say absolutely that they are forward looking and evident from their participation in shows and events around the world to try to understand what is going to happen with cotton and fabrics. Many of them spin and use both cotton and other fibres so it gives them a strong knowledge base. We had several conversations about different topics and I found the textile professionals very knowledgeable and these sessions have been very impressive.

PTJ: How many licensees do you have in Pakistan?

Bruce Atherly: We have 38 licenses issued in Pakistan. It is a mix of spinners, weavers, vertical setups and garment manufacturers. This is the first time this year that Gul Ahmed has also been

licensed as a retailer in Pakistan. Although as a spinner they are also buying US cotton directly. They are also importing Supima yarn from China and now registered as a licensee retailer of Cotton USA. They already have 75 shops in Pakistan and growing very rapidly.

PTJ: Gul Ahmed is indeed a trend-setting organisation. When most of our industry was focused on exports, they realised the potential of 200 million people of Pakistan out of which at least 50 million belong to the middle class, their key customer base.

Bruce Atherly: It was interesting for me to note in their stores the point of purchase material and hangtags talking about the US Cotton. It is obvious that the consumer in Pakistan is getting more and more aware and places value on such information when making purchasing decisions. I found Mr. Bashir Ali Mohammad, the driving force behind the success of this company to be a visionary.

PTJ: Can you give me some final comments about your presence in Pakistan?

Bruce Atherly: Pakistan is a very important country for US Cotton. In fact, Pakistan is among our top ten export destinations. We believe that it is vital that we have a strong presence in Pakistan and that is the reason we regularly engage with all of our customers in Pakistan and invite them to the sourcing events and other activities around the world. We will come to Pakistan more often in the future to work directly with them to help build their businesses. Because that's really what it is all about. After giving them the US Cotton licenses, we continue to help them in every way we can.

We really have a great team in Pakistan headed by Mazhar Hussain Mirza. In Mazhar, we have somebody with a deep knowledge of the textile business because he used to be a textile CEO now running his own business. So he knows the industry well and then has the contacts within the industry to help spread the word about Cotton Council International and our activities. In the recently held Global US Cotton Summit in the United States, Pakistan had thirty plus representatives which are quite amazing. Pakistan's strong representation is a testament to our long-term relationship of US Cotton with Pakistan's textile industry. ♦