

ORGANIC COTTON FACT SHEET

WHAT IS ORGANIC COTTON?

Organic cotton is grown using methods and materials that have a low impact on the environment. Organic production systems replenish and maintain soil fertility, expand biologically diverse agriculture, and prohibit the use of synthetic toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers, as well as genetically engineered seed. Third-party certification organizations verify that organic producers meet strict federal regulations addressing methods and materials allowed in organic production.

Much of the demand for organic cotton currently comes from companies with corporate environmental and social responsibility goals driving them to seek to be responsible stewards. So, too, they are acting in response to consumers increasingly seeking sustainable, chemical-free fiber and finished apparel and home products.

HOW MUCH ORGANIC COTTON IS GROWN GLOBALLY?

During the 2020/21 global harvest year, farmers grew 1,572,011 bales (342,265 tonnes) of organic cotton fiber on 1,536,232 acres (621,691 hectares) of certified organic land in 21 countries around the world. This represented a 37% increase in the amount of organic fiber over the previous (2019/20) year resulting in organic cotton making up approximately 1.4% of global cotton production.

Additionally, 830,068 bales (180,726 tonnes) of cotton transitioning/in-conversion to organic was produced on 724,523 acres (293,204 hectares) of land. This will help bring the organic cotton sector closer to meeting the growing global demand for the fiber.

Organic cotton was grown in 21 countries during the 2020/21 growing season led by India and Turkey. Approximately 97 percent of global organic cotton was produced in eight countries: India (38%), Turkey (24%) China (10%), Kyrgyzstan (9%), Tanzania (6%), Kazakhstan (4%), Tajikistan (4%), and the U.S. (2%). Thirteen countries (listed in descending order) accounted for the remaining three percent: Uganda (0.7%); Pakistan (0.6%); Benin (0.6%); Greece (0.5%); Peru (0.2%); Burkina Faso (0.2%); Uzbekistan (0.1%); Egypt (0.1%); Brazil (0.02%); Mali (0.02%); Ethiopia (0.02%); Spain (0.01%); and Argentina (0.001%).[i] UPDATE?

In 2022/23, approximately 772 thousand tonnes of cotton were estimated to have been certified to one or more of the 15 farm-level organic standards or programs known to be used for cotton production that year, representing 3.2% of global cotton production.[ii]

HOW MUCH ORGANIC COTTON IS GROWN IN THE UNITED STATES?

2023 organic Upland and American Pima cotton production in the U.S. totaled 39,259 bales, with production decreasing by 3,624 bales from the previous year. An additional 795 transitional bales were reported. Texas continues to lead organic cotton plantings and production, with additional acreage in Arizona, California, Georgia, and New Mexico.[i]

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE U.S. ORGANIC COTTON MARKET?

Organic fiber continues to be the largest and fastest-growing non-food category of the U.S. organic industry (which includes organic textiles, personal care products, supplements, and pet food), representing 40% of the category's total sales in 2023. Organic fiber product sales were \$2.4 billion in 2023, representing the fourth largest organic subcategory. Overall, sales of organic food and nonfood products in the U.S. totaled almost \$70 billion in 2023.[ii] Increasing availability of, and consumer interest in, organic apparel – especially casual wear – and home textiles, including mattresses, sheets, and towels, is driving growth in the organic textiles and fiber market.

WHAT ABOUT THE PROCESSING OF ORGANIC COTTON INTO FINISHED TEXTILES?

Companies are increasingly becoming certified to traceability standards such as the Textile Exchange Organic Content Standard (OCS), which verifies that the cotton (or other natural fibers) in a final product is certified organic. The number of OCS-certified sites increased 14% from 12,131 in 2022 to 13,859 in 2023.[i]

Thousands of facilities around the world also have become certified to the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). GOTS is a stringent voluntary global standard for the entire postharvest processing (e.g., spinning, knitting, weaving, dyeing, and manufacturing) of apparel and home textiles made with organic fiber. The standard prohibits the use of toxic inputs during the processing stages and establishes strong labor provisions including a prohibition on child labor. In 2023, the number of GOTS certified facilities increased 8% over 2022 to 14,676 globally.[ii]

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a policy memorandum addressing labeling of textile products containing certified organic fibers, including cotton, linen, and wool. According to the memo, products containing organically grown fibers that have been processed according to GOTS may be marketed as organic in the U.S.[iii]

WHAT KINDS OF PRODUCTS ARE MADE USING ORGANIC COTTON?

As a result of consumer interest, organic cotton fiber is used in everything from personal care items (e.g., sanitary products, rounds, puffs, and swabs), to fabrics, home furnishings (e.g., towels, bathrobes, sheets, blankets, bedding, mattresses), children's products, and apparel of all kinds and styles.

In addition, approximately two-thirds of cottonseed is used for animal feed, and cottonseed oil is used in a variety of food products, including cookies and chips.

- ⁱ Textile Exchange. 2022. "Organic Cotton Market Report." https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2022/10/Textile-Exchange_OCMR_2022.pdf
- ⁱⁱ Textile Exchange. 2024. Materials Market Report. <https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2024/09/Materials-Market-Report-2024.pdf>
- ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Agriculture. August 2023. "Organic Cotton Market Survey." <https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/cnaocms.pdf>
- ^{iv} Organic Trade Association. May 14, 2024. "US Organic Marketplace Posts Record Sales in 2023." <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/22820>
- ^v Textile Exchange. 2024. Materials Market Report. <https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2024/09/Materials-Market-Report-2024.pdf>
- ^{vi} Global Organic Textile Standard GmbH. May 1, 2024. "GOTS Annual Report." https://global-standard.org/images/resource-library/documents/GOTS-Annual-Reports/GOTS_Annual_Report_2023.pdf
- ^{vii} U.S. Department of Agriculture. May 20, 2011. "Labeling of Textiles That Contain Organic Ingredients." <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/OrganicTextilePolicyMemo.pdf> and Organic Trade Association. May 2023. What are Organic Fiber Products and How Can You Label Them? https://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/What%20are%20Organic%20Fiber%20Products_0.pdf
- ^{viii} National Cotton Council. ND. The Many Faces of Cotton. <https://www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/upload/The-Many-Faces-of-Cotton.pdf>