

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 manufacturers and brands 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 US (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

HOW MUCH ORGANIC COTTON IS GROWN IN THE UNITED STATES?

In 2020, US farmers grew 26,736 bales (5,821 MT) of organic cotton harvested from almost 30,406 acres (12,035 HA). This U.S. represented 1.7% of global organic cotton production and 0.2% of US cotton. In addition, farmers grew 252 bales (57 tonnes) of in-conversion cotton on 292 acres (118 hectares). Organic cotton production spanned four states, with Texas accounting for the majority, followed by New Mexico, Arizona, and California. Most organic cottonseed is sold to organic dairies for use as feed, though many farmers catch and reuse their seed.ⁱⁱ

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, household products, personal care products, supplements, pet food, and flowers), representing 40% of the category's total sales in 2022. According to the Organic Trade Association's 2022 Organic Industry Survey, organic fiber product sales reached \$2.4 billion in 2022, for a gain of 2.5 percent. Overall, sales of organic food and non-food products in the U.S. totaled more than \$67 billion in 2022 – a 4% increase that nearly doubled 2021's growth while facing significant challenges from inflation, supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and more.ⁱⁱⁱ Increasing availability of, and consumer interest in, organic apparel – especially casual wear and baby clothes, 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 in a final product is certified organic. In 2021, there were 11,885 facilities globally certified to the Organic Content Standard, a 37% increase over 2020.^{iv}

Thousands of facilities around the world also have become certified to the [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#).^v 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 2021, the number of GOTS certified facilities grew 19% to 12,338 globally.^{vi}

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.^{vii}

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.^{viii}

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ⁱ Textile Exchange. 2022. Organic Cotton Market Report 2022. https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2022/10/Textile-Exchange_OCMR_2022.pdf

ⁱⁱ Textile Exchange. 2022. Organic Cotton Market Report 2022. https://textileexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Textile-Exchange_OCMR_2022.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Organic Trade Association. May 10, 2023. "Organic food sales break through \$60 billion in 2022." <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/22820>

^{iv} Textile Exchange. 2022. Organic Cotton Market Report 2022. https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2022/10/Textile-Exchange_OCMR_2022.pdf

^v Global Organic Textile Standard GmbH. Global Organic Textile Standard Version 6.0. 2020. https://global-standard.org/images/resource-library/documents/standard-and-manual/gots_version_6_0_en1.pdf

^{vi} Global Organic Textile Standard GmbH. February 23, 2022. "GOTS Marks 20th Anniversary with All-Time High in Certified Facilities." <https://global-standard.org/news/gots-press-release-gots-marks-20> and GOTS personal communication. June 27, 2022.

^{vii} US 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>