

Fiber Council Meeting Minutes

4.14.15 | 4:00 – 5:00 pm

In attendance: Marni Karlin OTA, Gwendolyn Wyard OTA, Kelly Taveras OTA, Marci Zaroff Chair, Barry Cik Naturepedic, Dale Reed SSA, Sandra Marquardt GOTS, Maggie McNiel OTA, and Dick Siegel, Richard Siegel Law Offices.

AGENDA:

- Anti-trust review
- Get grounded in Council operating guidelines
- Develop a work-plan framework
- Set a meeting schedule
- Discuss member outreach and recruitment

Kelly: Opens meeting, welcomes group.

Marci: Announces that OTA Board officially approved the establishment of a Fiber Council in this morning's Board meeting.

Marni: Reviews antitrust laws.

Sandra: Expresses concern that she hasn't seen details about the Council yet. Requests more information be shared with OTA's fiber members. Suggests discussion on improving communication (i.e. Listserv communications need to broaden, Outreach needs to broaden). Request more information on how the Council is going to be run with OTA staff resources.

Kelly: Notes concerns. Explains a bit more about process, as today was official sign off from Board, the roll out plans have not yet been executed. Notes there will be a dedicated OTA staff person (yet to be assigned) to support the council.

Gwen: Notes we're modeling after the Farmer Advisory Council. Open to OTA members.

Discussion of OTA plans for other sector councils ensues. FAC Annual Report is shared for example.

Kelly: Reviews operating guidelines hand out.

Gwendolyn and Marni: clarifies policy setting in sector councils versus task forces. Discussion of what types of work the Council could do, and if they can't discuss policy, what can they do? Where is the line?

OTA staff talks about ongoing policy and regulatory work. If we're gathering feedback for a policy goal, we'd form a task force.

Can OTA report on policy issues to the council? Yes.

Discussion of how many times a year does OTA meets as a membership ensues. Board meets 4 x year in person. Member meetings Expo East and West. Councils, meet twice per year. Phone meetings are often. Task forces meet in different increments depending on issue.

Questions on letter from OTA to FTC, misleading labels where does that ask stand? Marni and Gwen clarify: FTC has not responded to the comment period yet. Request for comments was on what information they should be collecting if they were to do a survey on textile claims. FTC says that they are lacking data and information, so our position is that there is enough information available for them to take action. It continues to be an issue. We let you know if there are any developments in this area.

Sandra: Requests clarification on role of the Council Secretary.

World plan brainstorm:

Sandra: suggests Council works on OTA.com website updates

- updated fact sheets currently on the OTA website. See about updating NOP?
- funny split, between information ota.com and organicitworthit.org. Cotton and environment. Organic Cotton Facts.
- GOTS website link should be on the OTA website.

Kelly: clarifies what is on current OTA.com in learn about versus what OTA does.

Sandra continues:

- Annual OTA Survey – suggestion to build out the textile section into sub categories – so that we can track the growth of different sectors?
- **Question about Cotton Inc funded study. Does it have to come out in January?** What is the problem with listing those farmers that are the one per state – can we ask permission from them to include that? It's [the report] always slightly out of date. January timeline isn't good – if we could wait an extra month we would have more up to date information? February would be better. We also need to be able to say where it's grown. Can we list the states and not how many farmers?
- GOTS – webinar last summer was great. With OTA / Textile Exchange. We should do it again. How to capitalize on that webinar and get more OTA members GOTS certified? What can we do to get the fiber folks certified to GOTS?

Marci: We should discuss brand vs. product certification to GOTS at another time. Education within our sector is important.

Marci:

- Organic fiber education and promo tools – organic cotton 101, video, PowerPoint, marketing tools, perhaps this Council could develop materials.

- Connecting with research studies – collaboration with textile exchange, ID collaborations and build them, grow together
- How can we as a sector, build the organic fiber industry in the US?
- Host a fashion show
- Be included in OTA media events
- Develop FAQ's, what are the biggest questions that get asked in organic fiber?

Barry: 50 years ago over 100 members of cotton growers now it's been decimated and no longer exists. There is a big issue, polyurethane foam and flame retardants. Now isn't the time, but it's a huge issue, OTA should take it on.

Dale: promotion, idea of doing something at the next Expo "organic home" Demonstration, fashion, lifestyle, etc. in Baltimore. Take all of the textiles in your everyday life. OTA sponsor "organic life".

Marci: explains fiber directory dwindling, fiber members that left OTA.

Marci: As a council, let's address why organic fiber people should join OTA. How do we deliver value through OTA to the fiber sector so that they see value and want to join.

How may fiber members are there now?

Marci: Fiber category – how do we get the word out so that more people are wearing and buying organic in a context other than food? Get the information out. Start at the route.

CALL & MEETING SCHEDULE.

Expo East, in person meeting. Annual fiber meeting TBD if best at OTA policy conference or Expo East. Attempt a meeting at Expo West as well.

ROLL OUT PLANS: OTA to make official announcement. Send broad invitation to next meeting. Blast to Fiber list serv and full OTA membership. Press release. Maggie adds that the non-food growth rate biggest in 6 years and that organic textile sales broke the billion dollar mark, combine the story and we could tie in release of that data with PR on fiber council formation.

Meeting time ran out without determining next meeting plan. Need to follow up with dates/times and get a call on the calendar. Need to develop a timeline for roll out of council information and promotion to share back with group.

Email sent in response to highlighted questions:

Dear Fiber Council Members,

Thanks for your patience as we get the Fiber Council up and running. I am including the OTA members that participated in the fiber meeting held at Expo West, the members that attended our first official meeting at OTA's Policy Conference last month in DC, AND the members that signed on to the sector council request that was approved by OTA's Board. Please let me know if I have forgotten anyone!

The notes from our recent meeting in DC are attached. You'll find highlighted questions and action steps in the notes and answers to the questions below in this email. The next big step is an official announcement/press release and blast to the OTA fiber list serve. We also need to set up a conference call so we can develop a meeting plan and timeline. I will be helping to facilitate all of this over the next couple weeks. The next in-person meeting will be at Expo East in Baltimore.

Answers to questions in the notes:

-How many fiber members are there now? There are approximately 82 OTA members that have indicated they are involved in the fiber sector in one way or another. This range includes manufacturing, retailing, consulting, sponsorship, etc.

-Clarification on the role of the Sector Council Secretary: The Sector Council Secretary will be responsible for the administrative and record-keeping needs for the council.

-Does the Cotton Inc. study need to come out in January? The Cotton Inc. final report is due at the end of January, per the terms of our grant funding. They hold all of their grant recipients to this date across all projects. We will ask if they'd be willing to extend to February, but we cannot promise they will. The challenge with listing specific farmers is that it becomes extremely easy to deduce competitive information about those farmers, such as how many bales they've sold and at what price. The Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative grows and sells upwards of 95% of the organic cotton in the U.S., and fairly freely shares their results. There may literally be only 2 or 3 other producers reporting in a given year. We promise to keep business information confidential when we do the survey (as we do with the Industry Survey). I believe this approach is also in line with how USDA reports out on certified organic operations. We do list the states where organic cotton has been known to be grown in the recent past, and there are only like five of them. (CA, AZ, NC, NM, TX). We can discuss this further.

Ok, thanks everyone for your support and commitment to growing organic fiber, stay tuned, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions!