

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 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 out sustainable, chemical-free fiber and finished apparel and home products.

How much organic cotton is grown globally?

In 2014/2015, approximately 112,488 metric tons of organic cotton were grown by 193,840 farmers on 350,033 hectares acres in 19 countries. These included (in order by rank: India (66.9%), China (11.69%), Turkey (6.49%), Kyrgyzstan (4.93%), United States (2.16%), Egypt (1.91%), Tanzania (1.91%), Burkina Faso (0.95%), Tajikistan (0.89%), Uganda (0.71%), Peru (0.49%), Mali (0.47%), Benin (0.34%), Ethiopia (0.13%), Brazil (0.02%), Israel (0.01%), Senegal (0.01%), Madagascar (0.004%), and Colombia (0.001%). An additional 85,671 hectares are in conversion to organic from 2015/16 - 2017/18.

The top five producer countries—India, China, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, and the United States—grow more than 92% of total global organic cotton fiber. India continues to be the biggest producer, growing 67% of the world's organic cotton.¹

Organic cotton production represented approximately 0.4% of global cotton production in 2014/2015.²

What is the value of the global organic cotton market?

Global sales of organic cotton products reached an estimated \$15.76 billion in 2015. The Top 10 users of organic cotton in 2015 were C&A, H&M, Tchibo, Inditex, Nike, Decathlon, Carrefour, Lindex, Williams-Sonoma, and Stanley & Stella.

Companies are increasingly becoming certified to traceability standards such as the Textile Exchange [Organic Content Standard \(OCS\)](#) which verifies that the cotton is certified organic.³

There were 3,125 companies certified to the OCS in 2015.⁴

¹ Textile Exchange, "Organic Cotton Market Report 2016," July 2016. <http://textileexchange.org/2016-organic-cotton-market-report-overview/>

² Textile Exchange, "Organic Cotton Market Report 2016," July 2016. <http://textileexchange.org/2016-organic-cotton-market-report-overview/> and Cotton Incorporated, Monthly Economic Letter, December 2016. <http://www.cottoninc.com/corporate/Market-Data/MonthlyEconomicLetter/pdfs/English-pdf-charts-and-tables/World-Cotton-Production-Bales.pdf>

³ Textile Exchange, "Organic Cotton Market Report 2016," July 2016. <http://textileexchange.org/2016-organic-cotton-market-report-overview/>

⁴ Textile Exchange, E-mail from Lee Tyler to Sandra Marquardt, January 11, 2017.

How much organic cotton is grown in the United States?

U.S. organic cotton production continues to increase, encouraged by consumer and corporate demand, price premiums, and federal and private standards that provide clear production and labeling requirements for organic cotton and organic cotton products.

In the U.S., approximately 18,030 bales of organic cotton fiber were harvested in 2015⁵ from an estimated planted 19,056 acres. This represented a 61 percent increase in organic fiber over the prior year's 11,169 bales⁶ from an estimated 18,234 planted acres.⁷ The 2014 organic cotton planting represented the largest number of U.S. acres devoted to organic cotton since 1999.⁸ The Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative, based in the West Texas High Plains area, grew almost 80 percent of all the organic cotton in the U.S. in 2015.⁹ Organic cotton – mostly Pima – is also grown in New Mexico.¹⁰

What is the value of the U.S. organic cotton market?

In the U.S., total organic product sales reached \$43.3 billion in 2015, an increase of 11 percent from the previous year's record level.¹¹

Organic fiber is the largest non-food organic category in the U.S. market, with organic fiber sales totaling \$1.3 billion in 2015, up almost 17 (16.8) percent from 2014 sales. Organic fiber sales equal more than 37 percent of total organic non-food sales of \$3.5 billion. Other categories in the non-food sector include supplements (\$1.115 billion), personal care (\$848 million), pet food (\$129 million), household products (\$80 million), and flowers (\$60 million).

What about processing of organic cotton into finished textiles?

Thousands of facilities have become certified to the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS).¹² GOTS is a stringent voluntary global standard for the entire postharvest processing (spinning, knitting, weaving, dyeing and manufacturing) of apparel and home textiles made with organic fiber. The standard prohibits

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, Organic Cotton Market Summary, September 2016. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/cnaocms.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, Organic Cotton Market Summary, September 2015. <ftp://ftp.ams.usda.gov/Cotton/AnnualCNMarketNewsReports/OrganicMarketSummary/2014-2015%20OrganicCotton.pdf>

⁷ Organic Trade Association, 2013 and Preliminary 2014 U.S. Organic Cotton Production & Marketing Trends, January 2015. http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/2013%20and%202014%20Organic%20Cotton%20Report.pdf

⁸ Organic Trade Association, 2013 and Preliminary 2014 U.S. Organic Cotton Production & Marketing Trends, January 2015. http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/2013%20and%202014%20Organic%20Cotton%20Report.pdf

⁹ U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, Organic Cotton Market Summary, September 2016. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/cnaocms.pdf> and e-mail from Kelly Pepper, Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative, to Sandra Marquardt, November 21, 2016.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Agriculture – Organic Integrity Database, <https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity/>

¹¹ Organic Trade Association, 2016 Organic Industry Survey. 2016. [Organic Trade Association's 2016 Organic Industry Survey](#)

¹² Global Organic Textile Standard, Global Organic Textile Standard Version 4.0. 2014. www.global-standard.org

the use of toxic inputs during the processing stages and includes strong labor provisions, including a prohibition on child labor.

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 now be marketed as organic.¹³

In 2016, there were 4,642 facilities in 63 countries worldwide certified to GOTS, including more than fifty companies in the U.S.¹⁴ The U.S. ranks 11th in terms of the number of GOTS-certified facilities.

Note: For information on how to label apparel and home textiles containing organic fiber in the U.S., please see OTA's [fact sheet](#) "What are organic fiber products and how can you label them?"

¹³ US Department of Agriculture, Labeling of Textiles That Contain Organic Ingredients, May 20, 2011. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/OrganicTextilePolicyMemo.pdf>

¹⁴ Global Organic Textile Standard, "Number of GOTS Certified Facilities Increases 21% to 4,642 in 2016." May 2, 2017. <http://www.global-standard.org/information-centre/press-releases.html>