



Of all organic fibers, organic cotton is the most popular. Here are some facts about the growing organic cotton industry.

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, reduce the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and fertilizers, and build biologically diverse agriculture. Third-party certification organizations verify that organic producers use only methods and materials allowed in organic production. Organic cotton is grown without the use of toxic and persistent pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. In addition, federal regulations prohibit the use of genetically engineered seed for organic farming. All cotton sold as organic in the United States must meet strict federal regulations covering how the cotton is grown.

How much organic cotton is grown globally?

According to the *2014 Organic Market Report* from Textile Exchange, approximately 116,794 metric tons of organic cotton were produced globally during the 2013-2014 growing year. The top five countries—India, China, Turkey, Tanzania, and the United States—produce nearly 97% of total global organic cotton fiber. India continues to be the biggest producer, growing approximately 74% of the world's organic cotton. Global growth was expected to experience a 15 to 25% increase during 2014-2015.

Certified organic cotton is grown on 220,765 hectares of land, representing approximately 0.7% of global cotton area. An additional 37,883 hectares are in conversion to organic. There are approximately 148,000 organic cotton farmers around the world.

What is the value of the global organic cotton market?

According to the *2014 Organic Market Report* from Textile Exchange, global sales of organic cotton products reached an estimated \$15.7 billion in 2014, up 10 percent from 2013.

Companies reported significant growth in their organic cotton programs, and increased adoption of standards addressing product traceability and sustainable processing. Companies are increasingly becoming certified to traceability standards such as the Organic Exchange (OE) Blended or OE 100 standard, tracing the organic fiber from the field to finished product. Many manufacturers have also become certified to the Global Organic Textile Standard, which addresses textile's processing stages and includes strong labor provisions.

In fact, the adoption of the [Global Organic Textile Standard](#) (GOTS) has been a major milestone in the organic cotton supply chain. 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

USDA, products containing organically grown fibers that have been processed according to GOTS may now be marketed as organic, with certain restrictions. GOTS is a stringent voluntary global standard for the entire post-harvest processing (spinning, knitting, weaving, dyeing and manufacturing) of apparel and home textiles made with organic fiber.

[The number of facilities worldwide certified to GOTS](#) grew by 18 percent in 2014, to 3,085 facilities. At the same time, the number certified to the Organic Content Standard (OCS) grew by 26 percent, to 3,172. The complete list of OCS certified companies is available on the [Textile Exchange's website](#).

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 regulatory shifts that facilitate clear labeling for organic cotton products.

In 2014, despite grappling with tight seed supplies, persistent weeds and a shortage of seasonal labor, U.S. organic cotton growers planted the most acreage to organic cotton in 2014 since 1995, according to the *2013 and Preliminary 2014 U.S. Organic Cotton Production & Marketing Trends* report published by the Organic Trade Association in early 2015. Respondents to the survey reported a 14 percent increase in organic cotton acres planted in 2014—from 15,973 in 2013 to 18,234, represented the largest planted organic cotton acreage in the U.S. in almost 20 years.

How fast is the organic fiber market growing?

Sales of organic cotton have grown significantly in recent years, as consumers increasingly seek out sustainable, chemical-free fiber. Organic fiber is now the largest non-food organic category in the U.S. market, with organic fiber sales in the U.S. totaling over \$1.1 billion in 2014, up 18 percent from 2013 sales.

Much of the demand for organic cotton currently comes from manufacturers and brands. With corporate environmental and social responsibility top of mind, brands seek to position themselves to be responsible stewards and move in the direction of sustainability.

Note: For information on how to label apparel and home textiles containing organic fiber, please see [“What are organic fiber products and how can you label them?”](#)

Sources:

Organic Trade Association, *2013 and Preliminary 2014 U.S. Organic Cotton Production & Marketing Trends*, Produced for Cotton Incorporated, January 2015.

Organic Trade Association, *2015 Organic Industry Survey*, 2015.

Textile Exchange, *2014 Organic Cotton Market Report*, June 2015.

The Soil Association, *Cool Cotton: Organic cotton and climate change*, September 2015.

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