



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

How much organic cotton is grown globally?

From 2016-2017, global organic cotton production increased approximately 10 percent, with 539,788 bales (117,525 metric tons) of organic cotton fiber grown by 220,478 farmers on 1,168,806 acres (472,999 hectares) of land in 18 countries. These included (in order by rank): India (51%), China (19%), Kyrgyzstan (7%), Turkey (7%), Tajikistan (5%), United States (4%), Tanzania (3%), Egypt (1.5%), Greece (0.7%), Uganda (0.7%), Benin (0.6%), Burkina (0.4%), Peru (0.29%), Mali (0.1%), Brazil (0.04%), Senegal (0.004%), Thailand (0.004%), and Argentina (0.0003%). Ninety-seven percent of global production comes from the top seven countries.

There was a substantial area of cotton-growing land – 530,938 acres (214,863 hectares) – in transition to organic, suggesting strong growth over the next few years. This is equivalent to over 50 percent of the 2016-17 certified land area. Over 80 percent of this in-conversion land is in India, with the remainder stemming predominantly in Pakistan, China, Tanzania and Turkey.¹

Who are the leading players in the global organic cotton marketplace?

The top 10 companies by volume of organic cotton in 2017 were (in descending order by rank): C&A, H&M, Tchibo, Inditex, Nike, Aldi South International, Stanley & Stella, Aldi Einkauf, AB Lindex and Boll & Branch.

The top 10 companies by increased use that year were Gucci, Kalani-Home, Aldi Einkauf, REI, MetaWear, Fjällräven International, Stanley & Stella, Outerknown, Timberland, and West Point Home.

The Top 10 organic/Fair Trade companies were Boll & Branch, Coop Switzerland, Dibella, Cotonea, Pact, ARMEDANGELS, prAna, Coyuchi, KnowledgeCotton Apparel and Dedicated.²

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. There were 3,650 companies certified to the OCS in 2017.³

¹ Textile Exchange, Organic Cotton Market Report, October 23, 2018. Textile Exchange, Organic Cotton Market Report 2018. <https://textileexchange.org/downloads/2018-organic-cotton-market-report/>

² Textile Exchange, Preferred Fiber Benchmark Report 2018. <https://textileexchange.org/downloads/2018-preferred-fiber-materials-benchmark-insights-report/>

How much organic cotton is grown in the United States?

In 2016, 58 farmers planted 20,680 acres (8,369 hectares) with organic cotton in the U.S. Yield was approximately 20,400 bales (4,529 MT) of organic cotton fiber. The Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative (TOCMC), a co-op of 35 family farmers based in the West Texas High Plains, grew 84 percent of it. Organic cotton – including Pima and colored cotton – is also grown in New Mexico and minor amounts in North Carolina.⁴

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

Organic fiber continues to be the largest and fastest-growing sector in the U.S. organic non-food industry (including organic textiles, household products, personal care products, supplements, pet food and flowers). According to the Organic Trade Association's 2018 [Organic Industry Survey](#), organic fiber sales increased 11 percent over 2016 to \$1.6 billion in 2017 -- with most of those sales in organic cotton. Overall, organic sales in the U.S. totaled a new record of \$49.4 billion in 2017, up 6.4 percent from the previous year.⁵ Increasing consumer awareness and the growing knowledge that what we put ON your body is as important as what we put IN it is driving growth in the organic textiles and fiber market.

What about processing of organic cotton into finished textiles?

Thousands of facilities around the world have become certified to the [Global Organic Textile Standard](#) (GOTS).⁶ 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 the use of toxic inputs during the processing stages and includes strong labor provisions, including a prohibition on child labor. In 2017, there were 5,024 facilities in 62 countries worldwide certified to GOTS, including almost 100 in the U.S. The U.S. ranked ninth in terms of the number of GOTS-certified facilities.⁷

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.⁸

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³ Textile Exchange, Organic Cotton Market Report, October 23, 2018. <https://textileexchange.org/downloads/2018-organic-cotton-market-report/>

⁴ Textile Exchange, Organic Cotton Market Report, October 23, 2018. <https://textileexchange.org/downloads/2018-organic-cotton-market-report/> and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Organic Integrity Database. August 2017. <https://organic.ams.usda.gov/integrity/>

⁵ Organic Trade Association, "Maturing U.S. organic sector sees steady growth of 6.4% in 2017." May 18, 2018. <https://ota.com/news/press-releases/20236>

⁶ Global Organic Textile Standard, Global Organic Textile Standard Version 5.0. 2017. https://global-standard.org/images/GOTS_Documents/GOTS_Standard_5.0_EN.pdf

⁷ Global Organic Textile Standard, "Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) Tops 5000 Facilities in 2017." March 9, 2018. <http://www.global-standard.org/information-centre/press-releases.html>

⁸ 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>