

Organic cotton increasing in importance globally



Organic cotton is currently being grown successfully in many countries. Organic cotton grown by farmers worldwide increased from 40,322 tonnes in 2006 to 241,276 tonnes in 2010. Organic cotton now represents 1.1% of global cotton production. Many leading retailers and brands now include organic cotton lines in their clothing ranges, including companies such as Nike, Coop Switzerland, OTTO, Patagonia, Gap Inc, Levi Strauss, Wal-Mart and Marks and Spencer.

Interestingly, more than half the global production of organic cotton is in the hands of two companies – one in Turkey and the other in India, while the 25 largest brands and retailers absorb some 60% of the global organic cotton. Certified organic cotton is now grown in 22 countries worldwide with the top ten producer countries led by India, includes Turkey, Syria, Tanzania, China, United States, Uganda, Peru, Egypt and Burkina Faso respectively.

The infrastructure for processing and handling of organic cotton in various stages of the textile chain is also expanding. There is significant increase in area for organic textiles in stores all over the world. United States grew organic fiber sales by 10.4% in 2009 over the previous year. The Indian government has set a target of US \$ 1.0 billion which is 10 fold increase over 2008 of organic product sales. This suggests an average yield of organic cotton fiber per hectare of around 690 kg per hectare. Organic cotton farmers have huge concern over the average yield and are in their view that a well-supported organic cotton sector can achieve much better yields.

Organic cotton production is not yet an economically attractive alternative for conventional farmers in many areas in the world due to low yield as compared with regular cotton production. On the other one of the major barriers for planting more organic cotton include finding a market that may pay value-added costs of organic products, production challenges such as weeds and insects, weed control, and labour costs and competition from International organic cotton producers as well as the cost of transition to organic.

The increasing demand of organic cotton provides remarkable opportunities for Pakistan, the fifth largest producer of cotton in the world, the third largest exporter of raw cotton, the fourth largest consumer of cotton, and the largest exporter of cotton yarn). The cotton is cultivated over 3 million hectares, covering 15% of the cultivable area in the country. Cotton and cotton products contribute about 10% to GDP and 55% to the foreign exchange earnings of the country. An Organic Cotton project was launched by Kings Group in January 2000. Today it yields 80,000 kg of organic cotton lint and supplies Garments made of Organic Cotton to customers in Europe and United States in accordance with their special requirements. According to Kings Group, a small village 80 km North West from Karachi in the fertile Lasbela district in the province of Baluchistan was chosen to grow organic cotton. The land was mostly virgin but fertile. Today cotton of the highest quality is grown on 3000 acres of land cultivated on the principles of organic agriculture. ♦