



“More than 50 companies in Pakistan are certified according to Organic Exchange Standard”

Interview by Saood Qaseem, Regional Coordinator at IMO for Bangladesh and Pakistan

The Institute for Marketecology (IMO) is renowned international agency for inspection, certification and quality assurance of eco-friendly products. Its worldwide activities are accredited by the Swiss Accreditation Service (SAS) according to EN 45011 (ISO 65), which is the international standard for certification. IMO has been active in the field of Organic Certification worldwide for more than 20 years; in more than 90 countries worldwide. Saood Qaseem is Regional Coordinator at IMO for Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Please tell us about the scope of Organic Textile Market in Pakistan Textile Industry?

There were 163 GOTS certified textile units in Pakistan during 2010. In terms of the number of GOTS certified units, Pakistan positions itself as 4th largest in the world. In 2008, there were only 139 textile units and we expect to have more in 2011 and 2012.

In addition, more than 50 companies in Pakistan are certified according to Organic Exchange standard.

The cultivation and production of organic cotton fibers in Baluchistan is initiated by Kings Farming Group in Pakistan in 2000. There is significant potential for the farming sector for organic cotton cultivation, yet there is a need to create and foster backward linkages.

What kind of services IMO is offering to textile markets like Pakistan and Bangladesh?

Institute for Marketecology (IMO) is the certification branch of the Swiss Organic Foundation, which has the goal to promote organic agriculture and foster sustainable consumption.

IMO has been active in the field of Organic Certification worldwide for more than 20 years; in more than 90 countries worldwide. It is offering textile companies the services of: Organic Exchange (OE) 100 and Blended certification Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS) certification, including the assessment of the textile chemicals.

We also offer Social and Fair Trade certification to the textile sector and other segments of the industry. Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification can be relevant for textile products made from viscose or other fibers derived from FSC-certified timber.

What does it mean to be certified according to OE or GOTS?

The GOTS ‘made with organic’ label requires a minimum of 70% certified organic fibers. A maximum of 10% synthetic fibers can be used. Socks, leggings and sportswear can be made from no more than 25% synthetic fibers.

However, usually people mean the GOTS ‘organic’ label when they speak of GOTS, and that requires a minimum of 95% natural fibers from certified organic agriculture.

A product can only be GOTS certified and labeled as a whole. It is not possible to certify and label only a part or component of a product. The companies producing articles according to GOTS are also required to meet specific social and environmental criteria as minimum.

Organic Exchange 100 Standard is used for the articles (yarns, fabrics, knits, finished products) made from at least 95% organic cotton.

Organic Blended Standard is for the articles (yarns, fabrics, knits, finished products) made with a minimum of 5% organic cotton, which may even be blended with conventional cotton which is not allowed in any of the other standards. Usually companies use a higher percentage of organic cotton in these products.

What requirements must be fulfilled by the textile articles to be GOTS certified?

GOTS recognizes products that contain only organic cotton or other organic fibers such as wool, silk, jute, hemp, etc.

The dyes, chemicals and auxiliaries that are used for the processing of organic products must be assessed and approved by an approved certification body and must meet basic requirements regarding toxicity and biodegradability. All wet processing sites must treat waste water in an

internal or external wastewater treatment plant before its discharge to surface waters.

The organic products must only be processed at facilities that respect the social criteria as defined in the GOTS standard. These social criteria are based on the key conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Please elaborate how a firm can get these standards and which companies are eligible to apply?

Many firms look for certifications according to Organic Textile Standards (GOTS/OE) due to buyers’ demand. The standards can be downloaded freely or can be sent by email, but they require through reading to understand the list of requirements applicable to the specific company that requires certification. Furthermore, for GOTS certification, the certified company must not only look for organic fibers, but needs to meet the environmental and social requirements at the same time. For any organic certification, the companies must ensure separation and cleaning issues during processing of organic cotton, and through record keeping

Any player (Cotton traders, cotton spinners, fabric manufacturers, fabric converters, and cotton garments manufacturers or composite textile unit) in the supply chain of Textile-Clothing can apply for certification.

Who are the potential buyers asking for these certifications to the company?

According to Textile Exchange, the top organic cotton consumer brands in 2010 were H&M, C&A, Nike, Zara, Adidas, GreenSource, Anvil Knitwear, Target, Disney Consumer Products and Otto Group. There are also a lot of other brands and retailers that are pursuing environ-

mental initiatives and therefore look for organic cotton, as that is usually the biggest environmental issue, though followed closely by the dyeing and processing methods and effluent treatment issues.

How would you explain market presence of IMO as compared to its competitors?

The Institute for Marketecology (IMO) is one of the first and most renowned international agencies for inspection, certification and quality assurance of eco-friendly products. Our world-wide activities are accredited by the Swiss Accreditation Service (SAS) according to EN 45011 (ISO 65). About 350 employees support projects in over 90 different countries. We are the preferred partner for our clients and opt for sustainable and ethical behavior in all our activities.

In 2006, IMO was the first certification body approved to carry out GOTS certification. We have the most comprehensive list of chemicals approved for processing of articles according to GOTS. Our positive list system is accessible and searchable

online which is also unique to the industry. IMO has the most educated, knowledgeable and experienced inspectors on board and with their commitment are able to provide a reliable certification service.

In IMO, we prefer to be partners, rather challenging the mills during inspections, so that all issues can be addressed properly, and thereby we help to reduce the possibility of problems being identified by the buyer, or even worse by an NGO that puts the buyer under pressure.

In this sense we see ourselves as partners, to whom the certified companies demonstrate how they ensure the organic quality of their products. With our work we also help to provide a level playing field for textile companies working with organic natural fibers.

What are the market dynamics for Organic cotton?

Customer is the King; and brands would not offer organic products if there was no market. The principle market dynamic for organic cotton is the consumers' growing interest in green prod-

ucts, that is however to some extent facilitated by brands and retailers via consumer education. Last but not the least, better profit margins for every player in the supply chain also motivates the actors individually.

What is your contribution to the Organic World?

I joined IMO in 2008 and have been involved in the inspection and certification of more than fifty organizations and visited about 15 countries in Europe, Middle East and Asia. The highlight was my active participation in World Congress on Organic Cotton held in Interlaken, Switzerland during 2009.

Recently, I spoke about "Organic Cotton: Opportunities for Value Addition" at International Conference on Textile and Clothing held in Lahore, Pakistan.

Last year my book "Standards Governing the Supply Chain of Organic Cotton: A Guide for Implementation" has been published in Germany. ♦

BOOK REVIEW

Standards Governing the Supply Chain of Organic Cotton

A new addition has been made recently to the published resources available on organic cotton. 'Standards Governing the Supply Chain of Organic Cotton – A Guide for Implementation - by Saood Qaseem' published by VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, Germany is now available as a paperback edition of 116 pages.

Concerns for the environment are being raised throughout the world. The pollution caused by industrialized practices has forced the think tanks to find alternatives. To avoid the environmental damages caused by the cultivation and processing of conventional cotton, organic cotton has been introduced. To harmonize the trade of organic cotton and products made with it, standards are required that ascertain the quality of product and provide a uniform term for the trading partners to communicate along the supply chain. This book highlights the standards that govern organic cotton and discusses the challenges faced by their implementers. A comparison of the standards and a model for the enhancement of organic cotton has also been presented. Recommendations have been made to create ease in implementing standards that govern production and processing of organic cotton.

The global organic textile market experienced strong growth and robust expansion at the farming, manufacturing and retail level. This trend is expected to accelerate: The retail sales of organic cotton are set to a tremendous growth from currently \$ 5.3 billion to \$ 6.2 billion at the end of 2011. Pakistan economical conditions can also be improved by entering the organic market as it is still a niche market and profit margins are high. As compared to normal cotton, organic cotton is environmental friendly and costs for cultivation are low.

About the Book:

VDM Verlag Dr. Müller e.K. ISBN 978-3-639-29823-9, paperback, 116 Pages. Price Euro 49.

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