



# ORGANIC COTTON & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD

## ACHIEVING SDGs THROUGH ORGANIC COTTON



**TextileExchange**  
Creating Material Change

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

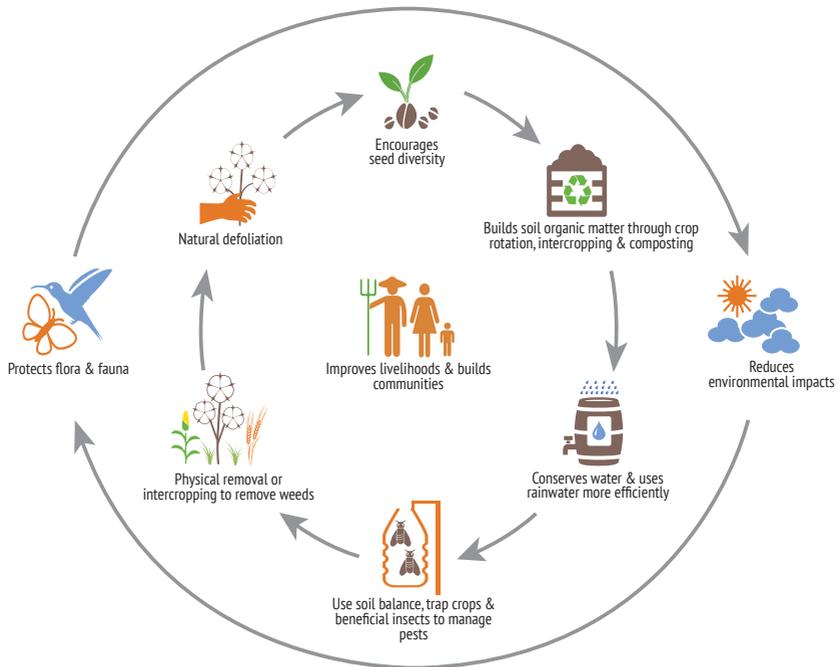
In this document, Textile Exchange (TE) outlines how organic cotton farming plays a role in helping countries achieve their SDGs. Millions of people around the world live in rural communities depending on farming. Holistic organic farming systems based on the organic principles of health, ecology, fairness and care, build thriving and resilient communities that attract people to stay on the land rather than move to cities, regenerating and nurturing the earth, its resources, and its people.

The UNDP has identified three priority **SDGs - 1: End Poverty, 10: Reduced Inequalities, 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, as central to its strategic plan. Organic cotton makes a significant contribution to all three - providing a market-driven solution to poverty, reducing inequality by raising farm incomes, and promoting inclusive societies through its reliance on cooperative working. Organic “cotton” is the vehicle to organic “communities” and success depends upon **SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals**, building committed, interdependent supply networks that share risk and reward. Below we summarize how organic cotton farming is a positive contributor to all 17 SDGs.



# WHAT IS ORGANIC COTTON?

Organic cotton is cotton that is produced within an organic farm system along with other crops. The land is certified to organic agricultural standards. Its production sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people by using natural processes rather than artificial inputs. Importantly, organic cotton farming does not allow the use of toxic chemicals or GMOs (genetically modified organisms). Instead, it combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote a good quality of life for all involved.



**ORGANIC AGRICULTURE SUSTAINS THE HEALTH OF SOILS, ECOSYSTEMS AND PEOPLE.**

**IT RELIES ON ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES, BIODIVERSITY, AND CYCLES ADAPTED TO LOCAL CONDITIONS RATHER THAN THE USE OF INPUTS WITH ADVERSE EFFECTS.**

**IT COMBINES TRADITION, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE, AND PROMOTES FAIR RELATIONSHIPS AND A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL INVOLVED.**

- IFOAM - Organics International

# ACHIEVING SDGs THROUGH ORGANIC COTTON



Organic cotton farming plays a major role in helping countries achieve their SDGs.

Here's how...

**1** NO POVERTY



**Organic cotton is a market-driven solution to poverty. Farmers can earn more, spend less on inputs such as agrichemicals, and decouple from the commodity market.**

Intercrops and rotational crops, such as legumes, grains, vegetables, fruits and flowers, play a key role in livelihood options by shifting farmers to more diverse incomes and reducing reliance on a monocrop commodity culture.

**2** ZERO HUNGER



**Organic cotton is grown alongside and in rotation with food crops.**

Seed can be saved and sold locally, reducing reliance on seed companies and providing additional incomes. Cotton harvests also produce cottonseed, processed into oil or animal feed. The demand for non-GMO cottonseed is growing rapidly. Improved incomes enable livestock rearing, diversifying diets and providing valuable farmyard manure.

**3** GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



**Organic cotton farmers and their families are not exposed to toxic chemicals.**

Nutritional needs are met through the production of food crops such as grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits, grown in rotation with cotton or intercropped. Many organic cotton-growing communities are able to offer at least primary health care locally with health centers funded in part by fairer prices to the farmers and supply chain partnerships.

**4** QUALITY EDUCATION



**Higher returns result in organic cotton farming communities being able to offer quality education, often through the investments of supply chain partners.**

Women's organic cotton cooperatives and farmers are earning their own income, which they tend to prioritize in schooling. Organic farming offers lifelong learning opportunities - and jobs - in both organic food and fiber, and value-add opportunities such as tailoring and the textiles sector.

**5** GENDER EQUALITY



**Many organic cotton farmers are women, particularly in African and Asian countries. Approximately 10% of certified organic farmers globally are women.**

In progressive producer groups, women are in leadership positions such as providing training and maintaining organic farm records, and are even land owners. Other opportunities include producing bio inputs to sell, running micro-businesses producing seed, and value-addition such as food processing and textile handicrafts.

## 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



**As organic cotton does not use toxic pesticides or synthetic fertilizers, it does not cause chemical contamination of local water sources.**

Organic soil is more able to retain water, increasing water efficiency. While not exclusive to organic, “rainwater harvesting” helps solve potable and non-potable water needs such as irrigation, hygiene, and even consumption challenges.

## 7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY



**Organic farming communities are increasingly using solar and biogas as an energy source, particularly where access to electricity is limited, such as in some regions of Africa and India.**

In Tanzania, smokeless ovens are being incorporated into the Swiss Coop and Remei AG farm investment program, resulting in healthier cooking environments and helping the company become carbon neutral.

## 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH



**Globally, approximately 200,000 people are certified to organic standards, mostly smallholder farmers. Many more are farming to organic or agro-ecological criteria.**

Principles of health, ecology, fairness and care are the basis of organic agriculture. Breach of human rights is prohibited. Many organic farmers, particularly in Africa and India, are also certified to Fair Trade standards, allowing them to benefit from additional social and trading guidelines.

## 9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



**Organic cotton production is the basis for the new global textile infrastructure – sustainable, ethical, transparent, and verified.**

Organic cotton is increasingly not only grown but also made into textiles in dedicated, committed supply networks – thus reducing risk for farmers and providing the infrastructure for a resilient, interdependent and innovative industry that can compete globally.

## 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



**Organic cotton production has put nations rich and poor on par with one another. China, India, Tanzania, Turkey, and the USA are the top 5 growing nations.**

Higher financial returns help raise the local income, empowering farmers and elevating them into positions of leadership and governance within rural communities. In some communities, organic is viewed as a “female’s crop”, giving women the opportunity to organize and make decisions away from competition with men.

## 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



**Higher financial returns, absence of toxic chemicals (and illness), alongside the satisfaction of working in harmony with nature, encourage more people to stay on the land, with evidence of reverse migration in parts of India.**

Increased value placed on organic farming empowers small-scale farmers to take more pride and responsibility for local development, and results in autonomous, resilient rural communities with reduced dependency on donor funding.

**12** RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



**Organic “life choices”, whether at the farm, the factory, in retail or in the home, promote healthy choices for all.**

Organic food, always grown in rotation or intercropped with organic cotton, ensures safe, chemical-free consumption. There is evidence of local staple food varieties being preserved through organic systems. Organic cotton itself also produces food - cottonseed oil - used in a wide range of organic foods.

**13** CLIMATE  
ACTION



**Organic soils sequester more carbon as a key component in soil building and improved soil fertility.**

Synthetic nitrogen fertilizer – known to result in the release of ozone destroying nitrous oxide – is prohibited for use in organic agriculture. Crop diversification helps reduce risk and protects farmers' livelihoods in times of climate change, providing some protection against the impacts of flooding or drought.

**14** LIFE  
BELOW WATER



**By eliminating toxic and persistent pesticides, organic cotton production is a proactive contributor to clean and healthy water used locally, and which ultimately runs into the oceans.**

Likewise, the elimination of artificial fertilizers (nitrates and phosphates) from organic farming reduces the nutrient load and run-off into surface waterways.

**15** LIFE  
ON LAND



**Organic cotton farms build strong soils and biodiversity by rotating crops, minimizing tillage, and planting cover crops.**

As toxic chemicals are not used in organic farming, these farms and neighbouring wild areas become a safe haven for a diverse array of plants and animals to thrive in. Clearing of primary ecosystems is prohibited, and strict standards address organic forest and grazing land management.

**16** PEACE, JUSTICE  
AND STRONG  
INSTITUTIONS



**Many organic cotton farming operations are cooperatives, respecting democracy, interdependency, stability, human rights and effective governance.**

Organic cotton projects are farmer-centric, respectful of gender, and promote local leadership to strengthen the participation of communities, and countries, in national governance and international partnerships.

**17** PARTNERSHIPS  
FOR THE GOALS



**A fundamental element of organic cotton production is its strong commitment to global partnerships and cooperation - recognizing the interdependencies at play.**

Organic cotton production promotes international trade, helping developing countries increase export of high value cash crops, while fostering local markets for fresh food provision. Organic helps further an equitable trading system that is fair, open and benefits all.

## NEXT STEPS!

Textile Exchange will work with its members to educate national governments that are responsible for achieving the SDGs in their own countries. TE can emphasize the contribution that organic cotton can make to the SDG process. In particular, TE can work to provide data, case studies, knowledge exchange platforms and best practice reports that will help countries to adopt and expand organic cotton production to contribute to their achievement of the Global Goals.

In addition to this country-specific work, each of the 17 SDGs has caught the attention of NGOs who specialize in the subjects covered. TE will seek to build alliances with NGOs in the SDGs most likely to benefit from an increase in organic cotton production, combining their subject knowledge with TE's organic cotton expertise to maximize the effects of an increase in organic cotton production, supply networks and, ultimately, consumer demand and consumption.

## OUR DELIVERY PLATFORM



Platform for Collective Action & Incubator for Great Ideas

The Organic Cotton Round Table (OCRT) is a global movement that supports and brings together the organic cotton community and beyond to be inspired, mobilized, and equipped to act. A one-day in-person meeting is held annually following TE's Textile Sustainability Conference. The OCRT also serves as the official in-person meeting place of the Global Organic Cotton Community Platform. Anyone with an interest in organic and fairly traded cotton is invited and encouraged to join!

### WHAT DOES THE OCRT DO?

#### 1. Collaborate and Grow

The primary objective of the OCRT is to find ways to collaborate in order to grow the sector, sharing best practices at every stage, building supportive partnerships, and improving the security of supply as well as farmer livelihoods.

#### 2. Create a Movement

The OCRT uses the power of organic cotton networks to energize, inspire, and engage a wider audience, from farmers right through to consumers. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### 3. Transform Business

Many individual efforts are being made to advance organic cotton, and the OCRT provides an opportunity to bring great ideas to fruition. Through collaboration and community building, we can make business more rewarding and even transformational.

Visit <http://textileexchange.org/organic-cotton-round-table/> for more details.

The OCRT has three on-going Task Forces for Business Models, Seed & Soils and Consumer Engagement. A recent addition to the OCRT is the Innovation Lab (and annual Innovation Award) that seeks out and celebrates new ideas in organic cotton.



**Business Models Task Force**

Success for all depends upon re-imagining and re-engineering supply chains to improve business security for growers and for organic to thrive. Incubating new ways of working, driving best practice, and ensuring product integrity is integral to improved business models and the resilience of the sector.

**Activities To Date:**

- Year 1 Incubation of the Organic Cotton Accelerator
- Year 1 proof of concept for Organic Cotton Communities – Chetna Coalition
- Organic Cotton Sustainability Assessment Tool (OC-SAT)



**Seed and Soils Task Force**

Access to good quality, non-GMO seed is necessary to meet the needs of the organic agricultural standard whilst delivering on fiber quality and meeting industry specifications. Productivity improvements in organic depend upon healthy, fertile soil as well as good quality, regionally-adapted seed. Avoiding and addressing contamination from GMOs is also key to the resilience and success of the organic cotton market.

**Activities To Date:**

- Global Inventory of Non-GM Cotton Seed
- Seed Projects
- Seed Dialogues
- White Paper on GMO Contamination



**Consumer Engagement Task Force**

The consumer is part of the organic cotton community. Educating and driving consumer demand are part of the business model. Brands and retailers of organic cotton need to see a return on investment. They invest significantly in product placement and talk directly to their customer, so consumer engagement is critical.

**Activities To Date:**

[aboutorganiccotton.org](http://aboutorganiccotton.org)

Serving the global audience



**Innovation Lab**

The Innovation Lab is a celebration of new ideas in organic cotton. It aims to seek out groups or individuals with innovative solutions to break through barriers to growth and discover new ways for the organic cotton community to flourish - from producer to consumer. Launched in Mumbai last year with eight inspiring Innovators pitching their great ideas, we are now preparing for the 2016 Innovation Lab in Hamburg.

Visit <http://textileexchange.org/innovation-lab/> for more details!

**BE PART OF OUR MATERIAL CHANGE!  
JOIN TEXTILE EXCHANGE  
JOIN THE ORGANIC COTTON ROUND TABLE**

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