



## **Why use organic cotton?**

### **Better quality garments**

Conventional cotton farming uses about 150 grams of acutely toxic pesticides and fertilizers to produce the cotton required for one t-shirt (Soil Association). Organic cotton uses none. The cotton is purer, has a much higher natural content and contains no allergens. When you wear clothing next to your skin, the skin can absorb any chemicals contained in the fabric.

### **Fairer prices for farmers**

In the world cotton industry corporate profits have grown whilst farmer profits have fallen. It is estimated that a fair price throughout the supply chain could cost less than 1% of the total sales price (PAN-UK). Organic farmers receive a premium for their cotton and organic textile supply chains seek to address this imbalance. The premium organic cotton farmers receive for their produce is by no means the only beneficial effect of organic cotton. Their families, food, local communities, wildlife and eco-systems are no longer at risk from the side effects of acutely toxic chemical pesticides and defoliants.

### **Better/safer conditions for farmers**

Cotton production uses nearly 25% of all insecticides on agricultural crops and 11% of all pesticides on only 2.5% of the world's cropped area. According to the World Health Organisation, 20,000 deaths occur in developing countries each year from poisoning by agricultural pesticides used on crops, of which many, due to their relative toxicity, can be attributed to cotton (Soil Association). These however are just the number of deaths and don't tell the whole story; it's estimated that up to 3 million agricultural workers suffer acute or reproductive after effects (PAN-UK). Even these figures are believed to be underestimates as they rely on medical records; many deaths and illnesses go unrecorded as medical care is often inaccessible or too expensive.

### **Improves food security**

It isn't just the health impact which makes a difference. Subsidised cotton industries in developed countries (primarily the US who are major exporters but also in the EU and China ) have driven down world cotton prices, intensifying the financial pressure on developing world farmers to produce higher yields, which means more chemicals. This forced short-termism has a dual negative effect: Insects and other pests develop resistance to chemicals when persistently applied and usually require the purchase and application of even more toxic and often more expensive chemicals, but also the lack of organic matter and reliance on synthetic fertilisers (often seen in intensive cotton farming and monocultures) reduces the soil's fertility (Soil Association), meaning costs increase without significant increases in cotton yields. The high yields required to meet the debt from purchasing these chemicals often forces land maximisation for cash crops, reducing land available for food crops. But the risk of contamination and the lack of fertile soil from these chemically supplemented monoculture methods means that sufficient food crops cannot be grown, yet cash crops do not yield enough profit to buy in all food required.

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But again these are not the only causes for concern. OBEPAB reported that between 2000 and 2002 68% of all poisonings and 74-84% of all fatalities in Benin (one of the worlds poorest countries but one of Africa 's biggest cotton producers) were from food contamination.

Organic cotton farming is usually on a smaller scale and grown on mixed organic farms where farmers are able to grow more crops in rotation, to intercrop more food crops safely with cotton fields and are able to prioritise food crops over cotton crops to ensure food security. More wild foods are available in diverse eco systems and more and healthier livestock (PAN-UK). Organic cotton often produces lower yields yet many organic cotton farmers report higher incomes as the costs of inputs are greatly reduced.

## **A greener supply chain**

But these benefits do not just stop at the farmers, the whole supply chain tends to benefit. Working conditions are better and environmental impact is considered at every stage and all effluents are properly treated. Thanks to the traceability and transparency of organic supply chains there is no 'sweeping under the carpet' of poor labour conditions and unscrupulous environmental standards.

In contrast, apart from the well documented labour conditions, conventional cotton uses large amounts of water, energy and chemicals in its processing stages which usual end up as highly contaminated effluent in local water suppliers (Soil Association). Again most processing is carried out in developing countries.

## **Traceability:**

The majority of companies who use conventional cotton will say they check that there is no child labour or sweatshop conditions in the factories that make their clothing. They cannot guarantee the same for where the cotton that ends up in their garments is grown. The difficulty is (although all companies, especially the bigger buyers can find out to an extent) the cotton that arrives in the main processing areas such as Bangladesh is grouped together by quality rather than origin. That means that it is extremely likely that cotton picked or initially processed under child labour is mixed with cotton that is more ethically produced. Factories that produce organic certified clothing can only use cotton certified as organic by the recognised bodies meaning you can only truly avoid unethical cotton by using organic cotton only.

## **Guaranteed GM Free**

It is estimated that 20% of all cotton in the world is GM cotton. Organic cotton is the only cotton that can be guaranteed GM free due to the traceability of its origins and global organic standards.

No less, the largest developer of GM cotton is Monsanto. So it is also Monsanto free.

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