

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 companies 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 IN THE UNITED STATES?

2023 organic Upland and American Pima cotton production in the U.S. totaled 39,259 bales, with production decreasing by 3,624 bales from the previous year. An additional 795 transitional bales were reported. Texas continues to lead organic cotton plantings and production, with additional acreage in Arizona, California, Georgia, and New Mexico. [i]

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE U.S. ORGANIC COTTON MARKET?

Sales of organic food and non-food products in the U.S. totaled \$71.6 billion in 2024. Among non-food categories, organic textiles—led by organic cotton products—remain the largest and fastest-growing segment of the U.S. organic industry, which includes personal care products, supplements, and pet food.

Organic textile sales grew 7.4% over 2023, reaching \$2.5 billion in 2024 and ranking seventh among the 10 food and non-food categories tracked. Over the past decade (2015–2024), the organic textiles market has grown by 92%. This growth is driven by increased availability of and consumer interest in organic apparel, home textiles (such as mattresses, sheets, and towels), and personal hygiene products.

WHAT ABOUT THE PROCESSING OF ORGANIC COTTON INTO FINISHED TEXTILES?

Companies are increasingly becoming certified to traceability standards such as the Textile Exchange Organic Content Standard (OCS), which verifies that the cotton (or other natural fibers) in a final product is certified organic. The number of OCS-certified sites increased 14% from 12,131 in 2022 to 13,859 in 2023.[ii]

Thousands of facilities around the world also have become certified to the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). GOTS is a stringent voluntary global standard for the entire postharvest processing (e.g., 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 establishes strong labor provisions including a prohibition on child labor. In 2023, the number of GOTS certified facilities increased 8% over 2022 to 14,676 globally.[iii]

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 be marketed as organic in the U.S.[iv]

WHAT KINDS OF PRODUCTS ARE MADE USING ORGANIC COTTON?

As a result of consumer interest, organic cotton fiber is used in everything from personal care items (e.g., sanitary products, rounds, puffs, and swabs), to fabrics, home furnishings (e.g., towels, bathrobes, sheets, blankets, bedding, mattresses), children's products, and apparel of all kinds and styles.

In addition, approximately two-thirds of cottonseed is used for animal feed, and cottonseed oil is used in a variety of food products, including cookies and chips.[v]

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[i] U.S. Department of Agriculture. August 2024. "Organic Cotton Market Survey."

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/cnaocms.pdf>

[ii] Textile Exchange. 2024. Materials Market Report.

<https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2024/09/Materials-Market-Report-2024.pdf>

[iii] Global Organic Textile Standard GmbH. May 1, 2024. "GOTS Annual Report." https://global-standard.org/images/resource-library/documents/GOTS-Annual-Reports/GOTS_Annual_Report_2023.pdf

[iv] U.S. Department of Agriculture. May 20, 2011. "Labeling of Textiles That Contain Organic Ingredients."

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/OrganicTextilePolicyMemo.pdf> and Organic Trade Association. May 2023. What are Organic Fiber Products and How Can You Label Them?

https://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/What%20are%20Organic%20Fiber%20Products_0.pdf

[v] National Cotton Council. ND. The Many Faces of Cotton.

<https://www.cotton.org/pubs/cottoncounts/upload/The-Many-Faces-of-Cotton.pdf>