EXPERT’S INSIGHT - TURKEY

Organic Cotton in Turkey - the spirit of organic agriculture

Turkish growers, especially in western parts, welcomed organic cotton agriculture. Field sizes were small, it was a family work to grow the local products, they were not using many chemical inputs, they were harvesting cotton by handpicking and also most of all, they were happy to gain a premium on top of conventional market prices. Additionally they also liked the spirit of organic agriculture and identified themselves with protecting their environment to hand over a cleaner environment to their children.

This worked from mid 1990’s until the first several years of the new millennium. Turkish cotton, thanks to its good quality, was welcomed in many countries by both industry and retailers. This helped organic projects to grow in Turkey with industry and retailers more or less committing themselves to certain organic production value chains.

But, in the early 2000’s this began to change. Conventional cotton prices fell to low levels due to increased production and high subsidies in some growing countries as well as organic cotton production’s rapid growth during the period. Turkish growers, both conventional and organic, were not happy with their income and they started to grow other products. In addition, the organic cotton business had become just like any other commodity business with fierce competition and no long-term commitment from buyers. This caused Turkey, formerly the world’s leading producer, to drop down to third in the world.

Of course, cotton prices started to increase globally from beginning of 2010. Turkish traders and growers revitalized some of their organic cotton projects and this season we expect to see a higher quantity harvested than in the 2009 crop.

We shall see the 2010 quality and quantity when harvesting finishes, but the price signal is having a significant positive effect.

Aydin Unsal, Egedeniz, Turkey