I am a third generation farmer and operate over 4,000 acres of land, most of which is certified organic. I grow organic cotton for (1) the increased financial gain and (2) the natural methods that can be used to better improve the environment.

Each bale of cotton marketed by our coop (TOCMC) can be tracked from the field to the customer. Buyers can know the producer’s name and farm for each bale purchased. TOCMC and our members are certified organic by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA).

USDA classing specifications are used to classify each bale of TOCMC cotton into one of five quality pools. Payments to producers are determined by the pool in which the bale falls, giving producers an incentive to grow the highest quality cotton possible. However, quality, like yield, is somewhat subject to weather conditions that are beyond the farmers’ control, resulting in some year-to-year variations in the percentage of the crop in each pool. The five quality pools are also the basis of TOCMC’s price structure. Customers receive bales from the pool containing cotton of the quality specifications they have requested and are charged the price related to that pool.

For every pound of cotton lint produced using organic farming methods, an estimated 0.0104 pounds of herbicide, insecticide, growth regulator and defoliant active ingredients and 0.3855 pounds of chemical fertilizer are not used.

Rainfall in a given year can make a significant difference in the percent breakdown of our production between dryland and irrigated. Abundant rainfall will also reduce the quantity of water used by our irrigated growers. Approximately 60 percent of our organic cotton acres are dryland and not irrigated. Based on our calculations, we estimated that our 2009 crop used approximately 250 gallons of irrigation water per pound of lint when you combine the irrigated and the dryland.

TOCMC members grow other organic crops including peanuts, wheat, corn, milo, soybeans, blackeye peas, pinto beans, black beans, and watermelons. Also, the cotton seed, which is separated from the cotton fiber in the ginning process, is marketed to organic dairies for feed.

The reward I receive for producing organically is the satisfaction of doing something that most people think cannot be done. That is – “environmental stewardship.” I believe in making this world a better place through fairness, honesty and integrity.

Jimmy Wedel, President, Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative