OPEN FORUM MEETING: CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT FOR ORGANIC COTTON
MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

1. Introduction

The first Organic Cotton Roundtable took place in Hong Kong 2012, focusing on Business Models and Seed as two priority areas. In the meeting Consumer Engagement was identified as a third priority area for action. This past year, in an initiative led by prAna, Textile Exchange produced a consumer video “I choose Organic”. The video was sponsored by C&A, Breganwood Organics, Eileen Fisher, Patagonia, Portico Home / Under the Canopy, prAna, Indigenous Designs, Nordstrom, and Quiksilver.

To inform and guide the next steps of Textile Exchange work on consumer engagement relating to organic cotton, an Open Forum meeting focusing on this topic was held at the Organic Cotton Roundtable meeting in Istanbul, chaired by Nicole Bassett from prAna.

2. Feedback from Panel Discussion

The Consumer Engagement session heard from four leading brands about their approach to communicating about organic cotton. Also on the panel was the Soil Association UK, who recently launched an organic cotton consumer campaign.

Graphic recording by Carlotta Cataldi
Vijayalakshmi Nachia, Ethicus, India: shared her experiences of engaging with consumers in the local Indian market and gave an overview of a successful campaign providing customers with cotton seed to give them the opportunity to experience, at a small scale, a farmer’s work.

Phil Chamberlain, C&A, Europe/Global: provided an overview of the development of organic within C&A and the experience that whilst “customers may not be asking for organic products they are certainly buying them”, and how this is reflected in the positive return on investment secured on organic products priced at the same level as conventional products.

Kristie Cameron and Anne Gilligan, Eileen Fisher US/Global: Talked about the “& campaign” and consumer responses to often complex messages and utilizing different channels to achieve a balance between simple messaging backed up with detailed information.

Stefan Dierks, Tchibo Germany/Europe: Provided an overview of the first ever organic cotton ‘world’ featured at Tchibo and how the story of the farmer, the company and the consumer was brought together, the challenges of reducing the complexity of the issues whilst sending the right message as well as the good outcomes of the campaign.

Sarah Compton, Soil Association: Provided an update on the Cottoned-On consumer awareness campaign a year on from the launch and the impact it has had. The campaign has generated a significant amount of publicity and the number of signatories is steadily increasing. In September 2013 an infographic was launched to communicate the key messages of the campaign.

3. Key Note – Harriet Lamb, Fairtrade International

Following the panel discussion Harriet Lamb, from Fairtrade International, shared the experiences of Fairtrade in reaching consumers and urged the group to find fun and innovative ways to get the message across.
4. Feedback from break out session

Participants worked in groups to answer three key questions.

1. What sort of marketing / consumer outreach is needed for organic cotton?
2. How could we work together to improve consumer awareness about organic cotton?
3. How could TE help?

A snapshot of some of the answers is provided below. The information gathered in the session will be used to inform the next steps in TE’s work on consumer engagement for organic cotton.

Responses to the question “What sort of marketing / consumer outreach is needed for organic cotton?” fell into four major clusters:

- **Education**: Catchy, global, viral campaigns. Collaboration across brands, Organic Cotton 101, social media, videos etc.

- **Facts**: Credibility, performance benefits, impact statistics

- **Emotions – People – Stories**: Tell a story, make it personal, make it positive, link to the grower, participatory

Responses to the question “How could we work together to improve consumer awareness around organic cotton?” fell into four major clusters:

- **Collaboration** around messaging, consistent labelling, shared goals and messages.

- **Education**, NGOs educating rather than brands, focus on young people.

- **Initiatives**: such as ‘world organic day’, ‘organic fortnight’, ‘black Friday’ sale on organic, Got Milk style campaign.

- Last but not least, the **role of celebrities / role models / spokes people** as catalysts for awareness raising.

Responses to the question “How could TE help?” Included the following clusters:

- **Marketing & consumers**: Providing tools for marketing organic, films, website, social media.

- **Platforms**: Identify and communicate benefits, consumer platform / portal, collaboration form for consistent messages etc.

- **Advocacy** and lobbying.

- **Partnerships**: form partnerships with key organisations, e.g. Fairtrade and GOTS as well as partnerships along the supply chain.

- **Certification and Labelling**: “Good Company” certification, common logo, verified information for marketing claims.
5. Next steps

As illustrated by the snapshots above, the group called for common messaging and more collaboration to meet the high priority of engaging consumers. Consumer engagement is now firmly on Textile Exchange’s agenda and will be further developed further in the Organic Cotton Accelerator.

A short report will be created based on the feedback provided in the Open Forum. Potentially, a Consumer Engagement Working Group could be created and coordinated by Textile Exchange. If you are interested in getting involved and supporting this work, please contact hanna@textileexchange.org

Images of Breakout Activity: