The Tanzanian company BioSustain was established in 2006 with the aim to revive cotton production using organic farming and to provide markets for organic certified products - with an emphasis on quality. BioSustain provides farmers with support and technical assistance and pays an organic premium for the cotton. Production volumes have steadily increased since the start and are expected to further grow in coming years as BioSustain has acquired a cotton ginnery and an oil mill and have signed a memorandum of understanding with three district governments to promote organic farming.

The Singida region of Tanzania has ideal conditions for cotton and sesame production. It is also one of the poorest regions of Tanzania and one third of the region is a game reserve. Sustainable land use is necessary to conserve the area whilst strengthening the economy. BioSustain was established in 2006 with the aim to revive cotton production using organic farming and to provide markets for quality organic certified products.

BioSustain provide farmers with seeds and input on credit, provide training and technical assistance to farmers as well as support on Fair Trade certification. Farmers are paid an organic premium for their cotton by BioSustain. To date, more than 3800 small holder producers have entered into contract with BioSustain and this number is expected to significantly increase in coming years as BioSustain has acquired a cotton ginnery and oil mill in Singida Town.
Fact File:

- BioSustain currently work with 3,800 farmers across 78 farmer groups. In 2010/11 BioSustain will reach 5,000 farmers to produce organic cotton. In five years to target figure is to reach 12,000 farmers.
- BioSustain has recently purchased the local (unused) ginnery and is will begin ginning again this season.
- The target for next year (2011/12) is to produce 5,000 MT of organic seed cotton and, within the next five years, reach a volume of 9000 MT of organic seed cotton.
- Steps to ensure the highest quality of production are in place.
- Focus on production and transportation with the lowest possible consumption of energy
- A comprehensive portfolio of training and support provided to farmers by BioSustain; including quality management.
- In addition to cotton and sesame, the BioSustain also supports sustainable production of maize, millet and legumes. In addition the project supports maintenance of the Miombo Forest and encourages traditional bee keeping.
- Important aim of BioSustain is to make a contribution to poverty reduction.

Success Factors:

- Linking farmers and markets - Biosustain sees itself as a bridge between producers in the south and consumers in the north and that its role is to strengthen mutual understanding and solidarity.
- Investing in a quality product - Organic premium is linked to fibre quality. Local organic agrarian personnel make visits in order to guarantee the quality.
- Achieving economies of scale - Biosustain have revitalised a local ginnery and will be stepping up production. Simultaneously bringing employment and wealth to the region.
- A commitment from the government - bringing further support and security to the BioSustain venture.

Farmer benefits

Pricing policy – organic and quality premium - A strong emphasis is placed on the production of quality produce. To support this, the organic premium is linked to quality and ranges between 7-15%.

Establishing groups and extension services - The very first step of BioSustain's approach is to establish farmer groups and support farmers in this by providing training in group strengthening. This is followed by identifying village extension workers and providing them with training whilst carrying out seed and cultivation needs assessments.

Technical assistance and training - Once farmer groups are established and extension workers are in place there is a comprehensive portfolio of training and support provided to farmers by BioSustain. This ranges from training in organic cotton farming techniques through to training in quality management. In addition training services are provided for internal control systems, inspections to ensure that organic products are well documented and ready for certification.

Food security - An important aim of BioSustain is to make a contribution to poverty reduction and a crucial factor for that is securing food supplies. As shown in research by Textile Exchange shows that a large proportion of food crops grown by organic cotton growers is kept in the household. This is also the case amongst farmers in the BioSustain project where they consume over 80% of the maize they grow, over 60% of sorghum, 40% of soya and sunflower, 30% of mungbean and 50% of sesame grown.

“This season I’m expecting not less than three tons of organic cotton. That is 3,000kgs. It’s not a joke. I have improved so much in my cotton farming and I plan to start a small supplies shop in the village. Later, I will go for the tractor. Our biggest challenge is money. With a loan we can buy things like tractors and other farming equipment to expand our farms. We just hope that this season ends well without destructive rains before our harvest as we wait for the buyer”
Mzee Bakari, organic cotton farmer in Msae that has been working with BioSustain since 2008.
**Revitalisation**

Singida used to produce up to 9000 MT of cotton and it is this past productivity that BioSustain is striving to reproduce using organic methods. The ginnery in Singida closed 12 years ago. BioSustain has now purchased the ginnery and is working to start ginning again this season. The target for next year (2011/12) is to produce 5,000 MT of organic seed cotton with the aim to within the next five years reach the historical volume of 9000 MT of organic seed cotton.

“At this point, I need to buy a tractor now so that I can expand my organic cotton farm and help other farmers at a fee. I can pay in instalments; I believe that my contract farming arrangement can help me. With this, I will cultivate a bigger farm than the current seven acres”

Mzee Bakari Hamis, an organic cotton farmer in Msae Village, Iramba District in Singida Region.

**Working in partnership**

BioSustain has a strong commitment to working in partnership to achieve its aims. Partnerships have been established with organisations such as Solidaridad Netherlands, Sidi, Rabobank Foundation, the Rural Livelihood Development Company (RLDC), a not for profit organisation, Rabo Foundation working to improve the livelihoods of poor communities in central Tanzania regions. Activities supported under these partnerships include farmer training, improved farmer extension services along with strengthening of market systems. A recent development is that BioSustain and all three district governments of the region have signed a Memorandum of understanding to promote organic cotton farming under contract farming systems. This is unique partnership as the regional government decided to go organic under a public private partnership.

For more information on BioSustain, please visit http://www.biosustain.de/index.html
A Unique Focus on the Entire Value Chain - Improving the Lives of Over One Million People

Through the work of Textile Exchange, and funding from our key partner ICCO, we now positively affect the lives of over 220,000 organic cotton farmers worldwide. Conservative estimates show that each farmer in the Global South has responsibility for a household of five people. This means that Textile Exchange programs have directly and positively impacted the lives of over 1,110,000 people in developing countries.

Textile Exchange’s methodology is unique and innovative in many respects, including:

- Textile Exchange takes a global approach to developing markets. This is particularly effective given the global nature of cotton production and consumption.

- We build demand and supply simultaneously. Engaging with farmers through to brand and retailers to help increase fiber production and enables suppliers to create short- and long-term production schedules. Our efforts culminate in consumer education, highlighting farmers and farming innovations, beautiful yarns and fabrics, and highly desirable products.

- Textile Exchange is unique in that we focus on the entire value chain, from seed procurement through to retail. We provide models and tools for collaborative planning, problem solving, product development, and point of purchase materials.