



Hello – and welcome to our June-July news bulletin. This issue of Engage brings you a great round-up of Farm Engagement news and Regional updates from Africa, Latin America, and India. We are delighted to welcome back Lazare Yombi from Helvetas who brings us in-depth and often very personal stories from West Africa. In this issue both Lazare and our regional director in Africa, Silvere Tovignan have written a couple of must-reads for Engage. Likewise our regional directors in Latin America and India have valuable news and information and stories to share. Alfonso continues to bring the hottest science – and this case quite literally speaking! – to our back page.

I would like to take this time to tell you a little about our new Round Table on Organic Cotton. The concept of a Round Table originated from the 12th Century when King Arthur formed the Knights of the Round Table in England. The ethos being that a Round Table has no head (of the table), and implies that everyone who sits around it has equal status. It's quite interesting to see how the philosophy behind 'organic' is pretty similar – organic agriculture is built on democracy and promotes equality to all within the value chain. So some nice linkages there!

These days, Round Tables are becoming popular vehicles for progressing sustainability in agriculture and commodity value chains. Opinion leaders and think tanks such as the WWF through to the various Stewardship Councils (forests and fisheries) are advocating the use of round tables. A round table in today's quest for more sustainable production involves getting business and civil society to focus on finding solutions to sustainability problems that directly affect them: The goal being to build consensus around mutually agreed key issues. The belief being that greater good can be achieved, and within a shorter timeframe.

I see a Round Table on organic cotton as not only supporting the organic cotton sector (which is paramount) but also to keep a focus on what organic cotton agriculture can offer the broader sustainable cotton agenda. The beauty of a round table is that it is an inclusive process involving representatives from both civil society and the corporate world and each has equal voice. To find out more about our new Round Table and the inaugural meeting in Hong Kong in October please visit our website (and the story later in this newsletter) and if you are interested you could contact Donna Worley to download the recording of my recent webinar on this subject.

I hope you enjoy our 19th Issue of Engage – and as always we welcome any feedback or contributions you might like to make. Remember all back issues of Engage are available on our website too.

Happy reading!

Liesl Truscott,
Director Farm Engagement
Textile Exchange



C&A – latest release in our Future Shapers series



C&A was established 170 years ago and remains a family business, growing from one small shop to a business of nearly 1600 stores spread across Europe today. The sustainability of the business has always been at the centre of the strategy, with the company thinking in generations, not in financial quarters. A core part of the more recent sustainability strategy is the C&A commitment to "Bio Cotton".

C&A began its organic cotton journey in 2004. C&A became a member of Organic Exchange (now renamed Textile Exchange) and the organisation helped them to understand the organic cotton chain, to connect to the right partners, and to have access to the knowledge the company needed to start their work in that area. That same year, C&A bought their first consignments of organic cotton, initially blending it with conventional cotton. In 2005, the company decided that it was ready to release its first products made of 100% organic cotton to its customers and since then has increased its commitment to become one of the two largest buyers of organic cotton worldwide.

C&A has been a pioneer in investing all the way through the supply chain in a holistic way in order to support both farmers producing organic cotton and farmers producing conventional cotton to move towards cleaner production. This work is supported by the C&A Foundation. For example, the Foundation supported the establishment of schools in several of their farming group locations in India, which means that more than 500 children can now attend school in those farming communities. For true sustainability, this holistic approach is essential:

"Our journey in organic cotton has been key to gaining a better insight into our cotton supply chain and to our understanding of where we can really make a difference. Since 2004, we have decided to take a holistic approach to our cotton supply chain and we are proud to be able to demonstrate that our investments are beneficial for both farmers on the ground, and for our company, which in turn makes the business case even stronger" says Philip Chamberlain, Head of Sustainable Business Development, C & A.

See the full story of C&A in the [Future Shapers](#) series. Take a look at other releases in our [Future Shaper](#) series: Vega, Debella, and Ethicus.

Textile Exchange – celebrates 10th anniversary with first ever calendar!



As part of our 10 year anniversary we have produced our first ever wall calendar. Our calendar draws on the theme Inspiring Moments – moments in organic cotton that capture hearts and minds and features 12 superb images and personal commentaries from around the world. Please take a look at our growing gallery of '[Inspiring Moment](#)' snapshots – a new one is released each month.

If you are looking for a meaningful and useful gift this Holiday season, look no further! By giving the Inspiring Moments calendar you are also giving a charitable donation to a cause aligned with your business. Staff, business customers, friends, and family will be delighted to receive this beautiful and practical gift, while also recognising your contribution to a worthy cause.

We now invite you to purchase our beautiful calendar and help us raise the visibility of the benefits of organic cotton to people and planet. All proceeds go towards farm capacity building; currently focussing on seed for organic farming.

Textile Exchange: Inspiring Moments Calendar 2013

- USD 15 + p&p, orders over 20: USD 10 + p&p (TE members)
- USD 20 + p&p, orders over 20: USD 15 + p&p (non TE members)

Early Bird Offers If you pre-order your calendars by **August 30th**, we will give you an additional 10% off!

Please contact Hanna Denes farm@textileexchange.org to preorder your TE special birthday edition calendar now. Online shopping cart purchase option available soon. We know you will be inspired by our 2013 calendar – and we thank you for your support!

The Farm Blog explores the impacts of organic cotton fiber



the series, visit the Farm Blog by clicking [here](#).

Over the past month the Farm Blog has been examining the **advantages of organic cotton agriculture through the lenses of the Eco-Index**: Toxics, Water, Energy, Waste, Biodiversity and Land Use Intensity. Coming soon in this series will be a closer look at how social issues can be integrated into the Eco-Index. To read

2012 Sustainable Textiles Conference - Hong Kong: Innovation, Performance and Passion



Inspiration for tomorrow's solutions

Exhibition Centre, running in conjunction with Interstoff Asia Essential - Autumn Fair.

This year, Textile Exchange is partnering with EcoTextile News, Messe Frankfurt, and Planet Textiles to bring you the premier 2012 Sustainable Textiles conference in Hong Kong, October 4 and 5. This event will be hosted at the Hong Kong Convention and

This annual event is a global gathering of key players and industry leaders representing the entire value chain from fiber to fashion, discussing sustainability challenges and solutions from raw materials extraction to end of life.

The 2012 global event will balance inspiring plenary speakers with action-oriented discussions and forums that cover important aspects of sustainability in textiles. The full conference agenda is now available [online](#).

withdrew its support for the Association that was in charge of input provision, primary commercialization and ginning of cotton, taking these responsibilities directly into the Ministry of Agriculture.

In order to encourage farmers to come back to conventional cotton, this year, the Benin Government increased subsidies on inputs (mineral fertilizer and pesticides), provided credit (in cash) to allow farmers to hire labor and increased the farm gate price of conventional cotton from 250 FCFA/Kg to 260 FCFA/Kg. As expected, this led to an increase in interest in cotton from farmers; but some organic cotton farmers have been tempted too. In the village of Gogbede (in Kandi, North of Benin) a group of 30 farmers with more than 15 years' experience in certified organic cotton production went to register to benefit from the Government subsidies and will sell their harvest this year as conventional. The same situation has happened in other areas of the country, such as the villages in the Helvetas project. It seems the same situation is occurring in Mali where the Government applies similar policies.

However, most of the organic cotton farmers have resisted this temporary policy, expecting it to last just one or two seasons. In the village of Kassakou (also in the Kandi area) two organic cotton farmers' groups of about 70 farmers, with also more than 15 years' experience in organic farming, have resisted the attraction of the subsidies and the risks of the debt trap. Their leader Mr. Sion Ngoby argues that organic farming is the best for them. After the harvest, they can sell their cotton and do not need to deduct any credit fee from their income. He said also that: "*we prefer suffering in the morning and to live the best life in the evening*". This was a reference to the fact that yields in conventional cotton farming are going down and that farmers will have difficulty paying back their loans with the money from their single harvest this season.

Most organic cotton farmers have resisted – we estimate that only about 10 percent of the 2,000 organic cotton farmers of Benin are affected.



Reported by Silvere Tovignan
Director for Africa
Textile Exchange

“Weaving is my destiny” ... adding value to cotton, locally

An interview with Gbinsan Sabi Bignon



“I am from the village of Koulané in Benin. I am 18 years old. I speak to you on behalf of the community of young women who did not have the opportunity to go to school and learn to read, speak and write in French. I speak only my native language: the bariba.

My parents, small local farmers, have 9 children and finally decided to send me to school too late - I was already too old. So, I was obliged to learn a trade and there was only one choice: weaving. Near Koulané there is a weaver whose work is very

popular and my parents wanted me to become like her and registered me as her apprentice. At first, I was reluctant, but soon I became captivated by the work. A year ago I obtained my certificate at the end of my apprenticeship, and my parents bought me a two pedal loom. Now I weave traditional loincloths which I sell locally. I have been able to buy myself a bicycle, which enables me to get faster from one place to another. I can easily provide for myself and for some other members of my family. Even if I was to be married tomorrow, I would have enough money even for my children.



I am always on the lookout for further training to improve my weaving knowledge. When my former teacher informed me that the Active and Valiant Women Association (AFVA) together with HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation were organizing a training course for textile producers I could not wait to take part. My prayers were answered as I learnt numerous new designs that I am confident I can make well. This way, I can diversify my production.

My ambition is one day to be responsible for a training centre and to teach other people. Already, two young girls have asked if they can come and learn the trade with me. I am planning to increase the number of looms I own, but I do not have enough money to purchase them yet. However, I hope that one day I will.”

Gbinsan was interviewed by:



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REGIONAL FOCUS: LATIN AMERICA

Regional Director Latin America Alfonso Lizarraga interviews Carlos Tonon, Manager of Verde Textil – Argentina. Alfonso poses the question “*Why isn’t organic cotton grown in Argentina?*”

Carlos Tonon, manager of VERDE TEXTIL, a company that produces organic clothing in Buenos Aires, says that there are two main reasons why organic cotton is not grown in Argentina. First of all, the cotton-growing areas are concentrated in the provinces of Chaco, Formosa, north of Santa Fe and part of Santiago del Estero. However, a large amount of soy and genetically modified cotton are also grown in those areas. As a result, the fields where organic cotton would potentially be grown could very easily become contaminated and, as a consequence, it is very difficult to obtain organic certification for the cotton. Since 2005, there have been attempts to grow organic cotton, but unfortunately it hasn't gotten off the ground.

One problem is that INTA (National Institute of Agricultural Technology), which supports and promotes the development of organic crops, seems to apply a different policy to food crops than it does to cotton. INTA promotes planting cotton in "narrow rows"[1], that is, with a greater density of seed, using a genetically modified type of cotton in which the plant grows vertically more so than

horizontally, thus significantly increasing the amount of cotton produced per hectare. However, there is also a disadvantage to the high yield: the excessive erosion of the soil, which considerably reduces its useful life.

In this context, organic cotton is not very appealing to farmers. There are some small scale farmers interested in growing organic cotton, but the production that they are able to achieve each year does not enable meeting the minimums necessary in order to be able to develop combed cotton yarn which would enable it to be sold.

VERDE TEXTIL is a company that tries to meet the demand from the Argentinean market for organic clothing and uses organic cotton from Peru to produce its range of organic clothing.

VERDE TEXTIL S.R.L. www.verdetextil.com

Note: Argentina is one of the main farming countries in Latin America, with a large number of areas where conventional cotton is grown, and is home to textile initiatives and companies such as Verde Textil and Otro Mercado del Sur, which deserve to be applauded for their work. Argentina also has organic certification standards in place and there are various certifying companies such as Argencert, Letis, and OIA, among others.

[1] Mechanized production technique which applies distances of 50 cm to 52 cm between rows or lines, instead of the conventional 90 cm to 100 cm (1 m). http://www.elcomercial.com.ar/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16604:la-tecnica-de-surco-estrecho-genera-un-alto-rendimiento-de-5-tonela&catid=5:interior&Itemid=57

REGIONAL NEWS: LATIN AMERICA

Monitoring of genetically modified cotton: Monsanto's Bollgard genetically modified cotton is approved in Paraguay.

The MON531 variety of genetically modified cotton produced by the Monsanto has been registered in the National Registry of Commercial Growers (RNCC) by the National Service for Plant and Seed Quality (SENAVE) in Paraguay. On July 6, the SENAVE decided in favour of registering cotton of the DP404BG variety, sold by Monsanto as Bollgard cotton.

Report by Alfonso Lizárraga Travaglini, TE Regional Director for Latin America

Source: <http://www.paraquay.com/economia/senave-habilita-uso-de-algodon-transgenico-84250>

REGIONAL FOCUS: INDIA

Organic in Action: Appachi and SKS farmers make way for wildlife

One of the key benefits of organic agriculture is its contribution to biodiversity. In southern India, organic cotton farmers are supporting fragile forest ecosystems and an elephant corridor. Appachi Cotton, a farm to fashion vertical chain that promotes Ethicus, India's domestic organic label, source all their cotton from SKS Savayana Krishikara Sangha).

Mr Mani Chinnaswamy of Appachi /Ethicus and Mr Chandrasekhar of SKS tell us how the organic story started in this vulnerable part of Karnataka and the critical role they play:

SKS is an organic farmer group based at Handpost in Mysore District in Karnataka, India. The SKS farmers are located on the border of Nagarahole National Park in the Niligris biosphere reserve on the Western Ghats. This area is part of the migratory route of the elephants of South India. Elephants roam the forests in search of food. They choose their routes from genetic memory and from the teachings of their elders. The villages where the SKS farmers live and work are very close to this major elephant corridor and migratory route - one of the oldest connecting the Eastern and Western Ghats forests of South India. There are said to be 6000 elephants in the area. The forests are also a core tiger area for India, with 300 animals reported.

Making the connection There are many major threats to the once pristine forest area and its immediate environs. Farmers living near forest land and cultivating it have emerged as one of the biggest threats to wildlife as their habitat shrinks. Human /wildlife conflicts occur on a regular basis.

"In this scenario the manner in which crops are grown and choices that farmers make are invaluable, and have a tremendous impact on the forest ecology and the wellness of wildlife in the area. By being organic, SKS farmers are making a small but significant impact" says Mani Chinnaswamy.

Mani calls the SKS farmers "*real life heroes*" as they are doing everything they can to hold on to their slice of paradise. They have tilled and walked the land for years. They have resisted the temptation of Bt (genetically modified) cotton. They refuse to stand around watching their beloved earth getting degraded. They love their land. They have given away acres of land to create the Kabini Reservoir.

"Thousands of elephants have benefited from this move," says Mani.



Above: the Appachi Cotton Trail

Read the full story in our [Organic in Action](#) series here: [SKS story](#)



REGIONAL NEWS: INDIA

APEDA releases Organic Textile Certification Standard



APEDA
Agricultural & Processed Food Products
Export Development Authority
Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India

On the 27th of July, India's Agricultural and Processed Foods Export Development Authority (APEDA) launched a certification standard for organic textiles, the National Organic Textile Standards (NOTS).

The new certification aims at introducing uniform standards with global recognition, and will be covered by the National Programme for Organic Productions (NPOP) which is a legal regime operating under the Indian Ministry of Commerce.

"India took over the long-standing position of the Global Organic Textiles standards (GOTS), a private standard prevailing in the organic textiles industry by introducing NOTS. India also has the distinction of being the only country in the world to have introduced organic textile standards at the national level," said Mr Asit Tripathy, Chairman, APEDA, in a statement.

Report by Prabha Nagarajan, TE Regional Director for India

Back Page: Farm Insights



Alfonso Lizarraga continues to bring you valuable insights on a diverse range of farming issues. Today Alfonso brings sobering news on the impact of climate change for farming communities in Latin America.

Climate Change: the effects of climate change on cotton production in Latin America

Climate change is a recurring phenomenon in the world and Latin America is not immune. At the beginning of 2012, the effects of the weather phenomenon known as "La Niña" were already starting to take their toll on agriculture. Some countries suffered torrential rains and floods (Colombia and Ecuador), whereas others such as Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay reported a lack of precipitation, which had a negative effect on agriculture (loss in the production of grains in Mexico, fires in Chile, drought in Paraguay and in north eastern Brazil, and excessive rains in Ecuador, Colombia and southern Brazil).

"The World Meteorological Organization defines "La Niña" as an anomalous cooling of ocean temperatures in the region of the Pacific Ocean, resulting in dramatic drops in temperature (frost) in addition to extreme phenomena such as intense rains or prolonged droughts lasting up to 18 months."^[1]

Brazil, for instance, is experiencing one of the worst droughts that the north eastern part of the country has ever seen, leaving many small farmers of cotton and other crops with nothing to harvest.

During the first six months of 2012, it is estimated that it rained less than 150 mm, when a minimum of 600 mm of rain is needed to guarantee production where there isn't any irrigation. This has created an emergency situation. One of the methods for dealing with the lack of rainfall has been to drill wells, which is very expensive for small farmers (ranging in price from 25,000 to 75,000 dollars).

Sources:

www.fao.org

www.nacion.com

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Please visit our website: <http://farmhub.textileexchange.org>

We hope you enjoy reading Engage. Please feel free to contact any of the team, we welcome your feedback and ideas for improvement.

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