Organic cotton demand surges due to fashion brands - report

By Sandra Halliday - 30 March 2022

The number of farmers growing organic cotton is ballooning as demand from the fashion sector grows, a report said on Wednesday.

Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA) — a group of industry partners whose “goal is to unleash the potential of organic cotton for farmers, brands and the planet” — released its latest Farm Programme Impact report, and underlined the business case for farmers to grow organic cotton.

And the message seems to be getting across as OCA had worked with over 22,000 organic cotton farmers under its Farm Programme during the 2020/21 season, which was a 180% increase. But it’s currently working with nearly 80,000 farmers for the 2021/22 season, a further increase of 350%.

That’s a key development given the criticism levelled at the fashion sector for over-production and increasing concerns about the impact of cotton on the environment. Given that cotton accounted for around a quarter of total global fibre production in 2019, every step closer to organic being the dominant option is a welcome move.

And the ramping up of actions to grow organic cotton mean sustainability pledges from fashion giants are more likely to be met. Bestseller, for instance, has set a target of sourcing 30% organic cotton by 2025 and to date, the H&M Group has introduced in-conversion cotton to its sustainable material portfolio to support farmers transitioning to organic agriculture.

The OCA said reducing harmful chemicals and greenhouse gas emissions, and preserving biodiversity and healthy soils mean that “organic cotton farming can have a significant impact in achieving a climate-friendly system for the fashion sector, as well as improving quality of life for farmers”.

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Brands and retailers participating in OCA’s Farm Programme financially support the critical services provided to farmers, ranging from training in organic practices, supply of seed and bio-inputs and procurement at a premium price.

Bart Vollaard, Executive Director at OCA, said: “Organic cotton holds the key to a more sustainable fashion system and we see demand getting stronger. More farmers are switching to organic farming and more global brands and retailers are expanding their organic cotton sourcing and investing the support required for farmers to grow organic successfully.”

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