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CottonConnect Biodiversity Statement

CottonConnect recognizes the importance of maintaining the balance between ecological systems in nature. CottonConnect trains cotton farmers to address an overdependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides in order to preserve the biodiversity of their farms.

Farmers are trained to reduce the use of pesticides, which in turn reduces damage to harmless organisms in the air, plants and soil. Soil is tested to determine the correct type and amount of fertilizer required. This reduces the usage of chemical fertilizers, thus improving soil health and encouraging inhabitation by micro-organisms and other organisms for ecological balance

- The agricultural training for **REEL Cotton and BCI programmes promotes the use of bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers and reduces the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers.** The REEL Cotton programme requires cotton production to respect ecologically sensitive areas by keeping sufficiently sized buffers around cotton fields. CottonConnect motivates farmers to plant trees around farms and increase biodiversity. Cotton farmers are encouraged to diversify their production system to increase environmental and economic sustainability through crop rotation and intercropping along with cotton. Border crops are also planted around the cotton field. CottonConnect also motivates farmers to take necessary steps to increase beneficial insects on the farms. As well as agricultural training, CottonConnect promotes awareness amongst villagers of the need for environmental, wildlife and forest protection.
- **In Organic programmes only bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers are allowed.** CottonConnect's organic training programmes support farmers to grow good quality organic cotton, securing organic cotton for the future and testing the integrity. The farmer training programmes cover multiple aspects of agronomic interventions including a focus on biodiversity. Natural pesticides are used to avoid harming friendly insects and protecting diversity of insects. Natural fertilizers also used which allow the growth of micro-organisms.

In all programmes, agricultural practices are encouraged to optimize water usage and save water for other ecological needs. Farmers are trained to adopt soil and water conservation methods so that they can minimize soil erosion and increase soil fertility. CottonConnect builds capacity of the farmers so that they can learn and adopt sustainable practices to preserve the biodiversity of their farms.