PLANTING THE SEED: THE ROLE OF ORGANIC IN CREATING A SUSTAINABLE COTTON SUPPLY CHAIN
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Consumer and brand demand for organic fibre is growing, but this must be matched in production volumes. We are closely involved in tackling some of the challenges to this growth, such as organic seed availability and retaining integrity throughout the supply chain.

Connecting farmers to market partners who are willing to pay a fair price is the long term solution to address poverty and create resilient rural communities. This is a critical step for the sector.

We are pleased to welcome the Textile Exchange 2017 Organic Cotton Market Report and it is encouraging to see growing commitments to organic cotton from brands and retailers, who are increasingly looking to boost the sustainability of their raw materials by switching from conventional to organic cotton. It is great to see that industry initiatives are working to find and fund innovative ways to strengthen organic cotton along the value chain and that the number of programmes to support the sector is on the rise. As founding partners of CottonConnect in 2009, we are proud to be working alongside Textile Exchange, C&A and C&A Foundation on projects that incentivise farmers to remain in the organic cotton system. These next few pages explore the current challenges and opportunities to collectively build a resilient organic cotton sector that benefits all players.

Organic agriculture reduces the impact on natural capital, promotes biodiversity, food security and improves and maintains the critical health of soil. Much of CottonConnect’s work in recent years has been focused in this important area, and the link to the health and safety of farming communities.

Farmers need support to adopt organic practices and techniques, as sometimes it means a reduction in yields for farmers in initial years. However, using organic methods reduces input costs and this provides the farmer with pay back in the long run.

Organic farmers on our training programmes in India have had such a positive experience with organic methods that they are now teaching neighbouring farmers how to do the same.

“As C&A Foundation partnered with CottonConnect to accelerate the production of organic cotton and improve the lives and livelihoods of the farming families who depend on it. Through their market-driven approach, deepening partnerships with brands and retailers, and support to local implementing organizations, I believe that CottonConnect can play a key role in enabling a resilient organic cotton sector.” Leslie Johnston, Executive Director, C&A Foundation

As an enterprise with a social mission, pioneering a transparent and sustainable cotton supply chain, we know that organic is one of the ways our retail partners can achieve ambitious sustainable cotton targets. Our direct link to farmer groups and communities of cotton growers, particularly in the leading organic cotton producing countries like India and China, allows brands and retailers to access these communities directly.

“CottonConnect is providing options and solutions for a growing number of cotton farmers by providing training, access to information and links to market partners. These are the building blocks that will lead to not only sustainable, but regenerative agriculture that will support thriving and resilient communities.” LaRhea Pepper, Managing Director, Textile Exchange
2. CONTEXT

Growing numbers of consumers are making a lifestyle choice to support organic fibre, and fashion brands and retailers are beginning to make commitments to increase the sustainability of their supply chains and raw materials.

Compared to conventional cotton, organic cotton production benefits both the environment and farming communities. Organic cotton uses 91% less water and 62% less energy\(^1\) and the use of chemicals in pesticides is completely prohibited. Organic cotton production helps to improve biodiversity and the health and safety of farming communities.

Organic cotton production contributes to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. Given that millions of people around the world are dependent on cotton farming, organic production provides an opportunity to improve livelihoods and reduce poverty.

Numbers at a glance (2016):

- 219,947 Organic Farmers
- 302,562 Organic Certified Land (ha)
- 107,980 Organic Cotton Fiber (MT)
- 262,975 Organic In-Conversion Land (ha)

Despite the benefits and rising demand for organic cotton as an important commodity crop, the organic cotton sector is faced with environmental, economic and social challenges.

Unless we address and overcome these threats to organic cotton production, we cannot reach the aim of building a thriving organic cotton industry. There is a growing urgency to unlock the potential of organic cotton and demonstrate its value to fashion brands, retailers and farmers.

“In the face of climate change and increased resource scarcity, organic agriculture holds the keys to survival. What’s still lacking is a business context that enables farmers to benefit from their sustainability value-addition. When we construct market mechanisms that reward farmers appropriately, we will see a radically different organic cotton sector - indeed a radically different rural economy - than we have today.” Liesl Truscott, European & Materials Strategy Director, Textile Exchange

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3. THE ROLE OF COTTONCONNECT

CottonConnect works with organic cotton farmers to boost the production of organic cotton and support their communities. We connect major brands to organic cotton farmers and empower farmers to deliver with transparency, consistency and integrity. This delivers business, environmental and social benefits all along the sustainable cotton supply chain.

CottonConnect’s Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme covers multiple aspects of agronomic interventions with a focus on good agricultural practices, organisation of farmer collectives and enhanced biodiversity. The programme components deepen the skills and knowledge of the farmers, and empower them with the tools to make a more sustainable future. We have also started working with the state government in Maharashtra in India, the largest cotton producing country, to support their efforts in bringing 25% of total agricultural land under organic farming.

“CottonConnect is a valued partner for the C&A Foundation. We have been working together to develop a strong future for the organic cotton market globally. CottonConnect’s strength is in its depth of knowledge both in the field and the supply chain. I believe CottonConnect can build on their knowledge and expertise to becoming a catalyst for transforming the sustainable cotton market.” Anita Chester, Head of Sustainable Raw Materials, C&A Foundation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Organic Cotton Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>✦ The biggest challenge is the inequitable distribution of value within the supply chain</td>
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<td>✦ Access to good quality organic seed</td>
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<td>✦ Supply chain integrity</td>
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<td>✦ Farmer level access to modern techniques and technologies</td>
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<td>✦ Market demand connected with supply</td>
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**COTTONCONNECT ORGANIC COTTON FARMER TRAINING**

We launched the Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme (OCFTP) in 2014/15 in partnership with C&A Foundation to support smallholder cotton farmers in adopting organic cotton production practices over a three-year conversion process, with the aim of using our learnings from this to scale up production of organic cotton globally.

The programme aims to:

✦ Deepen organic training with farmers and explore innovation models.
✦ Support farmer empowerment and independence through a Farmer Business School.
✦ Ensure that graduating farmers are encouraged to continue in the organic system.
✦ Support organic integrity across the supply chain.

The programme consists of six projects in the Indian states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

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<th>Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme</th>
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<td><strong>Years 1-3:</strong></td>
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<td>✦ Building agricultural knowledge</td>
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<td>✦ Entrepreneurial business skills</td>
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<td>✦ New technologies</td>
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<td>✦ Empowering all within their communities</td>
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<td>✦ Certification, seed testing and seed linkages</td>
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<td>✦ Farmer conventions and the creation of farmer producer groups for self-sufficiency</td>
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<td>✦ Market linkage building</td>
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<td><strong>Year 4:</strong></td>
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<td>✦ ‘Light brush’ agronomic training</td>
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<td>✦ Farmer Business School: economic empowerment and business understanding</td>
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<td>✦ Empowering women in cotton farming communities through a ‘Women in Cotton’ programme</td>
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<td>✦ Organic and Fairtrade Cotton Secretariat Maharashtra: creating a state level platform for organic cotton</td>
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<td><strong>Across all 4 years:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>✦ Entrepreneurial business skills</td>
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<td><strong>ORGANIC COTTON FARMER TRAINING PROGRAMME OUTCOMES</strong></td>
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<td><strong>22,978</strong> conventional cotton farmers enrolled under the programme</td>
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<td><strong>19,188</strong> will be certified organic for opening of the October 2017 cotton season</td>
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<td>Total cotton area certified: <strong>36,160 acres</strong></td>
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<td>Total cotton lint produced: <strong>7,112 MT</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100%</strong> of farmers aware of how and where to access improved organic cotton seed</td>
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C&A Foundation brings together brands, NGOs and other change-makers to transform the fashion industry so that it works better for everyone it touches.

Today, conventional cotton farming, especially in the context of smallholder farmers in under-regulated environments, leads to heavy water use, soil pollution, poor health and bad business for farmers.

However, cotton grown sustainably and sold fairly can help small farmers, their families and entire communities thrive. We see that organic cotton eliminates dangerous chemicals, protects farmers’ health, preserves the soil, conserves water, and helps farms break their cycle of debt. We need to unlock the potential of sustainable cotton. And fast.

CottonConnect, through the OCFTP with C&A Foundation, has been able to provide technical and financial support to almost 23,000 farmers, enabling them to convert to organic and farm as efficiently as possible to become certified. Organic certification verifies that farmers are following the organic practices and enables them to sell their crop as organic.

The programme is pioneering the training of good agricultural practices, organic cotton cultivation, financing of organic certification and the organisation of farmer collectives at scale. CottonConnect assist with farm monitoring and support, building checkpoints for controlling contamination and improving integrity score from the seed through to the fibre and also with the organic certification process.

Through a partnership with C&A Foundation, CottonConnect is supporting farmers to grow good quality organic cotton, while securing organic cotton for the future.

As a result of the programme, farmers have better working conditions and their children have improved access to education. Water efficiency methods such as rainwater harvesting and moving from flood irrigation to furrow and drip irrigation have helped farmers save money. Creating farmer groups also improves access to markets and finance and reduced dependence on credits. Lastly, farmers also benefitted from the availability of improved organic cotton seed.
Balu Nathu and his forefathers in Madhya Pradesh have cultivated cotton for many years. Previously the area followed chemical-free farming practices, but over the last 30 years as the agricultural revolution took place, most farmers adopted new technologies and methods of farming. Traditional methods such as crop-rotation and refuge crop cultivation were dropped in favour of GMO cotton, with the promise of better yields.

A few years ago Balu found the chemical pesticides were becoming ineffective on his crops; he was also going through a financial crisis and began to lose interest in cotton farming. But in 2014, he decided to join the CottonConnect Organic Cotton Farming Training Programme, supported by C&A Foundation, where he learnt about sustainable cotton farming practices such as nutrient management with organic inputs and how to prepare them onsite. These nutrients improve the soil fertility of land by increasing beneficial microbes. Balu observed that after using organic inputs, there was a drop in pest attacks in his field.

Balu also learnt about the benefits of adopting natural methods of controlling pests including use of sticky and pheromone traps, which are non-toxic ways to control and monitor small sized insects and pests. He also changed his sowing pattern and added guard crops as a natural distraction to insects.

“I felt very motivated attending the training modules where I learnt how to use organic farming methods effectively. I have learnt many new cultivation and farming practices through training and demo-farm visits. Adopting organic practices, such as nutrient management, has led to reduction in my cultivation costs over the last two years. This has meant I can increase my savings and improve the health and quality of life of my family.”
CottonConnect’s Farmer Business School is a first step towards long term resilience for communities, providing a platform for access to finance and community organisation.

CottonConnect has run the programme in China and India. The training aims to change farmers’ attitudes towards farming as a business and creating business men and women by:

- Developing farmer skills and competencies in business, farm and family financial management.
- Diversifying, planning and adapting their production to assure security for their family.
- Take advantage of new technologies and market opportunities to increase income and manage their financial means and credit.
- Supporting farmers in managing negotiations with their customers, input suppliers and credit institutions.

**OUTCOMES IN CHINA**

- Strong interest in joining co-operative groupings.
- 95% now know the profitability of their farms, compared to 68% pre-training.
- 87% now say they would like to buy insurance for their cotton, compared to 13% that bought insurance in past.
- 98% showed interest in purchasing inputs collectively, compared to 0% in a pre-training survey.
- Over 80% now want to keep track of their outgoings.
- 93% showed interest in continuing to grow cotton in the future, even though they have seen the price of cotton drop.

**OUTCOMES IN INDIA**

- Awareness of assessing quality of inputs/equipment and how best to assess went up from 58% to 98%.
- 40% now buy in groups compared to 15% previously.
- Willingness to transact in groups rather than individually increased from 2% to 90%.
- 73% now have bank accounts, compared to 55% before the financial management training module.
- 55% farmers are now enrolled in self help groups, compared to 43% before the programme.
- Female farmers taking on responsibility of bills/outputs increased by 35%.
6. SOIL HEALTH

Soil quality is the foundation on which good farming is based and creating a ‘living soil’ is a crucial principle underpinning organic. Organic soil contains sufficiently higher amounts of nutrients compared to conventional soil, which helps to improve the crop quality and reduces the need for fertilisers.

CottonConnect training teaches farmers how to maintain soil health through methods such as intercropping. Training teaches farmers that intercrops, including peas or beans, are not secondary crops but in fact beneficial crops that help in nutrient fixation which ultimately improve the quality of the cotton.

Educating farmers about nutrient availability in soil is vital to increase productivity. CottonConnect trains farmers on composting, through which farmers are directed to build and maintain the soil fertility through good farming practices. Moreover, training farmers on vermicompost pits also supports them to make their own organic fertiliser, reducing the input costs. Vermicompost is the excreta of earthworms, which is rich in nutrients that are not easily available in chemical fertilisers.

BENEFITS OF COMPOST

- **Better for farmers:** improved soil structure and fertility can increase yield potential, and farmers know exactly what they are getting in their compost, enabling them to get the correct spread rates on their fields for maximum benefit.
- **Better water management:** compost can prevent water logging of heavy soils and increasing water infiltration. It also helps light soils hold on to water, making it available for crop growth during long dry periods.

- **Improves soil health:** adds stable organic matter to the soil and slowly releases major nutrients such as phosphate, potash, magnesium and sulphur. These nutrients inhibit pests and soil diseases, help save on input costs and eliminates the need for additional fertilisers.
7. WORKING WITH COMPANIES: KERING

Kering has continued to increase its use of organic cotton over the last few years and the Group’s brands have been working to integrate more organic cotton into their collections. Notably, Kering’s internal Organic Cotton Platform, which was launched in 2015, has helped drive this shift. The Platform acts as a support mechanism for the Group’s brands, and was developed following a detailed evaluation by Kering of the challenges and constraints luxury brands can face when looking to source the highest-quality organic cotton needed for their products.

To support this process, CottonConnect is working with Kering on a pilot Organic Cotton Farming Training Programme in India. The programme aims to build knowledge and expertise of farmers in best practices of organic cotton farming.

Sustainable practices are demonstrated during these pilots so that all village farmers can see the benefits of these practices. A Winter Crop Training module was added to help the programme farmers with organic farming training, not only with cotton but also with gram, maize and wheat. A multiple crop approach is promoted to ensure farmers get maximum benefit.

Kering is also working with CottonConnect to help build knowledge and capacity of women in cotton farming communities, so that they lead healthier and more successful lives. Traditionally, women in cotton farming communities in India have had minimal education about women’s health, diet and nutrition, menstrual health, hygiene, safe drinking water and children’s rights. Basic education on these topics can help prevent illness and improve the health of families and the community overall. CottonConnect has experience working with women to increase their knowledge and confidence though education programmes which cover health, rights and enterprise development. The Gender Training Programme is helping to achieve commitments towards the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, specifically No. 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

“Winter crop training was something very new and fresh for us. We have been doing winter crops in the past and had some idea about the practices, but the training provided us with more in-depth knowledge that we were not aware of in the past.” Shahji Banker, farmer on the Organic Cotton Training Programme
Integrity is the foundation of sustainability and an important aspect of the organic cotton supply chain.

CottonConnect, with C&A, has not only developed a comprehensive strategy on how to prevent contamination of organic cotton with GMO (genetically modified organism), but has also successfully implemented it on the ground.

Some of the measures taken include:

- Development of comprehensive standard operating procedures on GMO integrity.
- Seed demand and supply mapping.
- Training for farm groups and farmers on issues of integrity.
- Implementation of multi-stage GMO testing across various crop stages: pre-sowing and post-sowing, leaf, seed cotton and cotton lint.
- Lab correlation between India and Europe, using a European lab as a benchmark.

Through the effective implementation of these measures, we improved the GMO integrity of our direct organic cotton projects and established successful seed linkages between seed companies, producers and farmers.

“Achieving organic certification is not an easy process. Often for farmers it’s a choice between following the right approach vs. following an easy approach. As part of our role in the integrity domain we support the supply chain integrity. Improving integrity does not only mean improvement in product quality but also improvement in the lives of people and the environment we live in. Improving organic integrity is a challenging task, and only a collaborative approach would give best results.” Arvind Rewal, Regional Director South Asia, CottonConnect

**ORGANIC SEED EXPERT**

Name: Rajeev Verma, Senior Manager Organic Cotton Projects, India

Rajeev runs the training and implementation of CottonConnect’s organic program activities in central states of India, including mapping and linkage of non-GMO cotton seed availability for organic farm groups.

He has contributed in upholding the integrity and prevention of GMO contamination within the organic cotton supply chain of various partner brands through the evaluation of organic farm groups. The comprehensive process of mapping the seed domain can be achieved by identifying all the potential seed companies and linking them to organic cotton farm groups. Seed linkage ensures sufficient availability of good quality non-GMO seeds to cotton farmers before the start of the sowing season.

“Non-GMO cotton seed is a fundamental requirement for organic cotton farmers and is the key to upholding organic farming integrity - yet, seed is the input farmers struggle with the most and require support on. By joining the CottonConnect Organic Farming Training Programme, farmers receive support and extensive training on seed linkage and integrity controls - which we believe are the most fundamental inputs, as these are the primary factors for farmers’ prosperity and product reliability.”
As part of our programme with organic cotton farmers in India, CottonConnect aims to support the state government as it works to bring 25% of total agricultural area in the state under organic farming.

Working with C&A Foundation, CottonConnect brings all stakeholders together from across the cotton sector, including farmer groups, ginners, spinners, NGOs and research establishments to find collective solutions to facilitate better adoption levels of organic cotton farming and improve the quality of the supply chain.

The objective is to work towards developing and implementing a roadmap to a favourable state policy for organic cotton cultivation and works mainly in the following five areas to scale up the production of authentic organic cotton in Maharashtra:

- Improve availability of non-GM cotton seed to organic cotton farmers.
- Strengthen organic cotton farming by supporting the state government for better policy facilitation.
- Preserve integrity in the organic cotton supply chain.
- Promotion of good agricultural practices.
- Improve supply chain linkages in the state.

**ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

The programme aims to support organic cotton farming in Maharashtra through improved seed availability and quality for local farm groups, better supply chain linkage with ginners and spinners and better infrastructure.
Amol Pruthviraj Shisode is part of the CottonConnect Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme supported by C&A Foundation, under which he is growing organic cotton on 1.6 hectares of land in Maharashtra.

During the training sessions, he learnt about various organic farming practices, such as understanding seed selections by being able to differentiate between original and duplicate seed varieties and the importance of checking the manufacturing date on seed packets. He also learnt methods of preparing effective bio-pesticides - all made from natural ingredients like plants and tree leaf extracts, cow dung and urine. These are useful for pest control and can be produced at home at a low cost, at the same time being environmentally friendly and easily biodegradable.

“Another neighbour farmer followed his conventional methods of farming from his knowledge and experience in the past. He sowed the same seed variety at the same time as us, but he didn’t get good crop growth like we did in our fields. I think he felt disappointed having suffered major losses this season, because of poor yield in terms of quantity and quality. If he had been associated with the Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme, then he would have had the knowledge about differentiating between original and duplicate seeds and other good agricultural practices of farming being taught in the programme about organic cotton cultivation.”
11. SEED CONNECTIVITY IN CHINA

GMO cotton varieties dominate 90% of the cotton seed market in China, meaning new organic producers face ongoing difficulties in accessing and buying non-GMO seeds. Non-GMO varieties are rare as even the locally bred seeds are often also contaminated.

To increase availability of non-GMO seeds in China, CottonConnect worked with C&A Foundation to engage a local partner, Huafeng Chahete Organic Cotton Processing Plant, on the Organic Seed Project China. Based in Xinjiang, the project ran between 2014 and 2017, and aimed to find and adapt new varieties of non-GMO cotton seeds for organic growers through seed connectivity.

Working in partnership with Huafeng Organic Cotton Processing Plant, CottonConnect seed experts selected six non-GMO varieties from 15 government recommended non-GMO varieties. The seed varieties were shortlisted against key factors including:

- Yield potential
- Resistance to disease and pests
- Length of growth period
- Staple and quality

CottonConnect took a unique approach to sustainability and scalability by linking local farmers to organic seed growers. The Technical Vice President of Huafeng was involved in all aspects of the project – from sharing knowledge on how the potential non-GMO seed varieties would be screened, evaluated and selected to participate in field trials.

"The organic cotton seed breeding programme has been very successful. Our local partner, Huafeng, learnt how to select and breed new non-GMO seed varieties, which is a big challenge in the industry. They also became more confident with international support and concerns. We also influenced nearby farmers by demonstrating Huafeng's success. We can now copy this practice across to other areas in China to further support organic sector."
Frank Wei, CottonConnect General Manager, China

The project also focused on seed connectivity and supply chain linkages. CottonConnect and Huafeng held in-field demonstrations in North Xinjiang to introduce local organic farmers and major cotton growers to the seeds that passed all integrity tests.

The local organic farmers were satisfied with the field performance and showed a high level of interest in the new varieties. Given this strong performance, CottonConnect signed a memorandum with Huafeng to expand the programme in the 2017/18 cotton season.

Availability of non-GMO seeds is still very limited in China, which threatens the future development of the organic cotton industry in the country.

Recommendations include:

- More resources and investment should be distributed to non-GMO seed breeding and promotion.
- A pool of non-GMO seeds should be identified and preserved for organic farmers’ use and the healthy development of the sector.
- Chinese seed breeders, organic cotton farmers and research institutes should be involved in the identification process.
Farmer name: Cui Futang, farm director of Huafeng Chahete Organic Cotton Processing Plant

Cui Futang is the farm director of Huafeng Chahete Organic Cotton Processing Plant. He is responsible for the technical direction of the whole organic farming programme at Huafeng. This work shows that there are very few seed varieties suitable for planting as the growth period must be shorter than 120 days and the seed variety must be non-GMO. Existing varieties offer poor fibre quality and lead to low market prices and constraint on organic cotton production.

“We experimented with Xinluzao No. 36, the seed variety offered by CottonConnect in 2015 and 2016, and found that No. 36 consistently outperformed the existing seed variety we were using. Notably, yield increased by 6%, and the fibre quality was much better. As a result, we plan to expand the growth area of No. 36 to 329 acres in 2017.”
13. NEXT STEPS

Collaboration is essential to boost organic cotton production and resilience at scale, therefore we are proud to be among the founding partners of the Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA). Through market-driven interventions that are designed to be self-sustaining and scalable in the long-run and by mobilising collaborative action, the OCA creates shared opportunities across the supply chain.

“Developing new high performing organic cotton cultivars and building capacity and networks among farmer organizations will ensure quality organic seed supply for organic cotton farmers and enhance their livelihoods.” OCA Annual Report 2016

CottonConnect has made significant advances to improve the integrity of organic cotton, particularly in India. Through a team of organic cotton and seed experts we have successfully established and implemented procedures and processes on the ground to help strengthen the sector.

Farmers or producers of cotton have to become self-sustaining and need to look at organic farming as a viable business model. In the current scenario, organic cotton farming comes with its own set of challenges pertaining to the difficulty of securing genuine non-GMO seeds, lower yields compared to GMO crop and protection of the crop against chemicals and contamination challenges.

In addition to these challenges, which have indirect monetary impact for the farmers, organic cotton farming faces direct monetary impact too - usually involving additional costs of certification and documentation for the farmer groups. All these have direct bottom line implications for the farmers if organic cotton is sold at conventional cotton prices. Organic premiums, if existing in the supply chain and distributed efficiently to the farmers, will help them combat these challenges which will enable them to look at organic farming as a viable self-sustaining business.

Connecting farmers to market demand is the next big step. This will assist farmers in securing commitments to organic cotton volumes to offset market fluctuations, and will also help them to reduce their transaction and transportation costs. Furthermore, working on holistic supply chain models with brands’ supply chain commitments and support can help to create demand for the organic cotton grown by farmers. As well as organic cotton, CottonConnect also works across sustainable cotton systems such as Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) and our own code, REEL.

“C&A Foundation is proud to be working with CottonConnect to establish organic cotton programmes that benefit farmers, through improved incomes and access to better markets. In India, we are particularly excited by the opportunity to scale up our impact by working with the local government in the state of Maharashtra to find collective solutions, strengthen links to markets, and improve the quality of organic cotton at scale.” Leslie Johnston, Executive Director, C&A Foundation

This ensures farmers and brands have access to a range of choices that can be tailored to suit individual needs.

For more information on CottonConnect please visit www.cottonconnect.org.