



## Future of Regenerative Cotton: Stakeholder Insights from Roundtable in Türkiye

Cotton plays a vital role in Türkiye's textile industry, providing livelihoods for millions and contributing significantly to the economy. Despite this success, Türkiye faces a considerable gap in domestic cotton production.

As consumer demand for sustainable textiles increases, coupled with rising environmental regulations, Türkiye has an opportunity to shift towards regenerative cotton farming. Regenerative practices, which enhance biodiversity, restore soil health, and improve water retention, are critical for mitigating the impacts of climate change and securing long-term agricultural sustainability.

This paper presents key insights from a recent roundtable to discuss the challenges and opportunities for regenerative cotton in Türkiye. The roundtable explored the potential of regenerative cotton to address critical challenges faced by the Turkish cotton sector, such as soil degradation, biodiversity elimination, water scarcity, and financial constraints. The paper highlights solutions proposed by various stakeholders, including government initiatives, private sector partnerships, and CottonConnect's programs.

### WHY IS TÜRKIYE AN ATTRACTIVE MARKET?

- Seventh largest cotton producer
- Clothing and textiles account 6% of country's GDP
- Second biggest textile supplier to the EU
- Sixth largest textile and apparel exporter to the world



# Key Challenges Identified at the Roundtable:

Cotton farming in Türkiye faces several challenges that threaten both agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of farmers. These issues must be addressed through innovative, sustainable approaches to ensure a resilient cotton sector.

## 1. SOIL HEALTH

Conventional farming practices, including heavy pesticide use, have impacted the soil health in cotton-growing regions. The depletion of organic matter and poor water retention is reducing yields and threatening long-term land productivity.



Prof. Dr. Gönül Aydın of Adnan Menderes University emphasised, **“Transitioning from conventional to regenerative agriculture requires a shift in perception, supported by education and concrete data.”**



## 2. IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has introduced erratic weather patterns, resulting in unpredictable rainfall and prolonged dry spells. Many cotton-producing regions in Türkiye face severe water shortages, making irrigation a challenge. In certain areas, farmers are only able to irrigate twice during the growing season.

With the changing climate, pests and diseases are becoming increasingly problematic for cotton farmers. The surge in pest populations threatens to undermine yields and increase the need for chemical interventions.



CottonConnect provides tools like Cotton Canopy Management and Agroecosystem Analysis to enable taking the right crop management decisions to conserve beneficial insects in the cotton ecosystem and to help farmers minimise their yield loss due to the impact of climate change.



## 3. KNOWLEDGE GAP

While government subsidies exist to support sustainable transitions, yet awareness among farmers about these subsidies is limited. Greater collaboration between brands, government, and local partners could help promote these resources, encouraging farmers to adopt regenerative and sustainable practices. Although farmers in Türkiye are aware of the new technologies, however, it is important to raise their knowledge about the importance of biodiversity and other natural resources and their effective utilisation and management as a tool for regeneration.



**“For cotton farmers to cultivate cotton by protecting nature and to continue using sustainable practices, farmers need to be financially rewarded for their efforts.”** as stated by Prof. Dr. Hakkı Unal Evcim, General Secretary of the National Cotton Council.

## 4. SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Large-scale and smallholder farmers face significant disparities in access to resources including technical expertise and financial support. There is also a generational gap, with older farmers tending to adapt more easily to regenerative practices as they are more akin to traditional farming methods, while younger farmers are less familiar with these techniques and can struggle to transition. A dissemination method utilising trusted ‘lead farmers’ from older generations could address this.

**“Cotton is very important for Türkiye; however, the cotton we produce for the textile sector is not enough to meet our own needs. Sustainable agricultural practices should be spread widely.”**  
Dr. Mustafa Koray Şimşek, Director of CRI.



# Key Solutions and Actions to Promote Regenerative Cotton Farming in Türkiye

To accelerate the transition to regenerative cotton farming in Türkiye, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. This involves a combination of government initiatives, private sector engagements/innovation, and farmer education and support, many of which are underway:

## 1. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

- Implement supportive policies, including subsidies, and low-interest loans, to incentivise farmers to adopt regenerative practices, particularly in the early stages when yields may be lower compared to conventional farming methods
- Invest in comprehensive training programs for farmers, covering topics such as soil health, water conservation, and biodiversity.
- Fund research to develop innovative technologies and practices that can improve the efficiency and sustainability of cotton production.
- Establish robust certification and traceability systems to ensure the authenticity of sustainably produced cotton and enhance market access.

## 2. PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

- Encourage private sector companies to provide support in developing, adoption and promotion of innovative technologies/practices such as precision agriculture, IoT, and AI through extensive demonstration to optimise resource use and to reduce environmental impacts.
- Foster partnerships between the public and private sectors to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.
- Work with suppliers and retailers to create sustainable supply chains that prioritise regenerative cotton.
- Encourage brands and the fashion industry in general to promote the benefits of regenerative products to consumers, helping to drive greater demand and achieve a premium for farmers.

## 3. FARMER EMPOWERMENT

- Facilitate knowledge exchange among farmers through workshops, field demonstrations, and peer-to-peer learning.
- Provide farmers with the tools and skills needed to implement regenerative practices, such as soil testing, water management, and crop rotation.
- Connect farmers to sustainable markets and provide support in accessing fair prices for their products.

## Conclusion

Türkiye has the potential to significantly contribute to global sustainable cotton production. By prioritising education, financial support, collaboration, and impact monitoring, Türkiye can accelerate the adoption of regenerative cotton farming. This approach will improve soil health, reduce environmental impact, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the cotton sector.

*“Establishing a system where the farmer explains to the farmer through continuous education creates change.” Gökhan Aydın, Sanko Textile*

## COTTONCONNECT ADAPTING TO REGENERATIVE COTTON IN TÜRKIYE THROUGH:

- Localising the REEL Regenerative Code to the specific needs and conditions of Turkish cotton farming
- Engaging with farming communities to educate farmers about regenerative practices
- Using scientific principles to optimise input use and improve on-farm management

**CottonConnect has been working on a REEL Regenerative Cotton pilot programme in Türkiye with 30 farmers in the Nazilli region, Aydın. The programme demonstrates the transformations that regenerative practices can bring into the agro-ecosystem. In Turkish context it focuses largely on enabling and supporting agricultural practices to improve soil health, increase biodiversity and ensure social compliances.**

The round-table in Türkiye was attended by government officials, industry experts, local partners, manufacturers, brands and academicians.

For further information on how CottonConnect is supporting the transition to regenerative cotton farming in Türkiye, please contact us at:  
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