



WORKING
TOGETHER FOR
BETTER COTTON

BCI Better
Cotton
Initiative

switchasia
PROGRAMME



REPORT

UK

2014

A man wearing a light-colored kurta and a colorful striped turban is kneeling in a field of cotton bolls. He is looking down at the cotton. In the background, there are large piles of cotton bolls covered with blue tarps. The scene is outdoors under a clear sky.

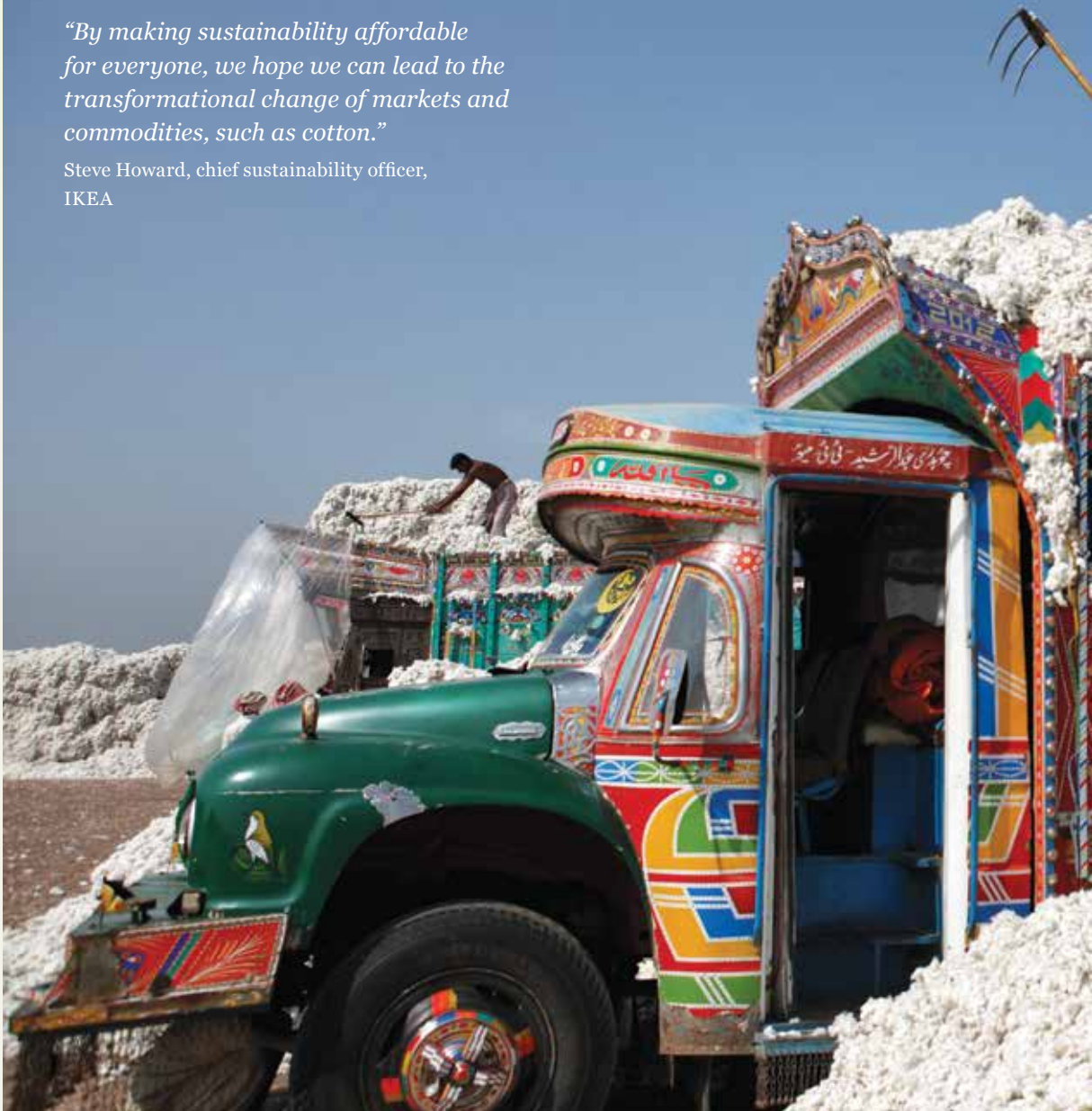
Better Cotton: from farmers to retailers

“We’re now in a process of converting more and more of our products from conventional cotton to ‘Better Cotton’ because we see the real value – not just for the farmers and the environment, but also to us as a retailer.”

Mark Sumner, sustainable raw materials specialist,
Marks & Spencer

“By making sustainability affordable for everyone, we hope we can lead to the transformational change of markets and commodities, such as cotton.”

Steve Howard, chief sustainability officer,
IKEA





About WWF-UK

WWF is at the heart of global efforts to address the world's most important environmental challenges. We work with communities, businesses and governments to help people and nature thrive. As well as safeguarding the natural world, we promote sustainable production and use of resources.

Cotton is a globally important commodity that has the highest use of pesticide of all agricultural products and accounts for more than 40% of all textiles. Together with Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) and its members, including IKEA and M&S, and with the European Commission through its SWITCH-Asia programme, we're working throughout the cotton supply chain from farmer to retailer to bring 'Better Cotton' into the mainstream. It's better for the environment it's grown in, better for the health and prosperity of people who produce it, and better for the sector's future.

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WHY THE WORLD NEEDS BETTER COTTON

Cotton is a globally important commodity. It's a renewable resource but only if we manage it responsibly. Under conventional methods, cotton can create significant environmental pressure at the cultivation and processing stages.

At the farm level, sustainability is threatened, human health is impacted and water is wasted through inefficient irrigation techniques and excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers.

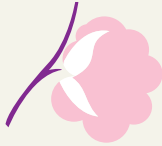
At the ginning stage, where the cotton is processed into usable fibres, the main environmental impacts are from the use of equipment that doesn't use energy efficiently. Safety measures for workers at all stages can be non-existent too, and child labour is not unheard of.

WWF is working with the innovative Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) and its members, including IKEA and M&S, to reduce the environmental impact of cotton cultivation and improve the lives of the people that produce it.

What makes Better Cotton better?

The first harvest of 'Better Cotton' arrived in the 2010-11 cotton season, and since then increasing numbers of industries have recognised the need to develop a bigger market for it. It's vital to have participation from all sections of the supply chain in order to increase both market demand and production – to make sure Better Cotton becomes a mainstream commodity.

Better Cotton isn't just good for growers and their local environment. It also makes sound economic sense for everyone involved, from farmer to retailer – improving long-term sustainability and resilience, and reducing reputational risks. The result is a good value, quality, ethical product that meets high environmental and social standards.



The BCI was launched in 2005 to make cotton production better for the environment it's grown in, for the people who produce it, and for the sector's future.

Better Cotton in Pakistan

Pakistan is the world's fourth-largest cotton producer. WWF-Pakistan is working hard to help bring positive changes in the country's cotton industry through the SWITCH-Asia programme, supported by funding from the European Commission.

We're encouraging farmers to comply with BCI production principles, including 'Decent Work' criteria. By doing so, they're reducing their use of pesticides, fertiliser and irrigation water, and increasing their profits. Gin owners are following WWF-Pakistan's recommendations. These provide much-improved conditions for their employees – for instance, they protect workers from damaging chemicals, dust and noise, and improve lighting and other safety measures.





THE BETTER COTTON EXPERIENCE

Here are the views of some of the people and businesses working along the cotton supply and production chain – from Pakistan cotton farms to global retailers – who have already witnessed benefits of working with WWF and the Better Cotton Initiative.

THE COTTON FARMER

Mohammad Mustafa, a cotton farmer from Pakistan tells us his story. “Before we started working with WWF-Pakistan, we would apply whatever fertiliser we could get to our crops – either in its original form or adulterated, whether we could identify it or not. And we’d spray pesticides for every insect, whether it was friend or enemy. We gained nothing from it.”



**PRODUCING
BETTER COTTON
HAS IMPROVED
OUR ENVIRONMENT,
OUR HEALTH
AND OUR INCOME**

We never had the habit of keeping a record of our expenses or costs – but we had debts to the fertiliser and pesticide dealers. But now we have started to keep records in our farmer field books. Now we know how much we have spent and how much profit we make.

The main advantage of reducing pesticides is that we not only save money but the environment is better too – for example, there were no more honeybees in our area, but now they’re coming back. Birds like starlings used to come and eat the bollworms that damaged our crop, but when we used pesticides the birds started to die – none would come near. Now we see birds coming back to the trees.

Water is short in this area. We used to only cultivate half of our land, because even the underground water from tube wells is brackish. But with WWF-Pakistan’s Sustainable Agriculture programme we’ve learned how to use water more efficiently and cultivate all of our land. We now cultivate in furrows using planters and hand-sowing, instead of drilling. Furrows need less water, so we can make better use of the little water we have.

Producing Better Cotton has improved our environment, our health and our income. The ginner[s] [cotton processors] are more than willing to buy our cotton, and actually ask us to supply ‘Better Cotton’.



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“We don’t want to go back to old practices – instead we ask other farmers to join us to grow Better Cotton.”

Mohammad Mustafa, cotton farmer, Pakistan

THE COTTON PICKER

As Arshia Khurshid from WWF-Pakistan explains, cotton picking in Pakistan is mainly done by women: “These women play a crucial role in the supply chain because they’re the ones who pluck the ‘white gold’ under the scorching heat of the sun. They work for hours and hours for minimum wages to earn a respectable living.”



**COTTON PICKING IN
PAKISTAN IS MAINLY
DONE BY WOMEN**

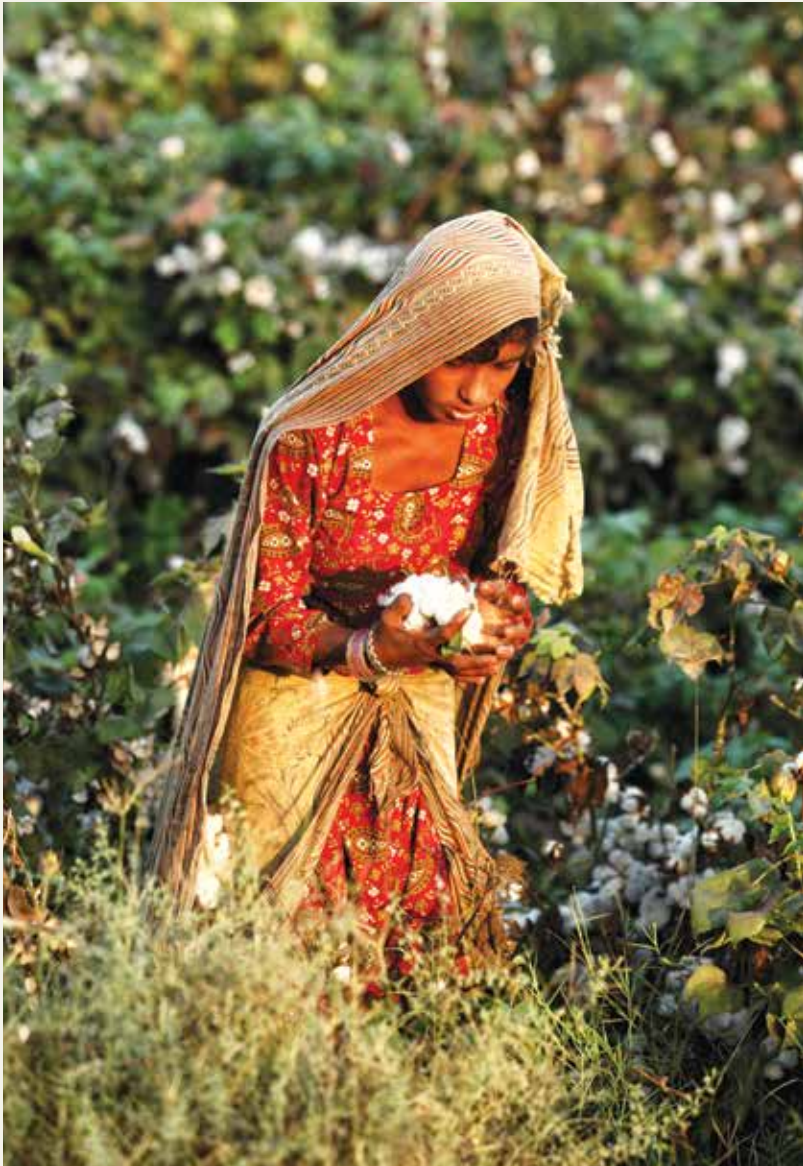
Most of the women pickers are poorly educated and unaware of the health hazards from exposure to pesticides in the cotton fields. WWF-Pakistan and the Better Cotton Initiative have helped the workers learn about safety measures: such as wearing long sleeves, gloves and face masks when working, not picking until at least 15 days after spraying, and not working in the fields when pregnant. The rural families have now learned to dispose of empty chemical containers instead of reusing them in the kitchen.

One cotton picker admits: “We had a practice of leaving our shoes outside the field – we’d have bare hands and feet while picking the cotton.”

Another of the women says: “Because of not wearing gloves our hands and fingers were badly affected. Spiky, woody plant parts damaged them too. Sometimes the sores and cuts meant we were unable to pick cotton or do other work, and we wouldn’t get any pay for those days.”

Keeping children away from the fields is another issue – and not just for health reasons. One mother recalls: “My children used to accompany me for picking, because I thought they will collect extra cotton and help get a little bit more money. But they used to get sick. Now I’ve realised that only I should work, and my children should go to school and stay healthy and safe from diseases.”

Through the Sustainable Agriculture programme we’re working with communities and landowners to eliminate child labour, which was previously known to occur. Arshia Khurshid points out: “We’re helping the women take care of their own health and that of their families.”



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“The SWITCH-Asia programme is helping the women pickers take care of their own health and that of their families.”

Arshia Khurshid, WWF-Pakistan



4%


IN 2012, THE AVERAGE
REDUCTION IN WATER
APPLICATION BY
BETTER COTTON
FARMERS COMPARED TO
CONVENTIONAL FARMERS
IN PAKISTAN WAS 4%*



109%

IN 2012, THE AVERAGE
GROSS MARGIN AMONG
PAKISTAN'S BETTER
COTTON FARMERS WAS
109% HIGHER THAN THAT
OF CONVENTIONAL
FARMERS*





67%

PAKISTAN'S BETTER
COTTON FARMERS USED
67% LESS SYNTHETIC
FERTILISER THAN ITS
CONVENTIONAL FARMERS
ON AVERAGE IN 2012*

36%

BETTER COTTON
FARMERS IN PAKISTAN
USED 36% LESS
PESTICIDE THAN
ITS CONVENTIONAL
FARMERS ON
AVERAGE IN 2012*

THE COTTON GIN OWNER

Cotton gin owners, or ‘ginners’ – who process raw seed cotton into usable fibres – at first assumed Better Cotton was only relevant at the farm level, so initially they didn’t express much interest. But through workshops and meetings organised by WWF-Pakistan, an increasing number have become aware of the benefits.

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Abdul Ghaffar
gin owner
Lodhran, Pakistan

Abdul Ghaffar, a cotton gin owner based in Lodhran, Pakistan, says: “WWF SWITCH-Asia programme gave us technical support, and since then we have made many improvements. We’ve achieved savings in energy, better quality, and our production has increased.”

Energy use is key to the efficiency of the ginning process. As well as saving on costs, production efficiency also reduces environmental impacts.

Gin owners have been given training in providing better working conditions for their employees too. Abdul says: “After a survey by WWF SWITCH-Asia programme team, they helped us take measures for the gin workers. We’ve now provided them with dust masks, earplugs for noise control, and safety guards have been put around the moving parts and belts of the machines. First aid facilities have been improved too. We’ve installed water coolers for drinking water, and we’re providing a better environment for eating and resting.”

The WWF SWITCH-Asia ginners also enjoy better contractual security when it comes to cotton bale procurement from suppliers. “The other benefit of working with SWITCH-Asia,” says Abdul, “is the increasing global demand for our cotton, which means our product sells better. And we hope that in future there will be more and more demand, and more brands will join – so our business will flourish.

“Often when we have our ginners’ meetings, we discuss this, talk about the technical support we get, and try to convince others who are not part of it yet. We tell them it has great benefits for the farmers too – it means production will increase, and we will also benefit from that.”

THE COTTON GIN WORKER

Before the introduction of WWF-Pakistan's interventions, the conditions at the factory were bad. We faced a lot of problems.

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Mohammad Saleem
cotton gin worker
Bahawalpur, Pakistan

There was a lot of dust in the ginning hall. The workers there had coughs – some developed diseases like asthma or TB. The machinery is very noisy – after a while some people became deaf or hard of hearing. We'd get headaches because of the dim light. There were no safety rails for people working high up – sometimes workers fell down and either lost their lives or were disabled. We could get electric shocks from touching open electrical wiring.

We had no knowledge about our rights – and even if we knew a little bit, we were afraid to complain to the owners. We thought they would kick us out of the factory. When the WWF SWITCH-Asia programme team came to our factory, they observed our problems. Then they guided the owners, and they helped us find solutions.

WWF told us about dust masks and earplugs. We went to the owners and they provided us with them. They gave us gloves, helmets, safety fences, better lighting, and covers for the electric wires.

Now we know a lot about our rights at work. Whether we work here or in any other factory, we can talk to the owners to solve our problems without fear or hesitation. So we can work better.

THE COTTON TRADER

© JESSICA HOOGHEMISTRA



David Rosenberg
sustainability adviser
Ecom Cotton Group
Switzerland
(a large global cotton
trading company)

We take sustainability seriously, it's a part of our business. And we think the Better Cotton Initiative is the best vehicle to create a mainstream sustainable platform for cotton.

We'd like to see end-to-end sustainable supply chains, from farmer to retailer, and that means working with the best counterparts on the supply side and on the demand side, and building an integrated supply chain from farmer to brand.

What we have learned so far in cotton and other commodities is that you can't build a sustainable supply chain in a [short-term] 'spot market'. We have to build long-term relationships, we have to show commitment – and that comes from the brands, all the way back up the supply chain to the farmers.

When the demand is there, the intermediaries can build longer-term plans and invest in sustainability. I think the key message is to keep the end goal in mind and don't get distracted by short-term hiccups and obstacles. Focus on building the supply chains; focus on picking the right partners.

Cotton has a very long supply chain that has very little transparency in it. BCI brings the supply chain tighter together and makes it more transparent. For us, it gives us access to the cotton spinners that are committed to BCI – generally the best quality spinners in terms of exposure and risk. I think it gives us access to the better, more serious players in the market.

THE COTTON SPINNER AND SUPPLIER

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Omar Ahmed
director, Artistic Milliner
Karachi, Pakistan
(a large Pakistan-based
denim supplier)

We were first introduced to the Better Cotton Initiative by several of our major brands, and from the get-go we knew this would be something very important.

And if three of your major clients tell you that you have to buy Better Cotton, and by 2015 they will be 100% based on Better Cotton – that’s something you have no choice with.

We were nervous in the beginning because we were wondering how will we procure so much Better Cotton? Is it possible to achieve such a target in such a short time? But we’ve been pleasantly surprised. In the first year there were some teething problems – I’d like to call them growing pains – but the supply has become very smooth, and the process has worked out very well for us.

As a manufacturer we can vouch that there are absolutely no production or quality issues with running Better Cotton. It doesn’t hinder any innovation either. And at the same time, most importantly, it does not impact price points. Prices have been consistent when compared to conventional cotton.

And we do feel very good about it. We feel good that buying this cotton is helping our people, and shedding positive light on our country. Developing countries were notorious for being non-compliant, not taking care of their people, the environment – so we wanted to change that trend. And that’s why Artistic Milliner was one of the forerunners in this process, especially in the denim field. Pakistan is now the world’s second-biggest producer of Better Cotton.

I would like to encourage all retailers and brands in the apparel industry to come on board. The benefits will be unbelievable in the next five to 10 years. And people’s lives are being affected by this, so they should definitely take this seriously.

THE COTTON RETAILERS

© PRAMOD SINGH



Pramod Singh
material specialist
IKEA India

In 2005 when IKEA first embraced sustainable cotton production, we started working with around 450 farmers in India and Pakistan. By 2012, it was more than 100,000 farmers. That's a huge jump, not only in terms of numbers but also the knowledge we've created and the impact this project has on the people. We are expanding the scope of Better Cotton – not just by working with NGOs, like our partner WWF, but also working with our supply chain partners.

We're also trying to work on a model where the up-scaling of the Better Cotton project is done by involving government and government institutions.

Our expectation and our hope is that more and more farmers will join the Better Cotton movement. We can make Better Cotton a mainstream cotton. That's what our efforts with WWF are aiming to achieve.

© MARK SUMNER

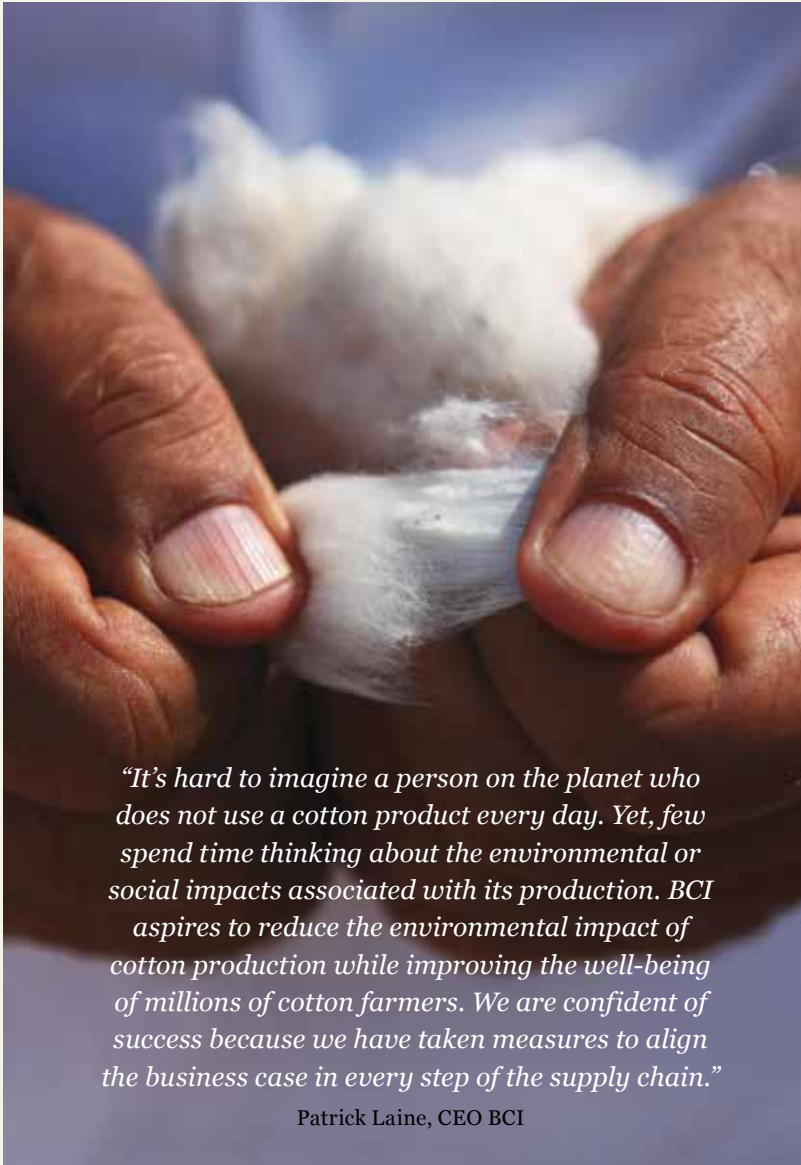


Mark Sumner
sustainable raw
materials specialist
M&S

Marks & Spencer has found being part of BCI incredibly useful and valuable. Not just for understanding more about the impacts that our interactions and decisions have on cotton communities and their environment, but also understanding what some of the business solutions are.

Just by being a member of BCI we're learning an awful lot about the cotton industry. We've realised cotton is a big risk for our business. It's by far the main fibre used in our supply chain. We need to look at what we can do to improve the sustainability of cotton.

There is a very strong business case for sustainability. There are going to be limited resources in the world – limited availability of water, limited energy, huge impacts on land use. All of those things are going to affect our business in the long-run.



“It’s hard to imagine a person on the planet who does not use a cotton product every day. Yet, few spend time thinking about the environmental or social impacts associated with its production. BCI aspires to reduce the environmental impact of cotton production while improving the well-being of millions of cotton farmers. We are confident of success because we have taken measures to align the business case in every step of the supply chain.”

Patrick Laine, CEO BCI

WHY CHOOSE BETTER COTTON?

Cotton is arguably the world's most important natural fibre. It can also be a damaging crop. So WWF and the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), alongside local partners in Pakistan, are working from the start of the supply chain, with the farmers and cotton pickers, all the way to the retailers and consumers to improve the environmental and social impacts of cotton production.

Farmers are improving their yield and profits by reducing chemical fertiliser, pesticide and water use. Where BCI principles are observed, female cotton pickers are seeing real health benefits, and child labour is being addressed. Safer working environments are being provided for employees. The future of cotton workers is looking brighter.

Better Cotton means BCI members and suppliers can manage reputational and resilience risks – thanks to more transparency along the supply chain and a more sustainable future for cotton. And it's providing a good value, high quality product for retailers and their customers.

We can all help reduce cotton's environmental and social impacts by changing the market demand, as well as improving inefficient and damaging production practices at source. With the support of retailers, brands and other businesses, we can make 'Better Cotton' a mainstream option. The best future for cotton.





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Further information:

Film version of this report
wvf.org.uk/pakistancotton
BCI bettercotton.org
WWF-Pakistan wvfpak.org
EC SWITCH-Asia
switch-asia.eu
IKEA ikea.com
Marks & Spencer
plana.marksandspencer.com

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Inner Workings

Cotton in numbers

100%
RECYCLED



2,700

It takes 2,700 litres of water on a global average to grow enough conventional cotton to make a single t-shirt

70%

of all pesticides imported into Pakistan are used for cotton cultivation



100,000

WWF-Pakistan works with around 100,000 farmers in five different regions of Pakistan – covering an area of about 3.5 million hectares

40%

The cotton sector employs 40% of Pakistan's workforce



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

wwf.org.uk