

Two minutes with...

Lise Melvin,

Executive Director, Better Cotton Initiative (BCI)



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Why was the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) set up in the first place?

To fill a gap and because there are several serious sustainability challenges with the bulk of today's cotton production. Most existing initiatives were not designed to deliver mass-market transformation but that's exactly what we're aiming for.

Are the main objectives of the BCI environmental or social?

Actually, our main objectives cover all three pillars of sustainability – environment, social and economic.

In which countries is Better Cotton currently farmed and how much crop was harvested?

Brazil, India, Mali and Pakistan. Crop volume is estimated at 35,000 MT lint cotton (excl. Brazil). We will have the exact figure later in the year.

Can you give us a breakdown of farmer numbers to give us an idea of regional outputs?

We have 40,000 in Pakistan, 20,000 in India, 5,000 in Mali and around 100 in Brazil.

How does the BCI intend to grow its volumes and in what regions?

Our plan is to grow 300,000 MT of Better Cotton by 2012 and 1,000,000 MT by 2015. As for new regions, we are currently starting work in China. Interest from different organisations has also been expressed to do the same in Central Asia, Southern and Eastern Africa, Turkey and the USA.

Is there really a need for Better Cotton programmes in regions such as the USA where cotton is already farmed in a socially responsible way?

As I mentioned – the aim of the BCI is to create a new, more sustainable mainstream commodity. To achieve that, we believe it is necessary to invite and encourage producers from all countries to participate. A greater diversity of origin and quality and access to large volume cotton production will help create and sustain a healthy demand for the product and in turn help generate funds for those regions where it is most needed.

Why is BCI not based on a transaction certificate scheme?

Because we want the BCI cotton to be mainstream, blended freely and used for as many purposes as possible. We also allow anyone to buy and use the fibre. A certification scheme risks adding cost and complication and could undermine our ambitions.

Can textiles and garments be labelled as BCI?

No.

Is there true supply chain transparency within the BCI programme?

One of our core objectives is to increase supply chain traceability. We currently trace the cotton from farm to bale. All consumer facing communications have to be backed up by a solid tracing system, to be run by the communicating organisation.

Can you outline which brands are currently involved with BCI and briefly describe their level of involvement?

Fifteen of our 67 members are brands or retailers. See our web-site for more details. Several members have targets of sourcing 100% more sustainable cotton within the next 10 years and private sector field investment for 2011 exceeds €2 million.

What are the next steps for BCI apart from expansion? Does it intend to revise its criteria?

2010-2012 is the start-up phase of implementation of the Better Cotton System – in 2012 we will conduct an evaluation of the whole system and production criteria, to ensure that we have a robust and field tested system from 2013 onwards.

How is the BCI funded?

We are currently funded through a combination of membership fees and grant funding from different bodies, ICCO, IDH, Rabobank Foundation, SECO and Sida. Our ultimate strategy is to generate all our income through membership fees and service delivery. ■

Web: www.bettercotton.org