



79th Plenary Meeting – Virtual

MINUTES

First Open Session Fortifying the Cotton Supply Chain

08:00 am to 10:00 am (GMT-5), Tuesday 7 December 2021

Chairman: Dr Adama Coulibaly, General Director of Cotton and Cashew Council, Côte d'Ivoire

Dr Kater Hake, Vice President, Agricultural & Environmental Research, Cotton Incorporated

Dr Hake spoke on the topic of, 'What is Sustainable Cotton'. He highlighted the complexity of agricultural production and the need for locally tailored solutions as well as collective and individual actions when it comes to sustainability. He stated that, according to research data, the impact of phosphorus in freshwaters such as lakes and rivers will significantly increase methane production to the point where it could be one-third of the GHG contribution from fossil fuels. Dr Hake stated that the first challenge for sustainability is climate change as it threatens human sustainability. Climate change can have an impact on temperature and rainfall and negatively affect the production of food and natural fibres. A second sustainability concern is nutrients — both the unlimited supply of nitrogen, and the limited supply of phosphorus, have huge impacts on the environment. The third main concern is related to pest susceptibility. However, genome editing is currently one of the best tools to make cotton less susceptible to pests. Dr Hake pointed out that cotton makes agriculture more sustainable by removing nutrients that are left over from other crops that might have contributed to groundwater contamination. He also noted some other benefits of producing cotton — such as providing food, feed, fibre and cash for education, health and housing — cotton is a highly drought- and salt-tolerant plant; and farmers use expertise and innovations from cotton in all of their crops across all of their fields. Dr Hake concluded his presentation by applauding GIZ for supporting the ICAC's effort to bring innovation to small farmers with the Soil and Plant Health app. He emphasised that technology allows growers to share innovations that address local concerns.

Ms La Rhea Pepper, Chief Executive Officer and co-founder of Textile Exchange

Ms Pepper spoke on 'The Integrity of Organic Cotton'. She gave a brief overview of the Textile Exchange organisation and its Climate+ strategy, and reminded all participants about the meaning of organic agriculture and outlined the requirements and benefits of producing organic cotton. She noted that the term 'organic' has greater legal protections and scrutiny than any other sustainable initiative. She noted that the term 'organic' has greater legal protections and scrutiny compared to any other sustainable initiative. Ms Pepper highlighted that cotton currently has two voluntary standards that address the post-harvest tracking and labelling of products containing organic cotton: the Organic Cotton Standard and the Global Organic Textile Standard. She expressed that the best approach for investing and strengthening the integrity of organic cotton was through the education of stakeholders throughout the supply chain. Ms Pepper recommended that in order to institutionalise integrity in the

organic cotton supply chain, brands and supply chain partners should invest in developing policies, investigate and corroborate claims if there any concerns about a product, share evidence with relevant authorities and stakeholders and collaborate and share monitoring with trusted partners. Ms Pepper concluded her presentation by emphasising that cotton has a significant opportunity in both the present and the future time to play a role in being the preferred fibre of choice when it comes to mitigating climate change.

Mr. Anupam Gupta, President of the cotton leadership team, Olam

Mr Gupta spoke on 'Challenges in the Sustainable Cotton Supply Chain'. He provided an overview of the cotton textile value chain, from production, ginning, marketing, textile manufacturing, garmenting and home textiles to brands and retailers. He wondered if the fast-fashion industry was sustainable for our climate and communities. He felt that environmental concerns and consumer sentiment are leading several fashion brands to launch sustainability initiatives. He noted that there is a need for an integrated approach to sustainable fashion. In global supply chains there is a need to balance efficiency with resilience, to diversify production networks, to be responsive and agile and implement demand-driven sourcing. Mr Gupta pointed out that sustainable textile products are made from sustainable raw materials, have to be processed through transparent and traceable supply chains and must have improved ecological and social footprint. He mentioned some examples of regenerative farm practices implemented with farmers in Africa — erosion control, cover crops and green manure, composting, revegetation, integrated pest management (IPM) and crop rotation. He noted that all these practices are based on improving soil health. If the carbon content in the soil can be increased, it will require fewer chemical fertilisers and interventions. Mr Gupta concluded that there is a need to reorganise supply chains to prevent wasteful production.

After the presentations, the floor was open for questions.

Mr Terry Townsend asked what can be done to have a more sustainable fashion industry, taking into account that prices for cotton and textiles haven't increased over time. Mr Gupta replied that it would be imperative for consumers to start thinking in terms of more sustainable fashion rather than trying to focus primarily on inexpensive clothing. Ms Pepper noted that it is imperative to switch from a price paradigm into a value paradigm. There is a need to educate both brands and consumers as to why they need to invest in preferred fibres.

Mr Kaonga asked if it is possible to distinguish non-sustainable garments from sustainable garments without a label. Mr Gupta answered that it is not possible unless it is checked with data custody or by using new traceability technologies available in the market.

Mr Neal Gillen asked that in the cultivation of organic cotton, how far a field from neighbouring non-organic farms must be to avoid cross-pollination with non-organic crops. Ms Pepper answered that there are different regulations depending on the country, but on average it should be 50 feet or more. Buffer strips are also used to limit cross-pollination between organic and non-organic production systems.

Mr Mahesh Ramakrishnan asked Dr Hake how organic farmers could manage weeds in no-till farming. Dr Hake replied that no-till provides unique advantages to farmers so they can focus only on seeds at the surface. Farmers need to dry the weed seedbank down to zero in the surface of the soil and that can be done with high-residue cover crops.

Dr Serunjogi Lastus asked if Olam plans to implement the programmes that are currently being conducted in some West African countries to other cotton-growing countries in East Africa like Uganda. Mr Gupta answered that there is a lot of work that can be done in several cotton-producing countries in Africa. He noted that Olam works on building scale. In that order, Uganda might not be a priority for the organisation but there could be a possibility for reassessing the potential to scale up the operation in that country.

Mr Vibhu Nath asked what the ICAC can do to promote the usage of sustainable cotton in textile apparel to regain the market share that cotton has been lost to man-made fibres (MMFs). Mr Usman, ICAC Head of Textiles, replied that cotton and MMFs are the major textile fibres in the world. However, cotton has a huge advantage over MMFs as cotton is more sustainable and also biodegradable.

The Chair thanked all the presenters and closed the First Open Session at 9:55 am.