



Opening address

The Honorable Stefanos Tzoumakas

Minister of Agriculture, Greece

It is great pleasure to welcome you to Athens, the city hosting the Second World Cotton Research Conference this year. Proceedings of such a conference are of particular importance for the promotion of research and its subsequent exploitation by cotton producers, as well as everyone involved in this sector of agricultural production and economy in general.

The importance of the conference is also obvious for you, the distinguished participants, who will take advantage of the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences in the purely scientific aspect of the subject and to promote science and discuss matters of mutual concern. In general, it will facilitate an exchange of views and ideas on matters of mutual interest.

At this, point, I would like to mention the exceptional importance of this sector for Greece, a sector that could justifiably be characterised as the most dynamic for my country. Forty percent of the irrigated areas are under cotton. In particular, in recent years, the area under cotton cultivation in Greece has been about 400.000 hectares, producing about 1,000,000 tonnes of seed cotton, corresponding to about 350.000 tonnes of ginned cotton.

Cotton provides financial support for more than 200,000 Greek families who are involved in its production and in every stage of the procession of its various products. This fact means employment for about 10% of the active population, with a corresponding percentage of contribution to the Gross Agricultural Product of the country. About 110,000 rural families are directly involved in cotton production and a corresponding number of rural and urban families are directly or indirectly involved in this production sector. Among other workers of the sector, there are those occupied in collection and other cultivation works and those working to the maintenance network for mechanical equipment, the units of "first" processing (gins, seed-oil mills) and the textile and clothes sector.

Cotton production has been known in Greece since the era of Alexander the Great. It has become traditional and is developing, but until the decade of '50s, it had limited economic importance. Production expanded rapidly after the accession of our country in the European Economic Community in 1981. Nowadays, Greece is among the top ten cotton producing countries of the world.

Greece is the major cotton producer in the European Union, accounting for about 75-80% of its total production. Its exports amount to about 60% of the total production, supplying the international markets with high quality product. At the same time, it provides necessary raw material to the domestic industry (ginneries, seed-oil mills and spinning-mills).

Attempting a brief report on technical matters concerning the sector in Greece, I would say that we make efforts to develop research and use its conclusions, to improve production, targeting higher productivity and higher quality and to strengthen the position of the product in the competitive international market. In particular, the matters we work on are: the use of the most appropriate varieties, the improvement of irrigation and mechanisation, rational plant protection and the production of a high quality product. All these endeavours are in a framework of environmental protection and respect, avoiding environmental degradation resulting from irrational use of natural resources and extensive use of chemicals. It is encouraging that our producers seem to adjust to these new needs in order to protect the natural environment.

In conclusion, I would like to underline your role as researchers, since your contribution to knowledge passes, through the dissemination of information, to all those who will be invited to exercise it in practice. This will help to deal with the major problems we have to face with regard to improved yields and production of high quality products, paying due respect to the environment that supports all of us. Thus, the future of the sector depends greatly on the results of your work.

Being certain that the work of this conference will be successful, I welcome you once more to Greece, wishing you the best for the whole proceedings and officially declare the conference open.

Athens, September 6, 1998