

U.S. COTTON

A GLOBAL LEADER IN SUSTAINABILITY

In Brief:

- Cotton, a natural fiber, has been used to dress and protect families for at least 7,000 years. The thousands of U.S. cotton growers – predominantly family farms – are committed to continual improvement that positions U.S. cotton to support society’s quality of life for future generations.

Accordingly, the U.S. cotton industry continues to research and adopt responsible production practices that not only promote economic sustainability but also minimize impact on natural resources. As a result, since 1980, the U.S. cotton industry has demonstrated continuous improvement against a number of measures, as defined by Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, including reductions in soil erosion, irrigation water applied, labor hours, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmental Stewardship: A commitment to continuous improvement

- Over the past 35 years, U.S. cotton production has used 79% less water and 54% less energy, reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 40%, all while reducing land use by 49%. The adoption of practices such as minimal tillage, GPS and sensor-driven precision agriculture, and the growing of winter cover crops have further improved soil health, reducing loss and erosion by 37% per hectare and increasing soil carbon levels.
- U.S. conventionally grown cotton fiber and U.S. organically grown cotton fiber are both produced in a sustainable manner and both meet eco-label standards.
- U.S. cotton accounts for approximately 16% (about 5-6 million tonnes or 5,000-6,000 kg) of the 36 million tonnes (36 billion kg) of CO₂ removed by the world cotton crop.
- In 2008, the most recent period for such data to be reported, 44% of U.S. conventional cotton farms had fields that required no foliar insecticides, and nearly one-third of U.S. cotton production required no insecticide applications at all.



More carbon is sequestered on a per hectare (acre) basis in cotton fiber and seed than is emitted into the atmosphere during production.

Social Responsibility: A commitment to future generations

- Cottonseed is used for both human food (such as cottonseed oil) and animal feed (including feed for dairy cows) in the U.S. As such, cotton production is regulated as a food crop. Any crop protection products that are used in the production of cotton must meet the same strict regulations as any other food crop produced in the U.S.



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- In 2020, the U.S. was the world’s third largest producer of cotton, and two-thirds of U.S. cotton is produced using only rainfall and no supplemental irrigation. When supplemental irrigation water is needed, farmers use advanced irrigation methods that minimize water use.
- U.S. cotton is a founding partner of Cotton LEADS®, a program to promote awareness of the responsible practices that U.S. growers use in the production of U.S. cotton.
- When it comes to fibers and fabrics, Cotton Incorporated’s Lifestyle Monitor™ shows that nearly 90% of consumers say cotton is safe for the environment.
- The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol, launched in 2020, brings quantifiable and verifiable goals and measurement to sustainable cotton production and drives continuous improvement in six key sustainability metrics: land use, soil carbon, water management, soil loss, greenhouse gas emissions and energy efficiency. The program also provides its members with complete supply chain transparency through its Protocol Credit Management System (PCMS).

Economic Profitability: A commitment to long-term viability

- The more than 16,000 U.S. cotton growers comply with stringent U.S. regulatory requirements and are committed to the principle of continuous improvement.
- U.S. regulations and quality controls assure worker safety and welfare and responsible stewardship.
- In the U.S., the raw cotton industry employs more than 115,000 people and stimulates economic activity of more than \$75 billion (€65 billion at current exchange rate).
- Cotton is grown in 17 states, stretching from Virginia to California, covering more than 4.65 million hectares (11 million acres).
- The number of labor hours required to produce the U.S. cotton crop continues to decline, with reductions per planted hectare (acre) and per half kilo (pound) of lint of 78% and 82%, respectively from 1980 to 2015.
- Cotton Incorporated’s 2016 & 2017 Lifestyle Monitor™ survey results showed that 65% of American consumers would pay more for clothes made of natural fibers such as cotton.



Cotton, while primarily thought of as a fiber crop, also produces cottonseed that is used in food and animal feeds and thus crop protection products are regulated as in any other food crop in the U.S.

Sources

U.S. Cotton: <https://cottonusa.org/sustainability>
 Cotton LEADS: <https://cottonleads.org/news/responsible-cotton-sourcing-cotton-leads-program-webinar-usfia/>
 Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor: <https://lifestylemonitor.cottoninc.com/>
 Field to Market (2016). “Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, 2016 Environmental and Socioeconomic Indicators for Measuring Outcomes of On-Farm Production in the United States.” Available at <https://fieldtomarket.org/>



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