

PRODUCING BETTER COTTON IN PAKISTAN

Locations	Pakistan
Dates	01/04/2014 - Ongoing

Summary

Cotton is Pakistan’s largest industrial sector. However, the industry is losing around 10-15% of its value through poor traditional agricultural practices. Using the Better Cotton Standard System, we are encouraging farmers to implement better cotton production principles and criteria and Good Agricultural Practices by providing participatory training to thousands of small, medium and large-sized farmers and their farm workers.

The problem

Pakistan is the fifth-largest producer of cotton in the world. It also has the third-largest cotton spinning capacity in Asia (after China and India) making cotton Pakistan’s largest industrial sector. Cotton plays an important role in the economic development of the country and has remained a key livelihood source for thousands of farmers.

However, in Pakistan, the industry is losing around 10–15% of its value (around US$350m a year) through poor production, transport and storage practices.

Sustainable production and improved quality are essential to achieve more income from the cotton crop but the misuse of pesticides and water, inappropriate addition of chemical fertilizers, transportation and storage problems as well as gaps in knowledge and skills reduce productivity and quality.

To protect producers and the environment, farmers need to be made aware of these problems and trained on the Better Cotton Standard System (BCSS) and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). This will enable them to conserve limited resources and produce better cotton as a sustainable mainstream commodity.

What we are doing

'Better Cotton' is a scalable model for cotton that transforms markets and creates tangible impacts at scale; it reduces pesticide and water use, improves yields, and ultimately, the livelihoods of farmers.

This project is part of an ongoing engagement with Better Cotton. Better Cotton is the world's leading sustainability initiative for cotton whose mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment.

CABI is working with a number of small and medium farmers at field level in two of the major cotton-growing regions in Pakistan, Sindh and Punjab. We are supporting these farmers to produce better cotton that takes social, environmental and economic criteria into account.

To promote sustainable farming, the project is looking at ways to integrate soil management, adopt modern water conservation technologies and practices, and manage natural habitats through training, resources and environmentally friendly methods. The project will encourage proper cotton picking methods to avoid contamination, as well as better storage and transportation to markets and ginning mills where they process it. Decent work practices will be promoted, including labour monitoring, identification and remediation. The project is also promoting women's empowerment through training and the development of female entrepreneurship for sustainable income generation through kitchen gardening, goat farming and tailoring centres.

Additionally, the project wants to achieve greater impact by expanding the Better Cotton project through an increase in the number of farmers trained and licensed, the number of hectares licensed and the number of metric tonnes of licensed better cotton produced.

In Pakistan, this means expanding the programme and reaching 50,000 farmers. We want to increase participation in the Better Cotton supply chain and secure domestic funding to implement Better Cotton projects. We also want to identify and try different methods of service delivery and farmer outreach models that engage with national and provincial extension services, or provide alternative services to mature farmers, for example.

Through a collaborative approach, CABI will help to build a stronger, more sustainable sector.

Results so far

Sindh

CABI has trained 31,534 Better Cotton farmers to implement the BCSS. The training focused on equipping farmers with practical solutions for field challenges and protecting cotton crops against harmful pests and diseases.

Farmers received hands-on guidance in soil testing techniques and sustainable ways to enhance soil fertility using compost. They were also trained in efficient water management, including ridge sowing and other water-saving methods. CABI established a Soil Testing Laboratory at its Regional Sindh Office in August 2024.

Farmers have also been trained in biological control through 'Natural Enemy Field Reservoirs.' This included the biology of pests, their lifecycle and their ecological management, on-site mass production of natural enemies and their

conservation. The training also covered the disadvantages of pesticides, crop maintenance, the conservation of natural resources, such as proper irrigation and soil fertility, the right to decent work, contamination-free picking, packing, storage and final transportation to ginners.

CABI has set up 1,920 demonstration plots showcasing four key environmentally friendly practices: yellow sticky traps for pest control, compost plants for soil enrichment, light traps to monitor and reduce pest populations, and attractant crops to enhance biodiversity. These demonstration plots served as learning hubs, encouraging farmers to adopt sustainable methods in their own fields.

Targeted livelihood programmes have provided women with income-generating opportunities to support their families. These initiatives included entrepreneurship training, enabling 10 women to establish self-help businesses; the establishment of 10 sewing centers across five producer units, benefiting 46 women; goat farming support for 40 women, enhancing their household income; a resource-less land rental initiative, assisting 20 women farmers in accessing farmland; and the promotion of kitchen gardening, empowering 1,826 women to grow food, improving household nutrition and financial stability. These initiatives not only increased women's earnings but also contributed to children's education and overall family well-being. Some beneficiaries were also enrolled in government support programmes to further enhance their financial security.

Women workers have also received specialist training on proper cotton picking techniques, health and safety measures, female empowerment, and prevention of child labour.

Punjab

CABI's work on the Better Cotton programme in Punjab started in May 2024 in two areas within the District of Bahawalnagar, Haroonabad and Fort Abbas.

Since then, 71 job opportunities have been provided to local male and female agricultural graduates who will train farmers on the Better Cotton production system. These local agricultural experts have a better understanding of plant sciences but also have specialized skills in areas such as crop management, pest control, soil science, natural resource management and crop production. Their skills and expertise, therefore, help to build the capacity of farmers on adoptive research, contributing to improving cotton farmers' approaches through knowledge and capacity on modern and sustainable agricultural production practices, and providing access to scientific expertise that farmers can adopt.

Comprehensive training sessions have also been carried out with project staff on Better Cotton principles and criteria, enabling sustainable practices to be reinforced in the region.

In Punjab, a total of 18,002 cotton farmers, of which 17,990 male, 12 female, and 1032 male workers and 3855 female workers have been trained on the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria, which included Good Agricultural Practices and sustainable cotton production practices. To enhance the cotton growers' technical capacity further, practical interventions have been introduced. For example, 70 organic compost units have been established to help increase soil fertility. Furthermore, to help minimize the pest populations, 2200 yellow sticky traps, 1370 pheromone traps and 400 light traps have been installed on farmers' farms.

To strengthen the working capacity and promote the health and personal protection policy, Personal Protective Equipment kits have been distributed among 112 male and female workers. These will help to strengthen the working capacity of farmers and promote the health and personal protection policy. Additionally, 466 cotton picking kits have been given to women workers to help protect cotton fiber from contamination.

One significant output has been the number of farmers who are adopting alternatives to chemical pesticides. By doing so, the number of sprays reduced and input costs decreased, showing a positive outcome in managing insect pests.

To help empower women through leadership, three sewing centres have been established, allowing more than 25 women the opportunity to enhance their sewing skills and generate an income.

The acquired knowledge and skills will enable farmers to implement the BCSS across a cotton area of 41,231.5 hectares.

Donors	Better Cotton Growth & Innovation Fund (BC GIF)
CABI Project Manager	Habat Ullah Asad






https://www.cabi.org/what-we-do/cabi-projects/