PRODUCING BETTER COTTON IN PAKISTAN

Locations  Pakistan

Dates  01/04/2014 - 31/03/2025

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 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 enhanced the capacity of 31,534 Better Cotton farmers to implement the Better Cotton Standard System. The main focus of the training addressed the field issues and capacity to protect the cotton crop from harmful insect pests and diseases.

Farmers have been trained on soil analysis and increasing soil fertility through compost application to provide the right soil nutrients. Farmers were also advised on how to make better use of available water resources by ridge sowing and water sourcing and were encouraged to conserve the natural habitats on farms.

Farmers have been trained in biological control through ‘Natural Enemy Field Reservoirs.’ This includes the biology of pests and their ecological management, on-site mass production of natural enemies and their conservation. The training
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.

Female workers have also been trained on proper cotton picking, health and safety, 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 Fortabbas.

Since then, 71 job opportunities have been provided to local agricultural graduates. The aim of employing agricultural graduates is to train farmers on the Better Cotton production system. These local agricultural experts not only have a better understanding of plant sciences but also have specialized skills in areas such as crop management, pest control, soil science 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 agricultural production practices, and providing access to scientific expertise that farmers can adopt.

Comprehensive training has 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 farmers, and 1032 male workers and 3855 female workers will be provided with the knowledge and skills in sustainable agricultural approaches by adopting the Better Cotton standard system across a cotton area of 41,231.5 hectares.

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<th>Donors</th>
<th>Better Cotton Growth &amp; Innovation Fund (BC GIF)</th>
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<tr>
<td>CABI Project Manager</td>
<td>Habat Ullah Asad</td>
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