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Need of the Hour - Ethical and Responsible Cotton Production in India

GUEST COLUMN

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Dr. (Mrs.) Usha Rani is currently Principal Scientist at ICAR- Central Institute for Cotton Research, Regional Station, Coimbatore. She earned her B.Sc (Agri), M.Sc (Agri) and Ph.d in Agricultural Extension from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Her current research activities are dedicated to find out innovations in Transfer of Cotton Technology so that through support of appropriate, tailor made and translated technological information; yield and income of cotton growers can be enhanced. She has been dedicating since 2000 to the issue of Technology Transfer in Cotton through conducting nationwide demonstrations and has been involved in studies on usage of Information and Communication tools viz., web portal, mobile phone, social media etc., in dissemination of agricultural technologies and gender mainstreaming in cotton sector.

A Tamil proverb goes like this *"Aal Pathi Aadai Pathi"* (meaning the distinction of a person is decided half by his natural appearance and half by his dress) stating the importance of clothing in our life. In the long run, when the necessity of clothing turned into fashion, the textile industry has become the universal phenomenon and the production of raw materials needed for textiles and manufacture of textile products has become competitive. This competition compels a few producers and industries to compromise the regular standards in production of raw materials and textile products, neglecting the labour and environmental policies, payment of a fair price and gender equality, which results in Indian products getting a bad reputation in the international arena.

Unavoidably, at a time when sustainable cotton is gaining importance, the cotton production and textile sectors in India are under compulsion to adhere to certain norms for their survival and competence at the world level. Also, these days a consumer demands the information on origin and history of products he or she buys. So, it is high time to educate the Indian cotton growers and other stakeholders in the cotton value chain about ethical and responsible cotton production.

Ethical Production in Agriculture

Ethics are important part of human life and farming is not an exception. According to Thompson (2014), agricultural ethics is a form of practical ethics that addresses ethical issues

or questions that arise in conjunction with the production and distribution of food and fibre goods. The issues related to agricultural ethics in general are issues related to human health and food security, issues related to environment and issues related to society.

The increasing population, mounting need for food and fibre, industrialisation of agriculture, globalisation demands and budding Informatics compel the modern agricultural research to introduce novel technologies that maximise the yield. To satisfy the demand of maximising yield and output, the farmers and industries are occasionally compromising the ethics in their production by neglecting the labour and environmental policies. Nowadays there is a pressing need on farmers and the industries which use their end products, to reflect the ethics, values and morals that emphasise their proceedings and so ethical and responsible production is gaining momentum in agriculture.

Ethical Cotton and Ethical Fabric

Ethical cotton production refers to the production of a textile product in ethical way from production of raw material to consumption, clarifying how ethical they are when it comes to their environmental impact, treatment of their workers and animal welfare. Ethical fabric is a broad term used to describe the ethical production of raw materials, fashion design, manufacture, retail and purchasing which covers a range of issues about sustainable production like environment, working conditions, worker's rights, exploitation, fair trade, animal welfare, use of toxic pesticides, carbon and water foot print, etc.,

Need for Ethical and Responsible Cotton Production

The first and foremost need for ethical and responsible production is the demand to adhere to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in which the 12th rule is about responsible consumption and production. This in turn yielded the "2025 Sustainable Cotton Challenge", which was formed in 2017, when His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales addressed the critical challenges faced by the world, to a group of CEOs through the work of his International Sustainability Unit, which, in turn is committed to work together to accelerated the use of sustainable cotton. Their commitment paved the way for many companies commit to source 100% sustainable cotton by 2025.

Thus, the 2025 Sustainable Cotton Challenge serves as a basis for change in the textile industry to source 100% sustainable cotton which in turn poses challenges on the Indian cotton growers to opt for ethical, responsible and sustainable cotton production. Addressing the land, air, water and social impacts of cotton supply

chains through ethical and sustainable cotton production in India will move the Indian textile industry to achieve the UN SDG.

The next important factor forcing the need to produce ethical and responsible cotton is the challenge faced by the cotton growing system. The system which produces unethical and irresponsible cotton, faces the challenges like over-consumption of water, pollution of water and contribution to greenhouse gas emissions through indiscriminate use of fertilizers and pesticides, soil depletion, indebtedness and poverty of the smallholding cotton farmers, forced and child labour, price volatility, uncertain market and the worst of all - farmers' suicides.

To overcome these challenges, Indian cotton farms need to adopt ethical and responsible cotton production. Scientific data is also needed to document the present state and monitor these indicators. Misinformation if any, on the levels of these indicators must be challenged with robust scientific data.

The next factor that influences the need of ethical and responsible cotton production is the norms advocated by certain networks. For example, "The Responsible Sourcing Network – A Project of USA Organization", which makes their brands sign up for its "Cotton Pledge". These types of norms force the high-street clothing companies to set targets to source 100% sustainable cotton by 2020 or by 2025. To be a client for these companies, in future, the buyers and traders will force the Indian cotton growers to cultivate sustainable cotton without any labour issues.

Traceability is another factor that calls for ethical and responsible cotton production in India. Traceability is an increasingly common element of public and private systems for monitoring compliance with quality, environmental, and other product and/or process attributes related to food and fibre. Consumers are increasingly demanding information on the origin and history of the products, putting pressure on retailers to provide transparency. Hence, it is high time that Indian cotton farmers start recording and maintaining details of all their farm activities from seed to seed cotton and adopt sustainable package of practices in cultivation. Easier said than done because the larger question is "who will bear the additional expenditure involved?".

Initiatives for Ethical and Responsible Cotton Production in India

An estimate by the "Textile Exchange", the popular nonprofit organization working for cotton industries, says that today, 17% of the world's cotton is more sustainable and by 2025, it is hoped that more than 50% of the world's

cotton is converted into sustainable cotton. This is due to the initiatives taken at the international and national level by various organisations. These initiatives provide education, assistance and the platform for more sustainable cotton production and supply.

These initiatives include organic cotton certified to the Organic Content Standard (OCS) of Global Cotton Textile Standard (GTS), Fairtrade cotton (Certified to Fairtrade International or Fairtrade, USA), Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA) and recycled cotton (rCotton) certified to an independently verifiable standard such as the Global Recycled Standard (GRS) or the Recycled Claim Standard (RCS), etc., Among these, few have already been working in India.

The BCI's Indian initiative says that in the 2017-18 cotton season, it issued license to 575,725 cotton growers, produced 572,000 metric tonnes of better cotton lint in 905,000 hectares. It addresses the increased profit by reducing the use of costly pesticides. The "Fair-trade cotton" made its entry into India as a certified product in 2004 and has 30,000 Fairtrade certified cotton farmers now. It emphasises on economic justice to empower cotton farmers, who are often marginalised by equitable profit-sharing in terms of trade by assuring a guaranteed minimum price. It stipulates no GM, no forced or child labour, no discrimination and minimised pesticide use. Another initiative in India is "Organic Cotton" which is pesticide and GM free. It is produced and certified according to the organic agriculture standards. It guarantees worker's rights and working conditions which include minimum wage coverage, fixed working hours, no child labour, no discrimination, harsh and inhumane treatment of labour, etc.

In India, many public and private organisations facilitate producing certified organic cotton. Even though India has around one percent of cotton production under organic, still it is the largest organic cotton producer at world level with 56%. Recycled cotton or regenerated cotton or reclaimed cotton or shoddy, the other initiative, which means converting cotton fabric into cotton fibre that can be reused in textile products. Recycled content includes recycled raw material, as well as used, reconditioned, and re-manufactured components either scraps created by yarn and fabric by-products or garments, upholstery, towels, household items to be repurposed. This is also gaining momentum nowadays.

Challenges Faced in Implementation

Even though India has the distinction of being the largest organic cotton producer at

the world level, organic cotton growers in India face tremendous challenges. Availability and cost of organic inputs including organic seeds, lack of subsidies and tempting premium prices, insufficient market access, difficulties in orienting the farmers and collaborating with stakeholders, complexities in getting organic certification, etc., are some of the major challenges faced by the organic cotton growers in India. To make this sector to thrive, the policy makers, researchers and extensionists in cotton sector need to work on actionable solutions that will shape this sector.

Lack of traceability technologies is a major challenge as regards addressing the traceability concern in ethical and responsible cotton production in India. Countries like India where the cotton cultivation is predominantly by small holders, traceability is a big challenge. Implementing traceability technologies is costly and complicated, since they need to establish fibre origins, authenticity of fibre quality, quantification of fibre purity and tracking of processing path from fibre to fabric. Even though few private firms do address this concern here and there in India, the Government should play a role in regulating traceability.

Accountability is the main challenge faced by the organisations at the forefront of the sustainable initiatives amongst cotton growers and industries. Implementation of a concept is easy and its value will be appreciable when it is niche. But it will be much difficult when it moved into the mainstream. India is a country cultivating 12-13 million hectares of cotton every year by more than 6 million farmers with an average land holding of 1-1.5 ha with limited support, spread across eleven diverse cotton growing states. Implementing a concept like "sustainable cotton" will be a great task. Hence, a massive program must be designed by the Government of India to foster the ethical and responsible cotton production in the country.

Future Perspectives

- Efforts must be taken by cotton policy makers, research and extension system to create awareness about ethical and responsible cotton production among Indian cotton growers and to educate them with the need of producing sustainable cotton.
- Initiatives must be taken to demonstrate the production of sustainable cotton at micro level, through proven extension mechanisms like Front Line Demonstrations, Farmers Field Schools, Village Adoption Programs, Mera Gaun Mera Gaurav and action-oriented extension research projects.
- Policy regulations need to be developed to adhere to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by ensuring the programs, policies, standards and decisions always take ethical considerations into account.
- An extension action research program as a pilot project to demonstrate the benefits of ethical, responsible and sustainable cotton production should be conducted and the explanation on "Who is benefited the most by this ethical and responsible cotton production?" should also be documented through empirical approaches.

Conclusion

Presently, cotton crop is blamed for many unsustainable practices. If cotton is grown in an ethical and responsible way, it would be one of the versatile crops in the world since it has the ability to grow in a diverse climatic conditions and provides fibre and other byproducts essential for human livelihoods. To create fibre security, cotton must be grown in ethical and responsible ways utilising more sustainable and regenerative farming practices. A sustainable approach towards the ethical and responsible cotton production, will benefit the people and planet by providing prosperity and peace.

References

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2. Paul B Thompson & David M Kaplan, (2014). Encyclopedia of food and agricultural ethics, Dordrecht : Springer Netherlands

(The views expressed in this column are of the author and not that of Cotton Association of India)

Since 1921,
we are dedicated to the cause of Indian cotton.

Just one of the reasons, you should use our Laboratory Testing Services.

The Cotton Association of India (CAI) is respected as the chief trade body in the hierarchy of the Indian cotton economy. Since its origin in 1921, CAI's contribution has been unparalleled in the development of cotton across India.

The CAI is setting benchmarks across a wide spectrum of services targeting the entire cotton value chain. These range from research and development at the grass root level to education, providing an arbitration mechanism, maintaining Indian cotton grade standards, issuing Certificates of Origin to collecting and disseminating statistics and information. Moreover, CAI is an autonomous organization portraying professionalism and reliability in cotton testing.

The CAI's network of independent cotton testing & research laboratories are strategically spread across major cotton centres in India and are equipped with:

- State-of-the-art technology & world-class Premier and MAG cotton testing machines
- HVI test mode with trash% tested gravimetrically

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COTTON ASSOCIATION OF INDIA
Established 1921

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UPCOUNTRY SPOT RATES

(Rs./Qtl)

Standard Descriptions with Basic Grade & Staple in Millimetres based on Upper Half Mean Length [By law 66 (A) (a) (4)]								Spot Rate (Upcountry) 2018-19 Crop January 2020					
Sr. No.	Growth	Grade Standard	Grade	Staple	Micronaire	Gravimetric Trash	Strength /GPT	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
1	P/H/R	ICS-101	Fine	Below 22mm	5.0 – 7.0	4%	15	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
2	P/H/R (SG)	ICS-201	Fine	Below 22mm	5.0 – 7.0	4.5%	15	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
3	GUJ	ICS-102	Fine	22mm	4.0 – 6.0	13%	20	9055 (32200)	8998 (32000)	8998 (32000)	8998 (32000)	9083 (32300)	9083 (32300)
4	KAR	ICS-103	Fine	23mm	4.0 – 5.5	4.5%	21	9926 (35300)	9898 (35200)	9842 (35000)	9842 (35000)	9842 (35000)	9842 (35000)
5	M/M (P)	ICS-104	Fine	24mm	4.0 – 5.5	4%	23	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
6	P/H/ R (U) (SG)	ICS-202	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	4.5%	26	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
7	M/M(P)/ SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	26mm	3.0 – 3.4	4%	25	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
8	P/H/R(U)	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	4%	26	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
9	M/M(P)/ SA/TL/G	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.0 – 3.4	4%	25	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
10	M/M(P)/ SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	3.5%	26	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
11	P/H/R(U)	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.5 – 4.9	4%	27	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
12	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	27	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
13	SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	27	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
14	GUJ	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	27	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
15	R(L)	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	28	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
16	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	28	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
17	SA/TL/K	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	28	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
18	GUJ	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	28	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
19	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	30mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	29	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
20	SA/TL/K/O	ICS-105	Fine	30mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	29	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
21	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	31mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	30	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
22	SA/TL/ K / TN/O	ICS-105	Fine	31mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	30	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
23	SA/TL/K/ TN/O	ICS-106	Fine	32mm	3.5 – 4.2	3%	31	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
24	M/M(P)	ICS-107	Fine	34mm	3.0 - 3.8	4%	33	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
25	K/TN	ICS-107	Fine	34mm	3.0 - 3.8	3.5%	33	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -

(Note: Figures in bracket indicate prices in Rs./Candy)

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(Rs./Qtl)

Sr. No.	Growth	Grade Standard	Grade	Staple	Micronaire	Gravimetric Trash	Strength /GPT	Spot Rate (Upcountry) 2019-20 Crop January 2020					
								20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th
1	P/H/R	ICS-101	Fine	Below 22mm	5.0 – 7.0	4%	15	10292 (36600)	10292 (36600)	10292 (36600)	10292 (36600)	10292 (36600)	10292 (36600)
2	P/H/R (SG)	ICS-201	Fine	Below 22mm	5.0 – 7.0	4.5%	15	10432 (37100)	10432 (37100)	10432 (37100)	10432 (37100)	10432 (37100)	10432 (37100)
3	GUJ	ICS-102	Fine	22mm	4.0 – 6.0	13%	20	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
4	KAR	ICS-103	Fine	23mm	4.0 – 5.5	4.5%	21	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
5	M/M (P)	ICS-104	Fine	24mm	4.0 – 5.5	4%	23	9983 (35500)	9926 (35300)	9926 (35300)	9926 (35300)	9926 (35300)	9926 (35300)
6	P/H/ R (U) (SG)	ICS-202	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	4.5%	26	10995 (39100)	10939 (38900)	10967 (39000)	10967 (39000)	10967 (39000)	10967 (39000)
7	M/M(P)/ SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	26mm	3.0 – 3.4	4%	25	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
8	P/H/R(U)	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	4%	26	11135 (39600)	11079 (39400)	11107 (39500)	11107 (39500)	11107 (39500)	11107 (39500)
9	M/M(P)/ SA/TL/G	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.0 – 3.4	4%	25	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
10	M/M(P)/ SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	27mm	3.5 – 4.9	3.5%	26	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -	- -
11	P/H/R(U)	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.5 – 4.9	4%	27	11192 (39800)	11135 (39600)	11164 (39700)	11164 (39700)	11164 (39700)	11164 (39700)
12	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	27	11164 (39700)	11107 (39500)	11023 (39200)	11023 (39200)	10995 (39100)	10995 (39100)
13	SA/TL	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	27	11192 (39800)	11135 (39600)	11051 (39300)	11051 (39300)	11023 (39200)	11023 (39200)
14	GUJ	ICS-105	Fine	28mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	27	11276 (40100)	11220 (39900)	11135 (39600)	11135 (39600)	11051 (39300)	11051 (39300)
15	R(L)	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	28	11192 (39800)	11164 (39700)	11079 (39400)	11135 (39600)	11107 (39500)	11107 (39500)
16	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	28	11304 (40200)	11248 (40000)	11164 (39700)	11192 (39800)	11164 (39700)	11164 (39700)
17	SA/TL/K	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	28	11360 (40400)	11304 (40200)	11248 (40000)	11276 (40100)	11220 (39900)	11220 (39900)
18	GUJ	ICS-105	Fine	29mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	28	11389 (40500)	11332 (40300)	11248 (40000)	11276 (40100)	11220 (39900)	11220 (39900)
19	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	30mm	3.7 – 4.5	3.5%	29	11473 (40800)	11417 (40600)	11332 (40300)	11360 (40400)	11332 (40300)	11332 (40300)
20	SA/TL/K/O	ICS-105	Fine	30mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	29	11529 (41000)	11473 (40800)	11389 (40500)	11417 (40600)	11389 (40500)	11389 (40500)
21	M/M(P)	ICS-105	Fine	31mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	30	11782 (41900)	11726 (41700)	11614 (41300)	11642 (41400)	11642 (41400)	11642 (41400)
22	SA/TL/ K / TN/O	ICS-105	Fine	31mm	3.7 – 4.5	3%	30	11867 (42200)	11810 (42000)	11698 (41600)	11726 (41700)	11726 (41700)	11726 (41700)
23	SA/TL/K/ TN/O	ICS-106	Fine	32mm	3.5 – 4.2	3%	31	12288 (43700)	12204 (43400)	12092 (43000)	12092 (43000)	12092 (43000)	12092 (43000)
24	M/M(P)	ICS-107	Fine	34mm	3.0 - 3.8	4%	33	15803 (56200)	15747 (56000)	15747 (56000)	15747 (56000)	15747 (56000)	15747 (56000)
25	K/TN	ICS-107	Fine	34mm	3.0 - 3.8	3.5%	33	16394 (58300)	16310 (58000)	16310 (58000)	16310 (58000)	16310 (58000)	16310 (58000)

(Note: Figures in bracket indicate prices in Rs./Candy)