

why organic  
with MaryJane

*As we go,* so goes the world, for the world is us.

The revolution that will save the world is ultimately a personal one.

— Marianne Williamson

# Why ORGANIC COTTON?



Ramu and Lakshmi have three girls and one boy. All their children, including the girls, attend school because they believe that giving a solid education to their children is essential for their future well-being. (This is not the case for most girls in rural India, where educational opportunities remain out of grasp—only recently have girls been able to attend past the fifth year of primary school, and most coed schools still go up to only Grade 8.) Sometimes Ramu's mother is part of their farm family, and at times Lakshmi's sister, husband, and their children are, too. Ramu and Lakshmi own a house, six cows, three goats, and hens—venerable possessions for farmers in the region where they live.





Ramu opted for organic farming 10 years ago. The costs for fertilizer are small, mainly involving labor, compared to chemical farming. Since his six cows provide the cow “pats” and urine free of charge, he has for free what are the most important ingredients of organic fertilizer. This frees him from the debilitating cost and health effects of agrichemicals. Organic seeds are normally given to Ramu by those who enter into a contractual agreement with him to buy his organic cotton. This eases the burden of seed procurement for him. Harvest for Ramu is the most important activity of the season. How is the quality this year? What is the yield of his crops? The future of his family depends on it.

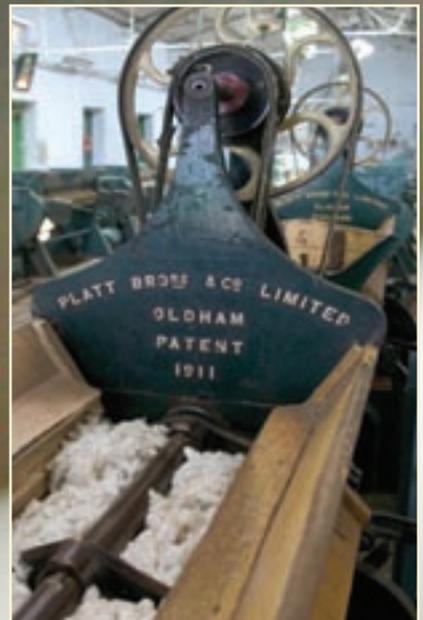


Once the cotton is collected from the fields, farmers and their helpers carry the sacks on their heads to a collection point.





The long journey from raw material to a silky, smooth product begins. In cooperation with the Gandhigram Research Center in Dindigul, Vijayeswari Textiles Limited (VTX) develops natural dyes on an herbal basis. Modern technology and technical know-how are VTX's precious possessions. Diligent screening under many trained and watchful eyes in every step of the manufacturing process guarantees outstanding products. At VTX, the products are not ready for shipping until the final inspection passes a fault-free premium product, a process that began when Ramu planted an organic cotton seed.



## Did you know?

- Cotton has been used to make clothing since 2200 BC.
- Cotton accounts for nearly 40 percent of total world fiber production.
- Cotton is the most comfortable and durable of all the fibers, natural or synthetic. Because of its versatility, cotton is one of the most widely traded commodities in the world; it represents an essential component of foreign earnings for more than 80 countries.
- China (24 percent), the U.S. (20 percent), and India (16 percent) together produce over half of the world's cotton.
- Cotton is one of the most heavily sprayed commercial crops in the world, and the chemicals used on non-organic cotton are among the most toxic classified by the EPA.
- Commercial cotton farming uses only about 3 percent of the world's farmland, but consumes 25 percent of the world's chemical pesticides and fertilizers. (In the U.S. alone, over 600,000 tons of chemical pesticides and fertilizers are used on cotton each season.)
- Organic cotton is grown and processed without the use of harmful chemicals. Sustainable farming practices that do not pollute ground or surface water, soil, or air are used to produce organic cotton.
- Organic cotton is safer for farmers, for you, for your children, and for the environment. Organic cotton also feels softer, smells cleaner, and is more hypoallergenic.





Did you know?

**250,000** Indian farmers have committed suicide as a direct result of genetically engineered cotton.

## Why? How could this happen?

In 1998, the World Bank's policies forced India to open its seed sector to global agribusiness giants. As a result, traditional farm-saved seeds have now been replaced with sterile, genetically engineered seeds owned by Monsanto, which require repurchase each growing season. Though Monsanto claimed that their seeds would bring down cultivation costs, a study by the New Delhi-based Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology says the costs of raising cotton have actually increased nine times with the GE seeds. This includes Monsanto's \$80 "technology fee" for every 2.6 acres of crops—a crippling expenditure in a country with an average annual per capita income of only \$450. Depending on empty promises of high yields and low costs from Monsanto, farmers turned to using the GE seeds, causing the conventional seed to virtually disappear in just one season. Whereas conventional cotton crops depended only on rainfall and cow dung for fertilizer, natural rainfall is often not enough for the GE crops, and farmers are forced to buy expensive fertilizer and pesticides as well. This has led to poverty and severe indebtedness for the farmers, often to moneylenders who charge exorbitant fees. One failed crop can put farmers into a downward debt spiral with no hope of ever paying back their loans.

In a futile attempt to relieve themselves of debt, some farmers even resort to selling their own organs. When these and other attempts fail to rectify their financial situations, many farmers commit suicide, often by drinking the very pesticides they're forced to use on their GE crops. When we first reported on this phenomenon in 2008, we were appalled to read that 25,000 farmers had committed suicide. But just four years later, that figure has risen to a staggering 250,000 farmers.

## Organic cotton can help.

(excerpted from Organic Consumers Association, [www.organicconsumers.org](http://www.organicconsumers.org))

Organic cotton projects, like the one initiated by [Indian] textile manufacturer Arvind Ltd. in villages in the Akola region of Maharashtra, are helping. In 2008, Arvind reported, "There has not been a single case of farmer's suicide in the area where we launched the project in February last year." The project, which follows organic farming practices and avoids the use of fertilizers and pesticides, has begun raking in cash for farmers. And fair-trade labeling allows consumers and distributors alike to track the origin of the goods to confirm that the benefit is actually reaching the farmers.

Currently, the project covers over 10,000 acres of farmland and involves working closely with nearly 1,200 farmers. The farmers are organized into self-help groups of 10-15 neighbors. The company is training the farmers and providing specially evolved cotton seeds, since GE seeds are not allowed in organic farming. The organic cotton produced in the region is certified by the International Control System and carries the India Organic logo.

"We have not owned farmers' land. We will pick up whatever they produce. They get payment within seven days. They are happy about it. More than 42 percent of participants are small farmers, and only 30 percent own 10 acres," an Arvind representative said.



“Till all  
are free,  
no one  
is free;  
one bound,  
all bound.”

— Author Unknown

In a nation where 60% of its 1.1 billion population are directly or indirectly reliant on agriculture, what some call “GM Genocide” has been responsible for a quarter of a million farmer suicides over the past 16 years

(one suicide every 30 minutes)

—the single largest wave of recorded suicides in human history.