WWF and IKEA co-operation – cotton projects

Cotton is a thirsty crop the cultivation of which often requires large quantities of water and chemicals. This results in negative effects on the environment and on people’s health. Cotton is also sometimes grown in areas where fresh water resources are scarce and under enormous pressure. During the last four years, WWF and IKEA have run joint projects to support more sustainable cotton production.

Shared values

WWF and IKEA work together to promote more sustainable cotton production in accordance with the Better Cotton Initiative. Since 2005, we have implemented projects in both India and Pakistan. The aim of these projects is to work with farmers to produce cotton using less chemicals and water, to improve the livelihood of farmers by helping them to produce more sustainable cotton in accordance with the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), and to influence the bulk production of cotton. We have discovered a number of farming practices that reduce the use of pesticides, water and chemical fertilizers, while increasing farmers’ profit margins, and we promote these through farmer training, support and outreach activities.

The projects

India

In India, about 60 million people work with cotton production in some way, amounting to 30 per cent of India’s total export of cotton and textile – about 22 per cent of the global production. The overall objective of this project is to improve the ecosystem through sustainable use of soil, water and external resources by farmers in the region of Maharashtra, and thereby improving health and livelihood of communities through production of more sustainable cotton. By promoting the use of Better Management Practices (BMPs), farmers have managed to reduce their water and chemical use. In 2009, the project worked with 796 farmers – by using BMPs, these farmers managed to reduce their water applications by 53 per cent, pesticide applications by 48 per cent and chemical fertilizer use by 50 per cent, on average, as compared to farmers who did not use BMPs that year. In 2010, the number of farmers involved in the project will be around 4,000.
Pakistan

Pakistan is the fourth largest producer of cotton in the world, after China, India and the US – with about 8 per cent of the total global cotton production.

The overall objective of the cotton project is to improve farmers’ livelihoods through the introduction of BMPs in three districts of Pakistan. This will ensure a sustainable improvement in the natural, financial, social and human capital available to the cotton farmers, and promote its adoption throughout Pakistan as well as internationally. WWF also aims to build the capacity of farmers to meet the BCI criteria, which would have environmental and livelihood benefits. By using the BMPs, around 25 000 farmers in Pakistan were targeted in 2009 and changed their farming methods to be more sustainable and less water and chemical dependent. Organic manures and composts are used, pest risks and nutrient and water needs of the cotton plant are better assessed. The BMP cotton farmers made crop management decisions which resulted in 40 per cent reduction in synthetic fertilizers, 39 per cent in irrigation water and 47 per cent in pesticides. This has not only led to more sustainable farming and production, but also to better economic benefits for the farming communities where the incomes of BMP farmers have increased by 11 per cent. In 2010, the number of farmers involved in the project will increase to around 40 000.

Summary of results:

The projects in Pakistan and India have shown significant results, proving that it is possible to produce cotton at a lower cost, which improves the gross margins for the farmer, while reducing the use of agrochemicals and water inputs. Below are some of the results from the projects over a three year period (2006–2008) by farmers using BMPs, as compared to conventional farmers, which give an indication of what can be achieved:

**In Pakistan, when compared with conventional farmers:**
- the average reduction in chemical fertilizer use by BMP farmers was 38 per cent,
- the average reduction in pesticide and water use by BMP farmers was 32 per cent,
- we have shown that by using BMPs, farmers can increase their profit by an average of 20 per cent.

**In India, when compared with conventional farmers:**
- the average reduction in pesticide use by BMP farmers was 81 per cent,
- the average reduction in water use by BMP farmers was 49 per cent,
- the average reduction in chemical fertilizer use by BMP farmers was 16 per cent,
- we have shown that by using BMPs, farmers can increase their profit by an average of 15 per cent.

Better Cotton Initiative

WWF and IKEA are two of the founding members of the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), and also members of its Steering Committee. WWF and IKEA promote the objectives of BCI, and support farmers to achieve the BCI criteria, and thereby produce more sustainable cotton. Read more on www.bettercotton.org

More information about the projects can also be found on www.panda.org/ikea.