

OUR COTTON

If all the cotton in the world were grown organically, the use of insecticides could be reduced 25 percent. In working toward that end, Coyuchi has been recognized for its role in bolstering the production of organic cotton. We've received the United Nations Second Annual Fashion Industry Award for Environmental Excellence.

Every fiber of cotton we use is produced in accordance with the standards set forth by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM). Individual organizations handle the actual certification of cotton fiber produced in different regions: SKAL, a Netherlands-based certifier, oversees the cotton grown for Coyuchi in India. What standards must we meet in order for our cotton to be certified as organic? At the top of the list outlined by IFOAM in its Growing and Processing Standards are the following: seeds must be non-genetically engineered; insects should be controlled by methods that simulate what occurs in the natural environment, where "good" bugs eat "bad" bugs. There must also be an emphasis on keeping plants healthy- healthy plants are more resistant to infestation-fields are usually weeded by hand. Organic farms are not allowed to use any chemical fertilizers or chemical inputs, such as herbicides or other pesticides.

All our organic cotton is grown in India by family farmers organized in cooperatives. We willingly pay premium prices to these small-scale growers for their organic cotton fiber because this encourages organic practices that protect not only the environment, but the farmers, their families, and their communities from exposure to toxic agricultural chemicals. Also, by purchasing their cotton at a better price per kilo, we help support local and economically sustainable production.

Coyuchi's organic cotton is produced by three growing projects in India, two located in Madhya Pradesh and one in Gujarat. The first was initiated in 1992, the second and third in 1996. Since then they have expanded to include over 2,500 family farmers, collectively producing over 400,000 pounds annually.

Farmers in India are aware of the facts: Cotton uses 25% of the world's insecticides and accounts for \$2.6 billion spent on pesticides each year. Conventional cotton production involves added costs, risks of exposure and the need to increase chemical inputs each season. By contrast, organic growing offers many benefits: improved soil fertility, decreased costs and increased revenues, less requirement of water as organic methods help retain moisture in the soil and promote porosity, and food crops produced alongside the cotton that are more healthful.



Before switching to organic production, these farmers were borrowing from money



lenders at a rate of 24-36% per annum in order to purchase pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Alternative, safe and organic methods save the farmers money and also, according to Greenpeace in India, affect children: Studies have shown that children reared on organic farms have faster mental development than those growing up on conventional farms.

Cotton is grown rotationally and intercropped with maize, soybeans, wheat, sesame, sorghum and chilies. Some of these serve as "barrier" crops and actually repel pests; others, such as maize and sorghum, attract beneficial insects. Soil fertility is managed through the application of manure, compost and earthworm castings, crop rotation, (making sure at least one legume is planted each year), the addition of oil cakes as supplements and the use of bio-dynamic preparations.

In all three of the cooperative projects currently producing organic cotton for Coyuchi, the standard of living as well as the quality of life have improved for farmers and their families. We look forward to increasing utilization of their cotton and are glad to be contributing to the practice of sustainable agriculture and social well-being of these people.