



SUSTAINABLE COTTON PROJECT

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California growers grow Cleaner Cotton

Buoyed by a rebounding global cotton market, a group of pioneering farmers this spring ramped up production of a greener California-grown cotton.

Growers of San Joaquin Valley-produced Cleaner Cotton™ increased their acreage by 22 percent over 2009, setting their sights at the fast-growing \$4 billion eco-fashion and textile markets. This season, Cleaner Cotton growers are cultivating nearly 4,700 acres of cotton.

“Farmers are finding new ways that are better for the environment and the consumer,” said Chad Crivelli, a third generation California cotton grower. “We are getting our name out. People out there are asking for our cotton.”

Indeed, the trademarked premium fiber already is attracting interest from some of the world’s largest apparel retailers, including Gap Inc. and Levi Strauss & Co. Growers are looking for a breakthrough deal this year after weathering a tough 2009 marked by a sluggish economy, high water prices and weak commodity prices.

The Cleaner Cotton program is coordinated by the Davis, Calif.-based [Sustainable Cotton Project](http://www.sustainablecottonproject.org) (SCP), a nonprofit organization founded in 1996. SCP promotes many of the practices in organic farming and helps farmers adopt biological methods to control harmful pests and improve soil quality. Foremost, growers eliminate the 13 most toxic pesticides used in cotton production, a practice that protects the health of community members, wildlife and water systems in the valley. In the past six years, growers have produced more than 1 million pounds of Cleaner Cotton.

“Farmers can still make a profit growing cotton and reduce their use of chemicals. That’s a great feeling,” Crivelli said.

[Cleaner Cotton](http://www.sustainablecottonproject.org) is the only option California cotton that eliminates the

top most toxic chemicals and uses non-genetically modified seed. For years, growers have tried to plant organic cotton, but could sell the fiber for a profit of the state's high labor and production costs. In fact, about 98 percent of organic cotton is grown outside the United States.

"It costs about five times more to grow organic than conventional (cotton)," said Crivelli, who planted 10 acres of organic cotton in 2009. "The seed is more expensive. You can't use herbicides for weed pressure. Everything has to be done by hand. It raises the price for consumers." Crivelli sold his 2008-2009 organic pima cotton on the conventional market because of a lack of market interest at the price he had to charge.

Cleaner Cotton is the best way for California growers to tap into the burgeoning consumer interest in sustainability. "It's a very good concept," Crivelli said. "Farmers can still make a profit growing cotton and reduce their use of chemicals. It's a great feeling."

That's good news for fashion designers who rave about the quality of California cotton, an extra-long, strong fiber coveted for high-quality products such as fine linens and dress shirts.

"The San Joaquin Valley produces some of the finest cotton in the world, a high-quality fiber that commands a premium price," said Lynda Grose, pioneer in fashion and sustainability and assistant professor at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco.

"Cleaner Cotton is great quality and is grown with reduced toxicity and non-genetically modified seed," Grose said. "At a time when the U.S. public is looking to bolster the domestic economy, grown and sewn in the U.S. is a great message for any American retailer. Cleaner Cotton also has earned kudos in the European and Japanese markets."

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