Sustainability is in fashion for Greek cotton
Cologne, 26 July 2017

In its long history, cotton has been associated with slavery, imperialism and environmental impact. But its desirability for chic and comfortable clothing has never diminished. Now the cotton industry is getting behind the principle of sustainable production. Thirteen of the world’s biggest clothing and textile companies recently signed a pledge to source 100% sustainable cotton by 2025 in a deal brokered by the UK’s Prince of Wales.

The cultivation of cotton in Greece is described by Pausanias in the 2nd century B.C. Nowadays Greece is the largest cotton producer in Europe and in the top dozen countries worldwide. In Greece, cotton is regarded as a crop of national importance. It accounts for more than eight percent of total agricultural output. Although cotton is grown mainly for fibre, the cottonseed, which remains after processing, is used to produce oil and oilseed cake for animal feed. Many producers seek ISCC certification to prove their products are sustainable.

With ISCC certification producers can address requirements for all markets as biofuels, food, feed and fibre too. Both environmental and social sustainability criteria are set at a high level, with traceability in the supply chain and a greenhouse gas calculation also covered. EUROCERT is the market leader for ISCC audits of cotton farmers and processors in Greece. The company offers a wide range of certification, inspection and testing services. EUROCERT is the first and only Greek certification body approved by ISCC.

Nikos Koulas, the ISCC Product Manager at EUROCERT, explains: “Cotton in Greece is grown mainly by small farmers with an average of three to four hectares of cotton cultivation. Our audits cover a changing sample of farmers every year; the minimum sample size is the square route of the number of farmers. We visit the farms, interview each farmer and check records to ensure compliance with EU farming and conservation rules, including optimised use and safe handling of pesticides. We also check that there has been no deforestation or other prohibited

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1 http://www.pcfisu.org/sustainable-cotton/
2 Cross Compliance according to European Regulations 1306/2013 and 809/2014 in all cultivated areas
land-use change since January 2008.” Interviews with workers verify their working conditions plus their health and safety provisions.

The harvested cotton is delivered to local processing facilities where the fibre is separated from the seeds in a process known as ginning. The seeds are then crushed to extract the oil, which is used in the food industry and for biodiesel. The remaining seedcake is used for animal feed. The value extracted from these by-products reinforces the local economy in the cotton growing areas. At the cotton processing facility the auditor checks the greenhouse gas saving calculation and management procedures to ensure they follow the ISCC Standard.

Pagaea is a cotton processor with four gin units, working with four thousand cotton farmers in northern, central and southern Greece, where the climate delivers top quality cotton fibre. Pagaea’s technologically advanced equipment ensures that cotton fibre retains all its qualities so it is sought after by spinning mills all over the world. The cotton oil is one of the best edible oils for margarine production and frying oils. Its superior specification ensures highly efficient biodiesel manufacture.

Sotiria Giouvanaki, Manager at Pagaea responsible for ISCC implementation, says: “Having ISCC certification demonstrates the credibility, transparency and sustainability of our company. It shows we are promoting better business practices with minimal impact on the environment.”

Certification of Greek cotton production to the ISCC Standard is part of the sustainability journey for cotton and its by-products. As some of the world’s biggest retailers answer Prince Charles’s call for sustainable sourcing of cotton, it’s appropriate that an industry once called King Cotton should respond to such a royal initiative.

If you would like to learn more about how you can apply ISCC certification in the cotton market or any other sector please do not hesitate to contact the ISCC help desk and write an email to info@iscc-system.org!