Accelerating Impact: Better Cotton Conference 2024 Emphasises Farmer Empowerment and Industry Ambitions



Courtesy:BETTER COTTON

The Better Cotton Conference 2024, an annual global platform for change, successfully concluded on 27 June 2024 after two insightful and inspiring days in Istanbul, Türkiye, one of the most important cotton-producing countries in the world. Over 400 attendees from around the globe joined both virtually and in person, underscoring the event's international significance.

Alan McClay, CEO of Better Cotton, commented, "This year's Better Cotton Conference has highlighted the crucial need for collective action in the cotton industry. The insights and stories shared over these two days emphasise that empowering farmers and integrating innovative practices are essential for a sustainable future. Our commitment remains steadfast in driving positive change for cotton communities worldwide."

Day one highlights

The first day featured diverse insights across 18 sessions, including plenary talks, interactive workshops and breakouts, all focused on accelerating impact for cotton farming communities. This rich diversity of perspectives ensured that all voices were heard, fostering a sense of inclusivity across the different industries present.

Putting People First

The first theme, ‘Putting People First’, underscored Better Cotton’s unwavering commitment to prioritising farmers and farm workers. The sessions challenged attendees to consider what it means to ensure a living income and decent work for cotton farming communities.



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Aarti Kapoor, Founder and Executive Director of human rights agency Embode, delivered a compelling keynote on how individuals can drive positive impact across supply chains through a collective vision for the cotton value chain.

Lars Van Doremalen, Impact Director at Better Cotton, emphasised the importance of discussing farmer income, sharing insights from a study the organisation conducted across India. Meanwhile, Leyla Shamchiyeva, Senior Decent Work Manager at Better Cotton, highlighted the need to address root causes of issues such as poverty and lack of rights awareness by connecting communities to social safety nets.



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In a one-on-one session with Aarti Kapoor, Nazia Parveen - a Pakistani farmer from the Rural and Economic Development Society (REEDS) - shared her story of overcoming community barriers and emphasised the need for women's empowerment in agriculture, advocating for equal opportunities for women to support themselves.

Driving Change At Field Level

The afternoon sessions shifted focus to 'Driving Change at Field Level', with discussions covering a wide variety of topics from regenerative agriculture to the role of fertilisers in a warming climate.

A panel discussion featuring Laila Petrie of 2050 and Gray Maguire of Anthesis, moderated by Lewis Perkins of the Apparel Impact Institute, explored the complexities of carbon markets and their impact on farmers. They discussed the differences between insetting and offsetting, using the 'Unlock' Project as a case study to highlight the importance of driving investment within supply chains.

Field-level representatives, including farmers and instructors from India, Tajikistan, and the US, shared their experiences with adopting regenerative agricultural practices. Their insights offered a diverse perspective on the practices driving field-level progress on farms both large and small.

Day two highlights

Understanding Policy and Industry Trends

The second day began with a focus on 'Understanding Policy and Industry Trends', examining major developments in the sector and their impact on cotton supply chains.

Vidhura Ralapanawe, Executive Vice President for Innovation and Sustainability at Epic Group, delivered a keynote speech emphasising the need for transformative change in the cotton industry. He urged attendees to move beyond meeting legislative demands and work towards collective action to address pressing needs.

Sessions highlighted the need for all stakeholders, including farmers and suppliers, to actively participate in policy-making. Speakers called for a shift to include the most affected communities in discussions, ensuring legislation benefits smallholder farmers globally.

Reporting on Data and Traceability

In the afternoon, the conversation moved towards 'Reporting on Data and Traceability'. Better Cotton's Director of Traceability, Jacky Broomhead, led a discussion on making Better Cotton Traceability* possible. A panel shared insights on balancing regulatory compliance with profitability, the efficiencies AI and automation could bring to the supply chain, and the role of traceability in achieving net-zero strategies. Panellists emphasised the need for simplicity in traceability to encourage adoption and reduce the burden on farmers.

Tülin Akın, Founder of Tabit Smart Farming, shared stories of how agricultural technologies can help solve challenges in rural communities. She also highlighted the importance of face-to-face interaction for farmers.

This was followed by a session on Pakistan's First Mile Traceability pilot, moderated by Better Cotton Pakistan's Director, Hina Fouzia. Farmers, middlemen, and ginners discussed the challenges of internet and technology access, Better Cotton's role in supporting adoption, and the importance of constantly reviewing results to drive improvements.