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Cotton: A Global Public Good

Eric B. Trachtenberg, Executive Director, International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC)

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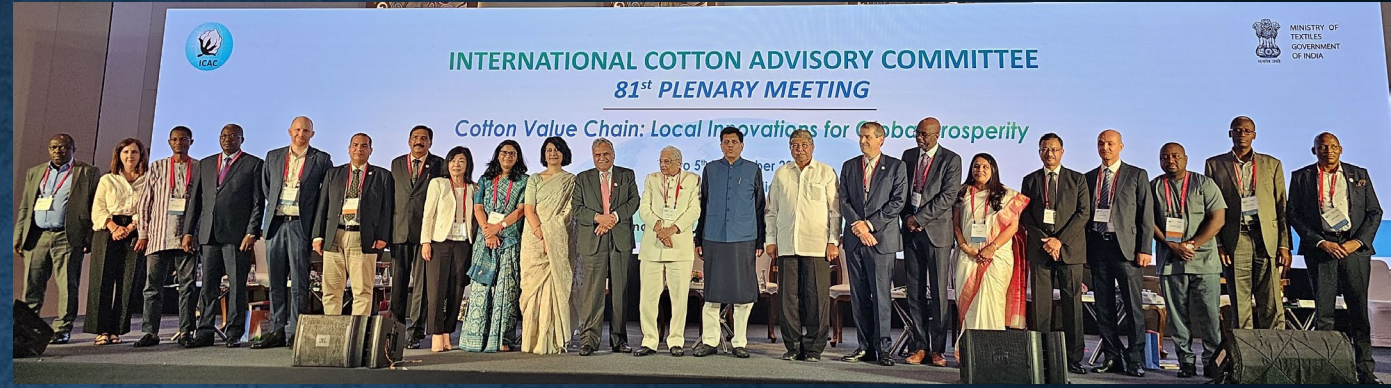
Cotton: A Global Public Good

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Executive Director
International Cotton
Advisory Committee (ICAC)



What is ICAC?



- The “United Nations” of cotton & products
- Founded in Washington, DC, in 1939, ICAC is the only intergovernmental body for cotton producing, consuming, trading & investing countries
- Intergovernmental Commodity Body: One of only seven ICBs recognized by the United Nations & the only one responsible for the entire cotton value chain, from seed to end consumer
- Report directly to our 20+ Member governments, almost half of which are in Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, South Africa, Tanzania & Uganda



ICAC's Current Work



Cotton's Challenges & Opportunities



Advantages

- Natural fiber (biodegradable with less waste)
- Potential to reduce poverty & conflict, esp. in Africa
- Women's empowerment (43% of cotton farmers are women)
- Climate change (cotton sequesters carbon!)
- Semi-xerophyte (adapted to dry conditions - grows where other crops can't)
- Higher-end feel that consumers like

Challenges

- Cotton costs more than synthetics (labor intensive/complex supply chain)
- Trend to fast fashion & athleisure - casual dress & working from home advantage synthetics
- Natural product, so supply can vary due to adverse weather, adding to volatility
- Cotton has multiple, variable quality characteristics that make it more complicated to use
- Lack of competitiveness in some engineered/functional uses
- Competes with other crops for land area
- Misconceptions about cotton
- Regulatory issues



Cotton's Challenges & Opportunities



- Regulation is a response to legitimate concerns about the environmental footprint of textiles
- The key issue is not whether new rules will go forward, but what form they will take. Some of these outcomes could disadvantage cotton
- Success for the cotton sector will depend on our ability to make the case to governments, consumers, civil society & the private sector:

Cotton is a global public good

- Backed by two major arguments: The environment & livelihoods

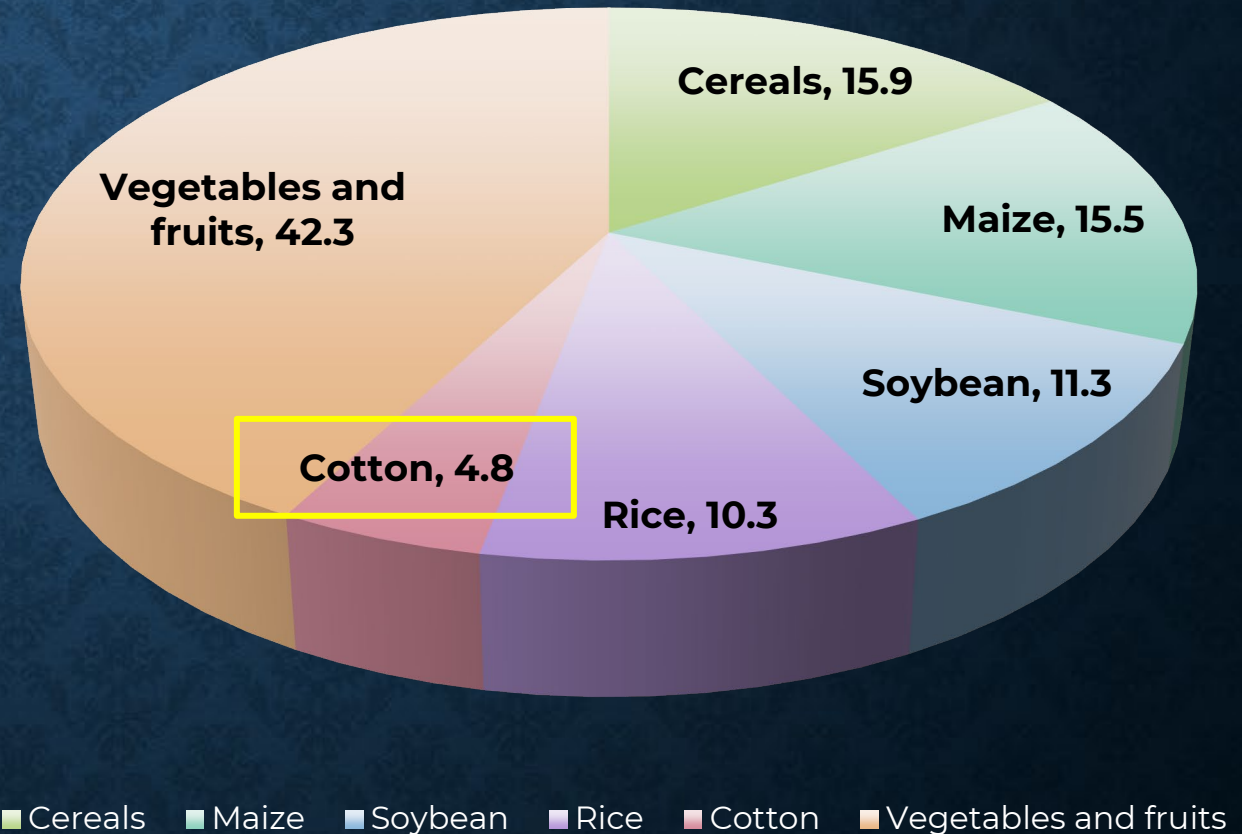


The Environment & Cotton

Compared with other crops, cotton:

- Occupies 2.5% of global crop land
- Uses 1.7% of global irrigation water
- Uses 4.8% of pesticide by value
- Uses 4.3% of pesticide by volume
- Uses only 2.8% of fertilizers

Pesticide Use, by Value, Percent



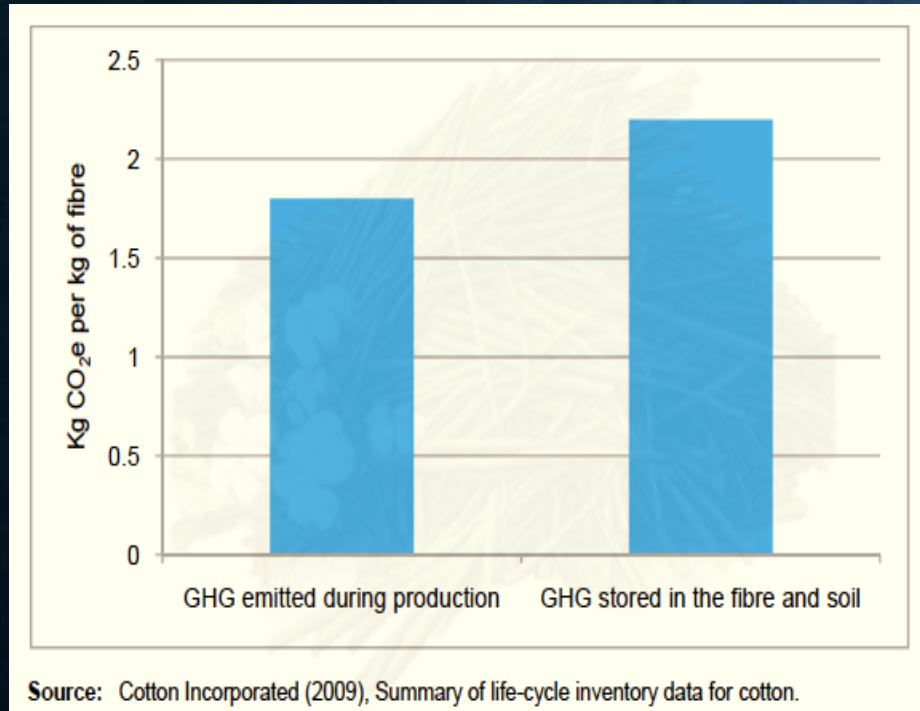
The Environment & Cotton

Cotton Emits Low CO₂ Kg of GHGs per Kg fiber



The Environment & Cotton

Carbon Sequestration by Cotton Fiber and Stalks



Cotton fibers are 96-98% pure cellulose ($(C_6H_{10}O_5)_n$)

Cotton sequesters 0.5 Kg additional CO₂ per Kg fiber produced

Products like cotton fabrics & furniture made from cotton stalk particle boards maintain carbon for several years until disposal

Typical lifespan of carbon in cotton fabrics and other products averages around 20 years (Xie, 2021; Ogle et al., 2019)

Biochar produced from cotton stalks is stable for more than 100 years



The Environment & Cotton

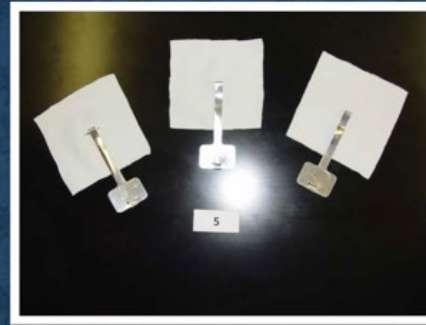
Cotton biodegrades in soil in 12 weeks & polyester does not

Use of synthetic fibers results:

- Higher quantity of waste
- Release of harmful chemicals (e.g. phthalates and Bisphenol A (BPA))
- Release of microplastics into the environment contaminating water, soil, food & people
- Linear consumption is inconsistent with circular economy

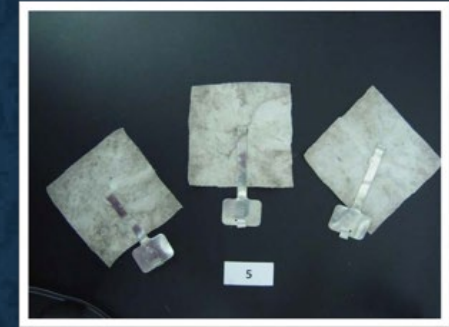
These issues should be included in all LCAs but are often not

Recycled Polyester T-Shirt



Week-0

Recycled Polyester T-Shirt



Week-12

Cotton Jersey, Bleached, Softened



Week-0

Cotton Jersey, Bleached, Softened



Week-12



Livelihoods & Cotton

Cotton's rank in the overall exports of C4+ African nations



Largest
exported
commodity
for Benin



2nd largest
exported
commodity
for Burkina
Faso



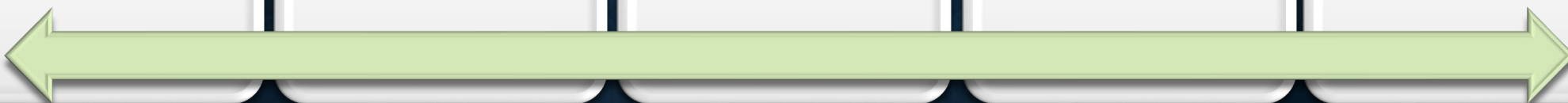
2nd largest
exported
commodity
for Mali



3rd largest
exported
commodity
for Chad



7th largest
exported
commodity
for Cote
d'Ivoire



Livelihoods & Cotton: Africa SWOT

Strength	Weakness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability of Sustainable Cotton Market Access Specially AGOA & EPA without any Expiry Low Per Capita Income / Wages Availability of Human Resources Strategic Location - Shorter Lead Times to Europe Government Commitment to Develop Textiles Value Chain Regional Integration - AfCFTA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Uncertainty / Implementation Incentives Dearth including taxation, importation, investment etc Access to Finance Skill Gap Infrastructure Hurdles Limited Textiles Base Utilities Shortage and Pricing Outdated Technology Marketing Challenges Limited R&D and Quality / Compliance
Opportunity	Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Sourcing Destinations E-Commerce Domestic Commerce SMEs Development Brand Africa Niche Markets and Products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of Policy & Fiscal space for schemes Global Competition High Cost and Dependence on Import Social & Environmental Concerns Market Access Global Political and Economic Volatility



Cotton: A Global Public Good

- **Nature Positive**

- Biodegradable with less persistent waste
- Lower GHG compared to other fibers
- Semi-xerophyte - adapted to dry conditions - grows where other crops can't
- Carbon sequestration & carbon payments (PES)

- **Fighting Poverty**

- Cash crop for poor farmers
- Potential for jobs downstream in textiles
- Potential to reduce poverty & conflict, esp. in Africa
- Women's empowerment (43% of cotton farmers are women)



Cotton: A Global Public Good

- **The Faces of Cotton**

- These & others along the value chain are our constituents

- **Action & Next Steps**

- There may be a willingness to pay a premium for sustainability claims that are trusted
 - Make the case for cotton to brands & consumers
 - Deepen coalition of farmers, cotton traders/allies, environmental civil society, quality brands, governments & others



Questions & Discussion

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