

Helvetas – A Swiss Association for International Cooperation in Kyrgyzstan

Helvetas was founded in 1955 as the first private development organization in Switzerland. Helvetas is today an independent and non – profit organization with more than 100,000 members and contributors, and 15 program offices abroad. It actively works to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged people in 22 countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America such as Bhutan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Senegal, Mali, Guatemala, Haiti, Columbia, and the Dominican Republic.

In Kyrgyzstan, Helvetas started its activities in November 1994 with the Agroproject – restructured as the Kyrgyz – Swiss Agricultural Programme (KSAP), operating in close co – operation with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources – in the remote rayons of Kochkor and Jumgal, Naryn oblast. Today, Helvetas runs 6 projects:

- *KSAP, the Kyrgyz Swiss Agricultural Programme*, which supports the nationwide Rural Advisory Service (RAS) and the Policy Support Project;
- *AVEP, the Agricultural Vocational Education Project* in Naryn oblast which is developing new curricula and teaching materials for agricultural training;
- *CBTSP, the Community Based Tourism Support Project*, which helps local communities market culture and adventure tourism;
- *SPIP, the Support to Private Initiatives Project*, which supports the development of small & medium sized businesses involved in food and forestry product processing;
- *LARC, the Legal Assistance to Rural Citizens Project*, which assists the rural population realize their rights and decision makers apply the law accurately, consistently and impartially; and
- *BioCotton Project: Organic Cotton Production and Trade Promotion*, which aims at developing and supporting production and export of organic cotton.

All of these projects aim to support rural people through the transition period from a socialist system to a market economy.

The BioCotton Project in brief

Project duration:	2003 - 2006
Financial commitment:	USD 300'000 p.a. (approx.)
Donors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO);• Humanist Institute for Cooperation With Developing Countries (Hivos)
Implementing agency:	Helvetas Switzerland
Beneficiaries:	Farmers from the southern regions of the Kyrgyz republic

How to reach us

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Organic Cotton Production and Trade Promotion Project (BioCotton)



◀ helvetas Kyrgyzstan ▶

The BioCotton Project aims to develop and support the production and commodity chain of organic cotton and organic cotton products, both in the domestic and international markets. The project has a purchase guarantee from retailers in Switzerland, thus vertically integrating organic cotton producers and sellers. The project concentrates on raising awareness, capacity building and agronomic & market research for efficient trade promotion.

Background

Only a decade ago cotton production was one of the most significant sources of GDP for the Osh and Jalalabat oblasts in the south of Kyrgyzstan. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992 the area used for growing cotton fell by over 70% due mainly to economic reasons. Living standards and the level of employment have dropped accordingly.

Today, cotton growing is reassuming the economic role it played in the past and currently the cotton production sector employs about half a million people in the Osh and Jalalabat oblasts. In the latter oblast it comprises 9.5% of agricultural GDP. With 14 ginneries processing raw cotton, Kyrgyzstan supplies 27,100 tons of cotton fibre (more than 90% of the amount produced domestically) to the international market. In 2001 Kyrgyzstan approved its own cotton standards compatible with international requirements.

Organic farming balances economic profit and environmental safety

The production of cotton is accompanied by the intensive use of toxic insecticides and pesticides harmful to the environment and health. Chemicals used in cotton production in the Soviet Union were one of the reasons for the ecological disaster in the Aral Sea. Cottonseed oil, extremely popular in the region, has allegedly led to health problems of consumers as it contains chemical residues.

The idea of organic agriculture rests on balancing economic profit and safety of the natural environment.

The project builds upon the previous experience Helvetas and other organisations have gained in organic cotton production in Mali, India, Tanzania and other countries and fair trade promotion in Europe. As this experience shows, converting to organic farming can contribute, both to improved market conditions in the region and solving serious health and environmental problems.

Approach

The BioCotton Project focuses mainly on developing a sustainable commodity chain of cotton products and sees applied research, capacity building and product marketing support as areas essential to its primary aim. Developing domestic, regional and international markets is seen as crucial in raising living standards in the southern regions of the country.

The BioCotton Project promotes and uses the main principles of organic agriculture:



- Sustainable use of natural resources
- Closed nutrient cycles – as far as possible
- Large variety of habitats and biodiversity
- Preserving and improving soil fertility
- Preventive measures in plant protection
- Animal welfare using appropriate husbandry
- Healthy and strong animals
- High quality products
- High degree of acceptance by consumers
- Respect for life

Organic agriculture renounces:

- Single product specialisation of farms
- Intensive use of inputs
- Mineral fertilisers
- Chemical pesticides
- Herbicides
- Genetically modified organisms
- Maximum performance in crop and animal raising

Implementation of the project

The activities of 2003 concentrated on raising awareness, capacity building and agronomic & market research. In 2004 organic cotton growing started with 56 farmers on a total area of 54 ha. As the conversion to organic farming implies conversion of the whole farm, a greater responsibility rests both on the implementing project and the farmer. Thus, one of the main tasks of the project is to select farmers that work on sites favourable for cotton growing and could deal with the process of transition to organic agriculture. The project also invests in training staff and farmers, which is conducted in close collaboration with the Rural Advisory Service in Jalalabat. The phase also includes the preparation of all the documents necessary for proper certification and quality control.

The expected yield for 2004 is 22 tons of cotton fibre. It is planned to increase the harvest every year and possibly reach 200 tons in 2006.

Organic cotton usually fetches a higher price than conventional cotton. The price difference is estimated to be 20%. However, in the two year conversion period, until the cotton can be properly certified as organic, the project will pay the premium from its budget.

Project Structure

The BioCotton Project consists of a project implementation unit based in Jalalabat. The project is controlled by a Steering Board, which has representatives from farmers growing organic cotton production, the Ministry for Economic Development, Industry and Trade, Ministry of Agriculture, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), Switzerland, the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos), The Netherlands, Helvetas and a trading partner.

Counterparts and Partners

The BioCotton Project supports partnership at local, national and international levels. The main counterparts are the Oblast Agricultural Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industries. The project mandates the Rural Advisory Service in Jalalabat to support organic cotton production and collaborates with research laboratories, ginneries and traders, as well as an international certification body.