



Photo: Helvetas

## ORGANIC COTTON CHANGES PRODUCERS' LIVES

### Impact study on organic and Fairtrade cotton in Burkina Faso

Helvetas and its partners have been supporting an organic and Fairtrade cotton production programme in Burkina Faso coordinated by the Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina (UNPCB – National Union of Cotton Producers of Burkina Faso) since 2004. A field study by the University of Berne assessed the impact of the programme on the socio-economic conditions of men and women producers. The study shows that organic and Fairtrade production enable the producers to increase their income and at the same time to improve soil fertility, human health and food security. As production costs are lower, there is less risk of producers running into debt than with conventional cotton production.



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## CONTEXT

Helvetas' organic cotton programme started in Burkina Faso in 2004 with financial support from SECO<sup>1</sup>, ICCO<sup>2</sup>, LED<sup>3</sup> and other partners. Its main objective is to promote organic and Fairtrade cotton from Burkina Faso on international growth markets so as to improve producers' living conditions – especially those of women and small farmers – through a viable and sustainable mode of production.

It should be noted that the cotton industry accounts for 50-60% of the country's foreign currency earnings and the area under cultivation is constantly expanding.

In 2008, organic cotton made up only 1% of total production, yet it involves 7,000 producers, 28% of whom are women. This initiative is managed by the Union Nationale des Producteurs de Coton du Burkina (UNPCB) which carries out the training and monitoring of organic producers. UNPCB implements an Internal Control System (ICS) which is necessary for the annual certification. Helvetas supports UNPCB's work through organisational advice and knowledge transfer, and by establishing contacts with commercial and financial partners.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The impact study carried out at the end of 2008 looked at three zones and two villages per zone with a total sample of 53 organic cotton producers and 48 conventional cotton producers. Using individual and group interviews, the study compared farm characteristics, agronomical figures for cotton production, and farmers' perceptions of their production system. The results were then presented to the participating farmers to check and discuss them.

At the end of 2008, an impact study carried out by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Berne analysed the extent to which the living conditions of men and women producers had improved, as well as assessing the economic sustainability of the programme in the field.

<sup>1</sup> State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, Switzerland;

<sup>2</sup> Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation, The Netherlands;

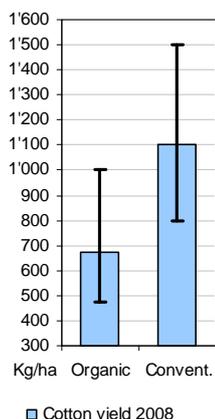
<sup>3</sup> Liechtenstein Development Service, Liechtenstein;



Photo:Stepkov

## DIFFERENT PRODUCTION METHODS...

Organic farmers plant more than twice as many leguminous plants (organic groundnuts) than their colleagues, and have a slightly more diversified rotation plan. They apply three times more organic manure than conventional producers. Over 56% of those participating in the study acknowledge the use of manure as the key factor in successful production. « It's easier work and it gives us more money, » assures Mrs Sakande, an organic cotton farmer in Tenkodogo.



Yields of organic and conventional cotton in the sample in 2008, with first and third quartiles.

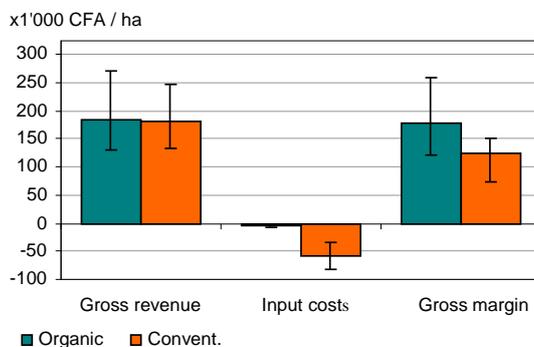
Contrary to a widespread belief, organic production requires 23% less hours of work in the fields than conventional production. 30% of these are worked by non-family members in the form of mutual aid. However, organic farmers spend more time preparing compost. Nevertheless, farmers' accounts of the advantages of organic production confirm that organic production requires less effort, especially since there is no pesticide spraying.

The average conventional yield is 1,100kg/ha, whereas organic cotton reaches 675kg/ha, although elite organic farmers can potentially push yields above 1,000kg/ha. The factors limiting yields are the choice of marginal zones and plots of land, the lower productivity of new producers and women, and stricter quality criteria for organic cotton. It should also be noted that the average yields of organic and conventional producers nationally were lower than in the study sample.

## ...PRODUCE DIFFERENT RESULTS!

The gross profit per hectare of cotton is identical in organic and conventional farms. This is due to the lower organic yield being made up for by a higher price, i.e. 272 CFA/kg for organic cotton instead of 165 CFA/kg for conventional cotton. Organic farmers spend 90% less on inputs and this results in their gross margin being 30% better than for conventional production.

Moreover, the lower cost of inputs also puts some in a more relaxed state of mind, as Yamdare Kaboré, an organic producer from Tenkodogo, testifies: « No more exhausting credit! »



Results for cotton fields, with first and third quartiles.

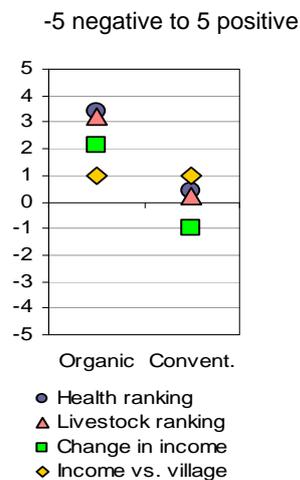
We should also note that the organic producer organisations receive a so-called Fairtrade premium of € 0.05/kg of seed cotton that they can use for community projects. This is generally invested in buildings that are partly used as schools, followed by boreholes for drinking water. Along with cotton, the producers can also sell products such as sesame, shea nuts and hibiscus on favourable terms, enabling them to earn some extra income.

## BETTER HEALTH AND SOIL FERTILITY

The study reports a more positive perception of human health as well as animal and soil health since organic production started, and this is confirmed by the most experienced organic producers. No more chemicals is the main argument – especially for women – along with less hard work. Health is an essential issue in the Sahel, as Idani Célestine, a cotton producer in Fada, testifies:

« As regards my health, conventional cotton gave me stomach aches every time I sprayed. »

Interviewees' perception of the changes in human and animal health, overall income, and income in relation to other households in the village.



It is true that organic means that people do not have to spray their fields with chemicals up to 6 times, and they also see the rewards of the effort they put into production and transporting compost.

Changes in the available food and rising incomes naturally have an effect on the amount, quality and variety of meals people eat: more meat, rice and vegetables.

“ I am proud of our organic cotton. It protects our health and gives us a better income. ”

Wimenga Kourita, organic farmer from Tenkodogo



Photo:Stepkov

## KEY RESULTS OF ORGANIC AND FAIRTRADE COTTON

- 7'000 producers (men and women) in 2008
- More diversified crop rotations with a higher commercial value
- An opportunity for women to earn an income
- 39% lower yields, but a 65% higher price for the farmer
- 90% less spent on inputs; a 30% higher gross margin
- Less indebtedness from buying inputs
- Farmers consider that both human and livestock health have improved
- Three times more organic manure applied
- Producers have observed a noticeable improvement in soil fertility

**This report is available at:**

[http://www.helvetas.ch/wEnglish/competencies/docum ented\\_experiences/doc\\_resources.asp?navid=16](http://www.helvetas.ch/wEnglish/competencies/docum ented_experiences/doc_resources.asp?navid=16)

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

In a difficult and uncertain economic climate, there is a need to protect and make the best use of existing resources. Over the past few years we were seeing an exponential increase in the area under organic cultivation and in the number of organic producers. Promising though this may be, it poses a number of challenges to the stability and quality of the programme's work. A strategic review of how the organic farmers are trained and selected should make it possible to expand the cultivated area without necessarily leading to a proportional increase in the number of farmers. The programme must also invest more in helping the producers to become more professional so that they can improve their yields. The diversification of food crops and those for market should continue as this will give the producers greater food and income security.

One other important challenge the programme faces is the arrival of genetically modified cotton in Burkina Faso. As standards for organic agriculture ban genetically modified (GM) cotton, UNPCB must ensure that organic cotton production is not mixed or



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