



News Release

Bremen, 3rd April, 2016

33rd International Cotton Conference Bremen

Cotton will continue to be in demand as a raw material in the future

Quality, innovation and prudent actions are the path to the goal

Under the motto Cotton: Connecting High Tech and Nature, the 33rd International Cotton Conference, which took place from 16th to 18th March at the historic Town Hall in Bremen, offered a broad insight into the future of the natural raw material cotton. More than 400 participants from 40 countries came along to the conference organised jointly by the Bremen Cotton Exchange and the Fibre Institute Bremen to discuss the latest trends in the marketing and further processing of cotton. The Conference offered plenty of opportunity for this, with its varied spectrum of topics covering the burning issues in the industry. The programme and the communication both met everyone's expectations. This was confirmed spontaneously by the visitors.

Cotton under continued price pressure

Ernst Grimmelt, President of the Bremen Cotton Exchange, opened the Conference on 16th March with a call to action: "For years, the market share of cotton has been in decline compared to synthetic fibres such as polyester. Given the fact that polyester prices have recently fallen more than those of cotton, this has put considerable strain on the competitiveness of cotton. This must be actively countered by developing innovative cotton products. We need to improve the acceptance of the natural fibre and emphasize the value and benefits of cotton."

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Keep the demands of the target group in mind

Tyler Cole of Olah Inc., one of the leading international sourcing companies for jeanswear and casual clothing, pointed to the growing consumer interest in sustainable production methods within the textile supply chain. In the United States, this applies especially to the premium market. Those companies who are increasingly able to meet these demands, will be well prepared with regard to the future.

Helmut Fischer, Head of Department at the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development outlined the objectives of the existing partnership for sustainable textiles and more transparency within the supply chain.

Emphasise the added value of cotton

Cotton is especially in competition with synthetic fibres where, as Bruna Angel from PCI Fibres showed, there is a wealth of product development. Representatives of the cotton industry stressed that only if we succeed in increasing the value of the completely biologically degradable product in the eyes of consumers, can the decline in cotton's market share be kept within limits.

In the opinion of Mark Messura, Vice President of Cotton Incorporated, Cary, USA, one way to avoid the pressure is to make and offer cotton products that are more interesting for consumers. Cotton already possesses beneficial natural properties. If we bring in additional properties with extra added benefit to this using technical finishing procedures, this provides a greater advantage compared with products made of synthetic fibres.

Convinced by green biotechnology

The lectures and subsequent discussion of new technologies in the context of cotton seed breeding made it clear that alongside the seeds from classic and transgenic seed breeding that have been in use for years, there are many new, more productive processes.

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These include methods such as Smart Breeding or CRISPR technology. If the DNA codes of selected plants are known, then a weakening or strengthening of genes using the latest technology can be carried out relatively inexpensively. This applies, for example, to insect and weed resistance, improving the nutritional value or plant health.

In this respect, Rafiq Chaudhry from ICAC Washington and Kater Hake of Cotton Incorporated on the one side, and Dirk Zimmermann from Greenpeace on the other side, provided information about new, progressive ways in terms of the future. This could lead to an increase in the acceptance of green genetic engineering by consumers, which is not uniformly available in all European countries for various reasons.

Leveraging yields

Cotton production is characterized by highly fluctuating crop yields in some regions of the world. Whereas Australia and Brazil work with the world's highest cotton yields of more than 2000 to 1700 kg /ha, African countries, and also India, are still far behind with 200 to 300 kg/ha.

Allan Williams of the Cotton Research & Development Corporation, Narrabri, Australia provided information on the possibilities for increasing cotton yields by selecting seeds which correspond better to local conditions, keeping soil fertility and improved water management in mind and paying attention to efficient protection against plant diseases and not letting them occur. Digitally managed control techniques could also be used. Here Williams pointed out that methods that were considered to be advantageous in one region, may prove to be inefficient in other regions for a variety of reasons.

Careful handling of cotton growing

A highlight of the International Cotton Conference in Bremen was the panel discussion on the subject of responsible cotton farming. The Bremen Conference is now well-known for the fact

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that uncomfortable topics, too, are discussed transparently. An important programme point, which is also the subject of contrary public debate, is the responsible protection of the cotton crop from diseases and pests. But just what does crop protection mean? Is the environment taken into consideration? What is the significance of research in this field and how far are we today?

Experts such as Allan Williams, (Cotton Research & Development Corporation, Australia), Menahem Yogev (The Israel Cotton Production & Marketing Board Ltd., Israel), Francesca Mancini (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Italy), Sebastião Barbossa (Embrapa, Brazil), Martin Märkl, (Bayer CropScience, Germany), Christoph Kaut (Aid by Trade Foundation, Germany) and Damien Sanfillippo (BCI, Switzerland) spoke about the opportunities and risks in the context of sustainable cotton growing. All the participants reported partially significant reductions in the use of pesticides. This was achieved primarily by training the people working in cotton growing fully on how to deal with agricultural chemicals. The use of inputs is only necessary when it is required from the perspective of the situation. Here, integrated pest management can definitely be employed, in combination with organic practices.

Further information regarding the cotton conference and its program as well as images are attached or available on: <https://baumwollboerse.de/en/cotton-conference/>

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