

Every fibre has a story.

Annual Report
2025

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A Note From Our Founder, Prof. Dr Michael Otto

Maintaining credibility, standing by our values, and acting out of conviction are touchstones for the work of the Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF). One such conviction is that our most pressing global challenges can only be overcome if we protect ecosystems and create greater fairness in world trade. This conviction has guided our approach for more than two decades, changing much for the better. It remains true today, despite all claims to the contrary, and we will hold fast to it, even as the world faces major upheaval.

This year's World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report makes it clear that the biggest long-term risks to our planet are not global economic collapse or out-of-control artificial intelligence; rather, the greatest risks are extreme weather, biodiversity loss, ecological collapse, and critical disruptions to the Earth's systems.

Considering how the media presents current crises, this may sound surprising. After all, the prevailing narrative is different, suggesting that the world economy is being hampered by overregulation. Environmental regulations, for instance, appear too limiting—notwithstanding the evidence provided by scientific research and numerous natural disasters.

Furthermore, the rules-based international order and global trade flows are coming under intense pressure. Culprits include military confrontations, protectionist trade policies, and the termination of multilateral agreements. Wanting to protect people and the environment from the consequences of climate change now appears almost like a relic of the past.

However, such appearances are deceptive. I am supported in this conviction by the Global Risks Report, which traces the greatest threats to humanity back to their source: a self-destructive relationship with nature. As it accelerates climate change, this approach is becoming life-threatening for more and more people around the world. It is no longer a question of whether we need to act but of whether we will do so in time.

Nonetheless, there are also grounds for hope. With three major UN environmental conferences this year—on biodiversity, land use, and the climate—the international community is demonstrating that the political will for change has not been extinguished; it has only been obscured by international political headlines. A global alliance comprising governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, and practitioners continues to drive forward the transformation that is needed.

The Aid by Trade Foundation and its initiatives—Cotton made in Africa® (CmiA), Cotton made in Africa Organic, the Regenerative Cotton Standard® (RCS), and The Good Cashmere Standard® (GCS)—have been part of this alliance for over 20 years. During the past year, these initiatives once again helped shape the sustainable and equitable transformation of the economy and society, making a powerful contribution towards our objective of harnessing market forces to help people become self-reliant—that is, providing aid by way of trade. More than 36 percent of cotton harvested in African countries is now verified under CmiA. Worldwide, 2,800 partners process this cotton into textile products under conditions of maximum transparency, thanks to user-friendly tracking systems such as the Hard Identity Preserved (HIP) system. Well-known retailers and brands then bring them to the market, where CmiA cotton's attractiveness to consumers remains undiminished. Beyond sustainable cotton, the same is true for sustainably produced cashmere. The



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Prof. Dr Michael Otto

Good Cashmere Standard's labels graced more than 1.2 million garments in 2025, and the number of brands and retailers using its cashmere grew by more than 20 percent compared with the previous year.

This success rests on having credibility. This credibility is not based on mere promises but rather on independent verification, on tangible projects, and on an earnest effort to treat people in the countries of origin as partners, not as means to an end. The results can be seen in every borehole that brings clean drinking water to a village and in every school and health centre that is established through the CmiA Community Cooperation Programme (CCCCP). Designed by local partners and implemented alongside village communities, CCCC projects ensure that lasting improvements are made to living conditions in cotton-growing areas. Effective nature conservation starts with understanding people and their interests.

The Aid by Trade Foundation will continue to work credibly, reliably, and in close cooperation with everyone involved, including smallholders in Africa and India, goat herders in Inner Mongolia, and partners throughout the global supply chain. After all, protecting nature and enabling people to live dignified lives is not only a matter of principle; it is a matter of survival.

Clear Values and Industry-Wide Actions: Building Resilience Amidst Unprecedented Challenges

Resilience is a key prerequisite for economic and social stability. This holds true for individuals, businesses, and entire economies, particularly amidst geopolitical upheaval and despite challenging, often contradictory narratives in contemporary discourse. The Aid by Trade Foundation is proud to work with its partners and farming communities to drive the production of textile fibres forward in an ecologically sound, socially responsible, and thoroughly innovative manner—and, in so doing, to help shape a resilient future throughout the textile industry, from farm to shelf.

“Our collaboration with partners in the global textile industry is characterised by shared responsibility and robust networks, fostering a resilient and solution-oriented approach. This empowers us to navigate complexities, drive sustainable impact, and ensure long-term progress for all involved.”

Tina Stridde
Managing Director
Aid by Trade Foundation



“AbTF’s financial success lies in its ability to put the foundation’s guiding principle into practice by harnessing market forces to empower people to help themselves—in other words, to provide aid through trade. Thanks to the strong market position of AbTF’s sustainability standards and diversified revenue streams, we are able to financially support our partners in implementing sustainable programmes as well as innovative and cooperative projects in order to drive change in farming and herding communities.”

Sabine Kleinewiese
Managing Director and Head of Finance & Legal
ATAKORA GmbH

“The Standards Team is fully committed to pursuing the ongoing development and improvement of our fibre standards systems, supporting our managing entities in the standard implementation, and analysing our impact in order to improve the livelihoods of farmers and herders, animal welfare, and environmental protection. By combining scientific findings with traditional knowledge, we aim to improve living conditions and to strengthen the resilience of local communities and the environment, including through innovations that are effective and scalable within the relevant local context.”

Alexandra Perschau
Head of Standards & Outreach



“Guided by our Aid by Trade principle, we strategically activate market forces, strengthen partner trust, and secure sustainable licensing income to advance a textile industry that genuinely honours people, animals, and nature. One of our core priorities is creating seamless traceability from raw material to final product. With our commitment to traceability and transparency, we offer retailers a reliable solution for meeting growing regulatory and governance requirements while strengthening consumer trust. After all, ‘Every Fibre Has a Face’.”

Valéa Vadaleau
Head of Business Development

“Through clear and credible communication, we powerfully engage stakeholders and media, allowing us to cultivate awareness of and visibility for the people at the source of the textiles—and for their impactful stories. Our mission is to move this vital ethos from the margins into the hearts and minds of the general public, allowing us to shape narratives and create a consciousness that aims to foster a fundamental shift towards responsible consumption.”

Christina Ben Bella
Head of Communications & Stakeholder Relations



Consolidated Results for 2025

The Aid by Trade Foundation's revenue amounted to EUR 7.8 million in 2025. Thanks to the strong market position of AbTF's standards, EUR 6.7 million was generated through the private-sector market activities of CmiA, CmiA Organic, RCS, and GCS. The Good Cashmere Standard was particularly successful, seeing a 19 percent increase in revenue. Expenditure on programmes implementing the standards and on cooperation projects amounted to EUR 4.2 million.

During the financial year of 2025, the Aid by Trade Foundation recorded total revenue of EUR 7.834 million. EUR 6.734 million was generated from marketing verified sustainable cotton or cashmere; of this total, EUR 4.884 million came from licensing income and EUR 1.85 million from partnership contributions.

While licensing income from marketing CmiA- and CmiA Organic-verified cotton amounted to EUR 3.123 million, the continuous expansion of the global network for CmiA cotton in the textile value chain resulted in partner contributions increasing by 17 percent, to a total of EUR 1.594 million. These partner contributions—from cotton companies in Africa, a growing number of international cotton traders and spinning mills, and numerous registered textile processing companies in the CmiA value chain—supported the implementation of CmiA under increasingly strict transparency requirements.

Among partnering retailers and brands, high demand for GCS-verified cashmere in 2025 led to a significant increase in revenue from marketing The Good Cashmere Standard; this 19 percent increase raised the total to EUR 2.017 million, of which EUR 1.761 million can be attributed to licensing revenue. The remaining EUR 256 thousand came from companies in the value chain providing partner contributions to allow them to participate in The Good Cashmere Standard; this sum was used primarily to fund further development of the standard as well as the comprehensive verification process of this valuable commodity in Inner Mongolia. In addition, training schemes and materials to address key issues were put together and rolled out to cashmere herders.

Donations in 2025 totalled EUR 802 thousand; of this figure, EUR 613 thousand was used to co-finance cooperation projects with CmiA and CmiA Organic cotton companies (see page 50).

The ratio between income generated from business activities (at 90 percent of total income) and from dona-

tions or grants (at 10 percent of total income) improved by another 2 percent between 2024 and 2025. This represents a further fulfilment of the foundation's guiding principles and signifies its success in harnessing market forces to enable people to help themselves—in other words, providing aid by way of trade.

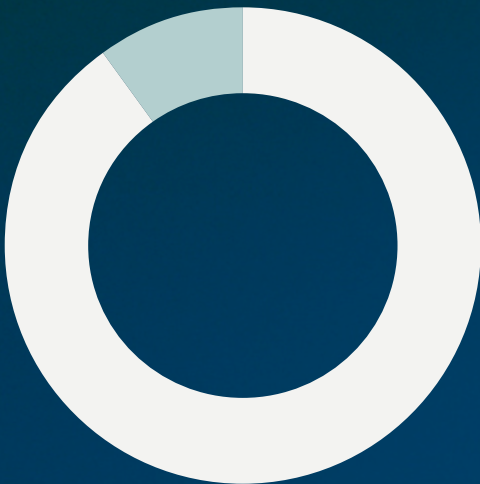
Implementation costs—for CmiA programmes in Africa, The Good Cashmere Standard in Inner Mongolia, and the Regenerative Cotton Standard in India and Tanzania—were slightly below the previous year's figure, at a total of EUR 3.607 million in 2025. By contrast, expenses for CmiA cooperation projects increased by around 16 percent, to EUR 613 thousand.

These funds were once again deployed effectively, resulting in an excellent programme service expense ratio of 76 percent for 2025.

About 11 percent of total expenditure was invested by AbTF in sales, marketing, and communication through its marketing company, ATAKORA. Targeted measures were taken to strengthen the international visibility of CmiA, CmiA Organic, and RCS cotton, as well as of GCS cashmere, and to further intensify marketing to both new and existing licensees.

Combined with the effective and targeted use of funds, another year of strong revenue development in 2025 yielded a consolidated net income of EUR 2.267 million (before taxes). In addition to further strengthening AbTF's capital structure, this secures the funding needed to continue delivering innovative programmes in the future. More concretely, this makes it possible to invest even more in transparency systems for textile value chains in order to further safeguard them. It also enables AbTF to conduct the activities necessary for promoting innovation and for ensuring sustainable development through the implementation of its standards: CmiA in partner countries in Africa, GCS in Inner Mongolia, and the new Regenerative Cotton Standard in Africa and India.

Income in 2025

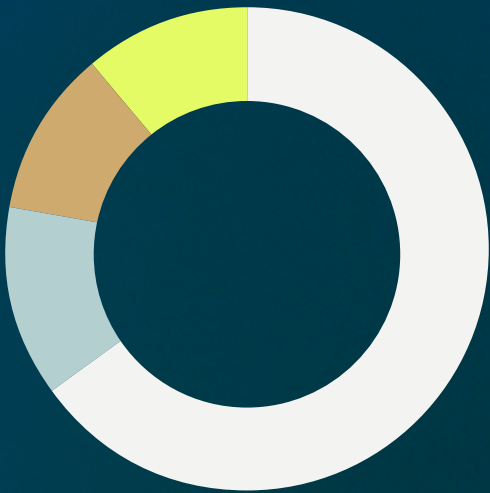


90 %
Income from
business
activities

10 %
Income from
grants
and donations

INCOME	2025 EUR K	2025 IN %	2024 EUR K	2024 IN %
Licensing income	4,884	62	5,096	59
Partnership contributions	1,850	24	2,020	24
Donations	802	10	699	8
Grants	0	0	360	4
Other income	298	4	424	5
TOTAL INCOME	7,834	100 %	8,599	100 %

Expenditure in 2025



13 %
Management and
administration

11 %
Marketing, sales, and
communications

11 %
Cooperation
projects

65 %
Programme
implementation

EXPENDITURE	2025 EUR K	2025 IN %	2024 EUR K	2024 IN %
Management and administration	744	13	704	13
Programme implementation	3,607	65	3,638	68
Cooperation projects	613	11	528	10
Marketing, sales, and communications	603	11	485	9
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	5,567	100 %	5,355	100 %

Engaging in Dialogue With Multiple Stakeholders Worldwide

2025 was another successful year for the Aid by Trade Foundation in terms of expanding its network within the global supply chain and intensifying dialogue with various stakeholders in producer countries and beyond. The further transformation of the global cotton, cashmere, and textile industry—guided by the values of transparency, trust, and credibility—succeeded thanks to trust-based collaboration with a broad range of partners. It is therefore a fundamental belief and the core of the foundation’s activities that transformation is inconceivable without shared knowledge and collaborative action.

QUARTER 1

January–March

- Throughout the year, AbTF took part in prestigious and pioneering events in the textile industry, starting in January with the **Heimtextil trade fair** in Frankfurt, Germany.
- To ensure the reliable implementation of The Good Cashmere Standard, AbTF continues to invest in the training of auditors and producers. Its innovative **digital learning platform** plays a key role in this, providing partners with relevant information to support them in meeting the standard's requirements.
- In Africa South of the Sahara, targeted meetings and **exchange platforms for West and Central Africa** enhanced small-scale cotton production and optimised the on-the-ground implementation of our cotton standards through improved system effectiveness and sectoral advancement. In Benin, local agricultural advisors were empowered with climate-smart farming knowledge, including compost, biochar, and bokashi production.
- Following its commitment to improving animal welfare, GCS launched its third **model farm in Inner Mongolia**, China, as a hub for inspiration, knowhow transfer, and information sharing.
- **The Good Cashmere Conference** in Hamburg brought together brand and retail partners, renowned experts from the global cashmere and textile industry, representatives of international non-governmental organisations, and scientists to discuss progress, challenges, and successes in cashmere production with respect to animals, people, and land.

QUARTER 2

April–June

- In collaboration with the African Cotton Foundation (ACF), AbTF held the annual **Innovations Club** workshop in Benin this year. Participants benefited from specialist presentations, practical demonstrations, and an exchange of ideas among cotton companies.
- With a focus on strengthening the competitiveness of the African cotton sector, the annual general meeting of the **Association Cotonnière Africaine (ACA)** provided AbTF with

an opportunity for networking and stakeholder dialogue with francophone partners.

- The new **Transparency Standard** was introduced. It regulates the use and traceability of verified cotton throughout the textile supply chain, from the cotton origin to the finished product, reinforcing existing tracking systems.
- At the **Hamburg Sustainability Conference**—which brings together international leaders from politics, business, science, and civil society to forge new alliances and accelerate progress towards the United Nations' 2030 Agenda—AbTF and stakeholders explored how voluntary sustainability standards and value-to-business approaches can address biodiversity challenges, especially in emerging markets; they also looked at scalable solutions and private-sector-led initiatives. During a dedicated press conference, the foundation additionally launched its Biodiversity Fund on the occasion of its 20th anniversary.
- Prof. Dr Michael Otto, the founder of AbTF, accepted the **German Africa Foundation's Honorary Award** for 2025 on behalf of AbTF, at a ceremony held at the German Bundestag. This award recognises AbTF for its long-standing commitment to sustainable economic development through trade.

QUARTER 3

July–September

- Together with African People & Wildlife (APW), AbTF tested a CmiA-adapted **ACTIVE® Community Engagement Training** of Trainers in Zambia and Tanzania. Agricultural extension officers who received this training also delivered feedback on the current training approach in order to effectively foster farmer-centric agricultural training and engagement with communities.
- At the **Association Française Cotonnière (AFCOT)** Forum in Deauville, one of the most important gatherings for the French-speaking cotton community, AbTF Managing Director Tina Stridde drew attention to the urgent issues facing African smallholders, who are disproportionately vulnerable to climate change despite their minimal emis-

sions. Her address aimed to mobilise a sense of collective responsibility and galvanise action towards climate justice within the global textile value chain.

QUARTER 4

October–December

- Through its **CmiA regional workshops**—held in Maputo, Mozambique, and Cotonou, Benin—AbTF focussed on enhancing farmer engagement by improving training content, increasing community involvement, and gathering crucial feedback for public consultation on the draft of CmiA Standard Volume 5.0.
- At the **Textile Exchange conference** in Lisbon, Portugal, Tina Stridde spearheaded discussions on the 4C Impact Data Series panel about The Good Cashmere Standard's Animal-Related Animal Welfare Assessment (ARAWA), an innovative approach to promote animal welfare in cashmere production.
- In a side meeting at the Textile Exchange conference, AbTF and industry experts discussed how businesses and standard owners can collaboratively forge credible, measurable, and lasting sustainability outcomes, paving the way for meaningful change in sustainability rather than relying solely on regulation.
- GCS contributed to discussions on the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health in livestock production at the **One Health conference** organised by the China Animal Health and Food Safety Alliance (CAFA) in Haikou, China.
- At the invitation of AbTF, over 70 experts from the cashmere production and supply chain, as well as other cashmere and animal welfare specialists, met at the **GCS Unit Meeting** in Shanghai, China, to discuss progress and new objectives of The Good Cashmere Standard.
- To strengthen the **implementation of traceable CmiA cotton** within global supply chains of retail and brand partners, AbTF visited production sites and met with customers and sourcing offices in key textile production markets in Asia.

20 Years of Impact

20 Years of Value to Business, People, Animals, and Nature

Founded two decades ago by Prof. Dr Michael Otto, the Aid by Trade Foundation is making a decisive and measurable contribution towards achieving ecologically and socially sound fibre production, improving the working and living conditions of producers and their communities, securing animal welfare, and protecting nature by activating market uptake and transparency. Over the past 20 years, key successes have included the following:

Global Impact

AbTF now maintains four sustainability standards that are recognised, implemented, and in demand globally: Cotton made in Africa, Cotton made in Africa Organic, The Good Cashmere Standard, and the Regenerative Cotton Standard.

Transparency & Market Uptake

Every year, millions of textiles are sold bearing a label of one of AbTF's standards; the standards provide significant support to brands and retailers in meeting their ESG requirements. To strengthen the integrity of traceable cotton products, the Aid by Trade Foundation developed the AbTF Transparency Standard in 2025, which introduces an additional layer of third-party verification and supply chain assurance based on its established chain of custody model and tracking system.

Growth of Cotton made in Africa

Launched in 2006, CmiA has since become a leading standard for verified sustainable cotton, growing from 100,000 small-scale farmers in three African countries to more than 700,000 small-scale farmers in ten countries in 2025. Almost 40 percent of all cotton produced in Africa is verified under CmiA or CmiA Organic. This involves partnerships with 20 cotton companies and 50 textile production markets worldwide.

Improved Production and Market Access for Organic Cotton

Introduced in 2014, CmiA Organic has become a standard in high demand by producers and retailers alike because it supplements regular organic certification with social and economic support for African farmers and communities. More than 40,000 small-scale farmers in four African production countries are now verified under CmiA Organic.

Leadership in Promoting Animal Welfare in Cashmere Production

Established in 2019, GCS quickly became the global leader for verified sustainable cashmere from Inner Mongolia, ensuring that animals, people, and land are all treated with care. Global demand has reached an all-time high, with 71 retail and brand partners from 13 countries worldwide processing and tracing GCS fibres.

Introduction of the Regenerative Cotton Standard

The launch of RCS in 2023 embodies AbTF's increased focus on protecting and restoring the environment whilst improving conditions for cotton farming communities based on a holistic approach for regenerative agriculture. The standard sets clear guidelines for regenerative cotton production, which include regular independent verifications. It was rolled out in India and Tanzania, with the number of farmers applying the standard criteria in Tanzania rising by 87.8 percent.

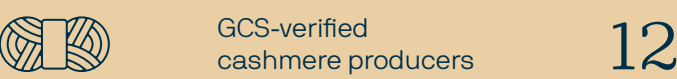
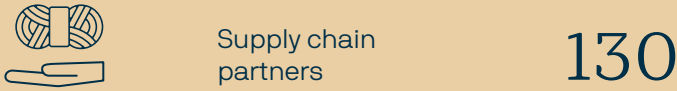
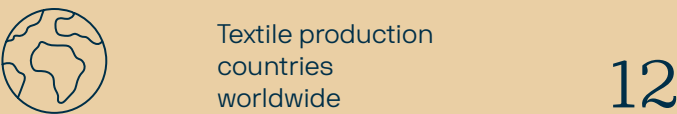
Cotton made in Africa & Cotton made in Africa Organic



* CmiA Organic farmers are included in the overall number of CmiA farmers named above.



The Good Cashmere Standard



Regenerative Cotton Standard



Figures compared to the previous year.

Launching the AbTF Biodiversity Fund

The production of verified sustainable cotton and cashmere requires aligning agriculture with nature conservation and reconciling people's interests with the demands of environmental protection. In line with its commitment to activating trade to create positive impacts for nature, people, and animals, it is a central concern of the Aid by Trade Foundation to preserve biodiversity for future generations. To this end, the foundation has allocated EUR 500,000 to the AbTF Biodiversity Fund, which was established to mark the 20th anniversary of the foundation, in 2025. The fund supports projects aimed at ensuring that ecosystems remain diverse and resilient to climate change, and it further strengthens AbTF's holistic approach to environmental stewardship.



First Biodiversity Project
Supports Evidence-Based
Grassland Management for
Sensitive Ecosystems in
Tanzania

The first project supported by the AbTF Biodiversity Fund is being implemented together with African People & Wildlife (APW), a renowned Tanzanian organisation specialising in community-based conservation. AbTF decided to support APW's Sustainable Rangelands Initiative in an effort to enhance community-led savannah management programmes across key Tanzanian ecosystems.

In Northern Tanzania, wildlife regions often border agricultural production areas and settlements. APW's Sustainable Rangelands Initiative is committed to keeping savannah areas open and vibrant for the benefit of rural communities and wildlife. African People & Wildlife supports local communities that are willing to protect, restore, and sustainably use savannahs through rotational grazing, mobile real-time monitoring tools, and the incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge.



“In view of the growing population and livestock numbers, coordinated rangeland management is simply essential. Without livestock, there is no livelihood, and without rangeland, there can be no livestock.”

Maria Lemuta Lazier
Grazing Committee Secretary
Village of Esilalei



First Milestones Reached

AIM

- Protection of 100,000 hectares of savannah through community-based nature conservation

ACTIVITIES

- Meetings were held to facilitate in-depth dialogue with local communities from eleven villages.
- Monitoring officers were trained, and measures to monitor grazing areas were continued.
- Plans for the use of grazing land were presented, and data on pasture quality was discussed.
- Real-time monitoring tools came into use by Maasai herders in order to gather data based on observations by designated members of village communities. Every month, the collected data is fed into an APW database, where it is visualised and made available to the villages in digital form, via mobile monitoring dashboards.

PROGRESS MADE IN THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

- Preservation of biodiversity and pasture quality in Tanzania's Engaruka Valley, actively supported and promoted by local village communities
- Groundbreaking melding of Indigenous knowledge and innovative technology
- Community feedback meetings with a total of 220 participants, including members of grazing committees and representatives of the pastoral women's council
- Monitoring and evaluation of data enables village communities to ensure that the savannah is grazed sustainably and without damage to its biodiversity
- Community-based approach to rangeland management, providing the best foundation for sustainable conservation measures and ensuring their compatibility with the economic needs of the rural population

How to Turn Biodiversity and People Into a Team

African People & Wildlife has extensive experience in projects that sustainably align environmental conservation with the interests of local communities. For this reason, its work is now supported by the AbTF Biodiversity Fund. APW staff member Elizabeth Naro, who oversees data collection and analysis of all programme monitoring data, explains what is needed to promote biodiversity as a key driver of sustainable land use in collaboration with the people using it.



We spoke with

Elizabeth Naro
Director of Monitoring, Evaluation,
Learning, and Adaptation
African People & Wildlife



Elizabeth, why is sustainable grassland and pasture management so important for the future of conservation efforts?

People, wildlife, and livestock depend on the same grassland resources in shared pastures outside formal protected areas. This makes pastoralists natural allies of conservation. Protecting these grasslands from conversion to agriculture or other forms of infrastructure development is critical for maintaining movement corridors for wildlife and ensuring the sustainability of pastoral livelihoods. Sustainable grassland and pasture management thus supports not just wildlife and habitats but also the communities that make land-use decisions.

Why does APW focus on involving local communities in efforts to preserve biodiversity?

As an organisation, our approach is one of community-driven conservation. So it's not a question of why we involve local communities but rather of how we can support local communities in their own efforts to preserve their lands and livelihoods. The people who live and depend on these lands are the decision-makers, so it's not the role of conservation organisations to tell them how to manage their lands. Our role is to enhance their capacity to make more informed decisions about land allocation and use and scale their efforts to ensure people and wildlife can share the land. These landscapes are beautifully complex social-ecological systems that provide us the opportunity to amplify the voices of local people and embody the values of sustainable use that are inherent in the traditional ecological practices and natural resource management systems of the local communities.

How, exactly, does the community-led savannah management programme run by APW work?

The APW programme enhances the ability of communities to restore degraded pastures and to make informed, real-time decisions about grazing allocations. Each month, trained Community Rangeland Monitors visit each pasture and record data about the current condition and quality of the grassland. Metrics like grass height and colour, bare-ground percentage, and the frequency of invasive species are submitted via geospatial software powering a mobile data collection application. The data are visualised in dashboards, which village grazing committees can use to decide whether to open or close pastures, adjust grazing plans, or designate areas for restoration interventions such as invasive species removal or native grass reseedling.

How is the Aid by Trade Foundation's Biodiversity Fund supporting the work of APW?

AbTF's Biodiversity Fund currently supports APW's Sustainable Rangelands Initiative in eleven communities in the Engaruka Valley, a critical wildlife corridor linking the Tarangire–Manyara ecosystem to the Greater Lake Natron landscape. Twenty-two Community Rangeland Monitors receive training and equipment for the monthly monitoring of their pastures. In the coming months, these communities will review their data and identify areas for grassland restoration interventions. We are grateful to AbTF for providing support for this important programme, and we are excited to share the results of the restoration projects in 2026.

Cotton Standards



Market and Supply Chain Results: From Impact to Business Benefits

MARKET AND SUPPLY CHAIN RESULTS

2,800
+3.7%

Supply chain partners globally;
3.7 % year-on-year growth

64

International brand and
retail partners

50

CmiA and CmiA Organic textile
production markets worldwide

9

Textile production countries
for traceable CmiA from cotton
origin to the final product

15

Retailers and brands using
traceable CmiA cotton

3,900

Users of the SCOT tracking
system

By providing its robust and verifiable voluntary sustainability standards—Cotton made in Africa, Cotton made in Africa Organic, and the Regenerative Cotton Standard—the Aid by Trade Foundation strengthened its leading role in the global textile industry amidst accelerating regulatory shifts and evolving market and supply-chain dynamics. As the demand for clear, practical sustainability frameworks reaches new heights, AbTF offers independently verified standards and credible traceability systems, which are crucial for businesses aiming to effectively mitigate risks, validate their claims, and meet growing expectations for transparency and due diligence. Through collaborative efforts with multiple stakeholders, the foundation offers strategies for navigating regulatory changes, cultivating resilient textile supply chains, and supporting responsible purchasing decisions.

Creating Competitive Advantages

The Aid by Trade Foundation delivers independently verified fibres that are in demand internationally. By sourcing cotton that is verified according to one of AbTF's standards, businesses gain access to a scalable, socially and environmentally sound source of cotton. This enables them to meet due diligence obligations and comply with international regulations while investing in a future-ready and traceable source of cotton. 2025 proved to be a year of significant progress for AbTF and its cotton programmes: CmiA and CmiA Organic. The network of partners throughout the supply chain expanded by approximately 3.7 per cent, reaching a total of 2,800.

Market and Supply Chain Impact Highlights: Traceability From Cotton Origin to Final Product

The Hard Identity Preserved System

The creation and application of transparency—for individual companies, for the entire supply chain, in terms of regulatory requirements, and as elementary components of reliable sustainability frameworks—have been ensured since 2018 by the Hard Identity Preserved (HIP) tracking system of the Aid by Trade Foundation. Used by about 500 AbTF partners in the global supply chain—with Bangladesh, China, India, Pakistan, and Vietnam being the biggest CmiA HIP implementation markets—to ensure transparency throughout the textile value chain, HIP makes it possible to fully trace the path of cotton from the ginnery to the finished product. The HIP system is constantly being further developed to provide assurance and meet increasing market demands both now and in the future.

A Key Guide for Consumers

AbTF's HIP tracking system provided reliable support to retailers and brands like Avon, Bestseller, Muji, OVS, Primark, and Rewe Group by ensuring transparency from the cotton field to the final textile product. In 2025, the Rewe Group reached its goal of using 100 percent CmiA cotton, traceable through HIP, for its own-brand products. The "Cotton made in Africa Inside" label may only be used provided that traceable CmiA-verified cotton was used in yarn and textile production—a key metric for consumers looking for textiles with a verified sustainable origin. To this end, all actors in the supply chain provide information to the HIP tracking system, demonstrating that all requirements for HIP implementation are met. They ensure that CmiA cotton is stored and processed separately throughout the entire production process and is not mixed with other cotton at any stage of processing.



MEDIA COVERAGE: 100% Traceable Cotton at REWE; Utopia



Creating Transparency

Transparency is not only a matter of sophisticated technology; it requires trust. Trust, in turn, requires personal contact, which fosters genuine collaboration and an understanding of business partners' needs. As CmiA products are produced in sourcing markets such as Bangladesh, China, India, and Pakistan, AbTF's supply chain team spent several days travelling through these countries to visit partners. Their discussions frequently focussed on topics related to traceability requirements for CmiA cotton. For instance, how can retailers and textile brands respond to the growing legal requirements affecting their textile supply chains, and which technical solutions can support them in creating transparency across all stages of global textile processing? At the end of the team's journey, the conclusion was as follows: retailers and brands know that, under the HIP system, they can rely on a mechanism that ensures that their labelled products contain only sustainably produced CmiA cotton. The system is, and will continue to be, a reliable source of transparency.

“We only accept traceable CmiA cotton”

Throughout 2025, the new partnership between the global retailer Primark and Cotton made in Africa continued to evolve, marking a key step towards the company’s objective of utilising 100 percent sustainable cotton in textile production by 2030. In this interview, Joe Ryan, a product sustainability manager at Primark, elaborated on the company’s decision to prioritise CmiA cotton, particularly emphasising the critical role of traceability from the finished product back to the raw material.



We spoke with

Joe Ryan
Product Sustainability Manager
Primark

Joe, Primark’s commitment to sustainability is clear. What role does CmiA play in this regard, and what made CmiA the right partner for Primark?

At Primark, we have a sustainability strategy called Primark Cares, which is our commitment to becoming a more circular business. When considering our strategy and, specifically, our focus on cotton, we wanted to use sources that align with the high standards of our Primark Cotton Project, launched in 2013. We chose the CmiA standard because it focusses on improving farming practices, supporting smallholder farmers, and empowering women, similar to the ambitions of our Primark Cotton Project. Traceability was essential for any new cotton source. For this reason, we only accept traceable CmiA cotton, so we can rely on full traceability back to its origin. The SCOT system, which traces CmiA cotton through the supply chain, was a key factor in our decision.

From a practical perspective, what has been Primark’s experience with the process of implementing traceable CmiA cotton? What were the main challenges and key lessons?

At Primark, we are always pushing ourselves to improve, so change is not new to us. However, change can still be challenging, especially when it relies on collaboration with our supply chain partners. When introducing traceable CmiA cotton, we were able to build on the strong relationships we have developed with our suppliers over time. One key lesson was how eager our suppliers were to support this new initiative and how committed they were to making it a success for everyone involved. We started with open discussions to help suppliers understand why and how traceable CmiA cotton was being introduced,

which made the onboarding process much smoother. Throughout the journey, clear and open communication has been essential, and any challenges have been treated as opportunities to learn. Traceable CmiA cotton is still new for Primark, so we expect more challenges and learnings ahead. However, the strong partnerships we have built will help us to continue working collaboratively towards success with our supply chain partners.

For consumers, clear communication is vital. How can customers recognise that the products are made with traceable CmiA cotton?

At Primark, the customer is at the heart of everything we do. Clear, simple communication with our customers across 19 markets is certainly a challenge. We aim to keep labelling and fibre descriptions simple and clear. If customers want to find out more, further information is available on our website. All our fibre content callouts follow a similar style in order to be as simple as possible for the customer to understand.

In which product categories or collections does Primark currently prioritise the use of traceable CmiA cotton, and are there plans for expanding its adoption?

While we started with a careful and considered approach, we are using traceable CmiA cotton in two of our largest categories—socks and leisurewear—in the women’s, men’s, and kids’ departments. We have since expanded to include towels as well. At Primark, we continually review our cotton sourcing strategy and will keep leveraging the flexibility and availability of traceable CmiA cotton alongside our other preferred cotton sources.



Compliance Through Future-Proof Traceability

AbTF's New Transparency Standard

Meeting tomorrow's regulations today—this is the aim of the Transparency Standard, which the Aid by Trade Foundation introduced in 2025. As the current benchmark for traceability in the textile supply chain, the Transparency Standard is based on the established Hard Identity Preserved tracking system; experts at the Aid by Trade Foundation used it as the basis for a standard that adds several layers to the existing control architecture.

Central to the new standard are digital transaction documents (DTDs). These are also regularly validated by independent auditors and used to trace CmiA, CmiA Organic, and RCS cotton along the supply chain. A single missing data entry in the supply chain system is enough to prevent a DTD from being issued, meaning that proof of the origin of the cotton used in the product is missing. This gives even more credibility to products labelled under CmiA, CmiA Organic, or RCS.

An additional check is carried out through risk-based desktop audits by independent auditors. These auditors check the data entered into the tracking system at all production stages, including associated documents such as production reports and delivery notes.

Furthermore, there are mandatory onboarding audits for spinning mills, conducted by independent auditing companies. These audits also review the additional self-assessment questionnaires that must be completed regularly across all stages of the supply chain.

With the Transparency Standard, globally active retailers benefit from increased assurance and reliability when using and promoting CmiA, CmiA Organic, or RCS cotton. The Transparency Standard thus represents a milestone in the development of tools for fulfilling due diligence obligations in the supply chain.



For more on this topic head to:

Aid by Trade Foundation Announces
New Transparency Standard



MEDIA COVERAGE:

AbTF launches transparency standard
for sustainable cotton supply, Just Style

Field Results: Measurable Progress at Cotton Origins



KEY FIELD-LEVEL RESULTS

715,000 CmiA & CmiA Organic farmers

43,000 CmiA Organic farmers*

36.4% Of African cotton production verified

10 Cultivation countries in Africa South of the Sahara, including **four CmiA Organic cultivation countries**

522,000 Tonnes of CmiA-verified lint cotton, including **25,200 tonnes of CmiA Organic cotton**

1.4m Hectares of land in use under CmiA or CmiA Organic

1.94 Hectares of cropland per farmer (on average)

892 Kilograms of cotton harvested per hectare by each farmer (on average)

20 Verified cotton companies, including six verified under CmiA Organic

In collaboration with its partners, AbTF has strengthened its commitment to future-proofing cotton production and to improving the lives and working conditions of small-scale farming families and ginnery workers in 2025. Our approach integrates fair business practices, targeted capacity-building training programmes, and community projects—all while striving to reduce agriculture’s environmental impact, particularly through mitigating climate change, combating biodiversity loss, and restoring soil fertility. AbTF’s CmiA and CmiA Organic standards promote decent working conditions, gender equality, and children’s education. These efforts extend AbTF’s influence beyond cotton cultivation, fostering community resilience through diverse initiatives under its CmiA Community Cooperation Programme.



* CmiA Organic farmers are included in the overall number of CmiA farmers named above.

Throughout these endeavours, integrity and robust implementation have remained paramount priorities, starting with a continuous-improvement approach to future-proofing cotton production by improving social, ecological, and economic conditions. This includes continuous verification cycles by independent control bodies, capacity-building programmes, and a standards revision process for CmiA Standard Vol. 5. The revision, which was underway in 2025, focussed on effectiveness and on enhancing biodiversity preservation and due diligence whilst meeting new reporting requirements.

Whereas CmiA and CmiA Organic are adapted to small-scale farming conditions in African countries South of the Sahara, CmiA Organic complements CmiA's socio-economic requirements with criteria for organic cotton cultivation. In 2025, about 715,000 small-scale farmers produced about 522,000 tonnes of CmiA or CmiA Organic verified lint cotton on 1.4 million hectares of land.



Meeting High Standards and Delivering a Reliable Source of Responsibly Grown Cotton

The verification results from 2025 show that CmiA-verified partners achieved their best ratings in the Prosperity pillar, followed closely by the Management pillar and the People and Planet pillars. All four pillars were rated “very good” and increased their scores compared with previous years, underlining the effectiveness of AbTF’s continuous-improvement approach. Principle-level analysis reveals that the principles related to supporting small-scale farmers, productivity, and fibre quality as well as to high-quality inputs and pre-financing received the strongest scores. Out of 288 indicators, over 66 percent of the indicators received ratings of either “excellent” (40.3 percent) or “very good” (26 percent) on average across all verifications in 2025. In 2025, no indicators received an average score of “poor”.



Cotton made in Africa Vol. 5: A Bridge to the Future of Cotton Production

Cotton made in Africa has gained momentum as the largest standard for sustainable cotton from Africa. In 2025, new efforts were undertaken to elevate Cotton made in Africa as a standard to a new level.

DEFINING KEY AREAS OF RENEWAL

The basis for the new standard included feedback from a two-day workshop in Côte d'Ivoire as well as responses from a public consultation conducted in the autumn of 2025. The following three main areas of change emerged for CmiA Standard Vol. 5:

- *Accentuation of the standard's requirements.* The standard's demands and objectives should be quickly and clearly understandable for everyone, including through precise and universally comprehensible formulations.
- *Readjustment of the standard's goals.* The standard's indicators were reformulated, and new ones were added. This was done, on the one hand, to intensify cooperation with cotton companies and farming communities and, on the other hand, to focus on climate change resilience and biodiversity.
- *Adaptation to changing regulatory requirements.* CmiA Vol. 5 places a new focus on human rights and environmental risk management. This is due to stricter regulatory requirements for companies regarding due diligence obligations and sustainability reporting.

KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON THE FINAL STEPS

After incorporating feedback from the public consultation and the technical advisory group, the Board of Trustees of the Aid by Trade Foundation confirmed the new indicator matrix as the basis of the new standard requirements in the autumn of 2025. The matrix, which includes guidance and, following the update of the assurance system, self-assessments and verification reports, will form the basis of the new CmiA Standard 5.0 in the course of 2026.





“Strengthen CmiA partners’ sense of responsibility and facilitate implementation”

We spoke with

Margaret Wanjiku Mugo
Lead Verifier
AfriCert

In early 2025, AbTF initiated a standards revision process. This decision was in keeping with best practices for voluntary sustainability standards, which recommend conducting a major review and revision of a standard at least every five years. Drawing on verification results, new knowledge and practices, and insights from monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), AbTF asked for stakeholder and public input. In particular, the focus was on increasing Cotton made in Africa’s effectiveness and adapting its criteria and indicators to take account of external factors, which currently include biodiversity loss and a growing set of reporting requirements for companies. As an experienced lead verifier for Cotton made in Africa at the Kenyan certification company AfriCert, Margaret Wanjiku Mugo played a key role in this process.

Margaret, as a lead verifier, you participated in the feedback rounds of the CmiA standard revision. How was the revision process rolled out, and what was your task?

There were various stakeholders exchanging views and sharing ideas in this robust revision process. The entire process was designed to be practice-oriented. The aim was to strengthen CmiA partners’ sense of responsibility and to facilitate implementation. I represented the certification bodies by sharing verifiers’ perspectives, opinions, and ideas on changes we wanted made to version 4 of the standard. For instance, we highlighted indicators that could be grouped together due to conceptual similarities, and we provided comprehensive feedback on indicators that were difficult to interpret.

Why does the Aid by Trade Foundation conduct major reviews and revisions of its Cotton made in Africa standard?

Through this revision, AbTF is ensuring the standard is as relevant as possible and that it builds trust with all stakeholders, from producers to consumers. A further aim was to incorporate any changes that might have occurred since the last standard revision; these changes touch on human rights, due diligence, biodiversity, and climate

resilience. Additionally, the content of the standard was revised to be simple for managing entities to implement and clear for auditors to understand.

What does this standard revision actually bring to Cotton made in Africa and its partners?

Globally speaking, with the new version of the CmiA standard coming into force, AbTF is increasing its precision, purpose, and value to all stakeholders integrated value. Greater emphasis is also being placed on interoperability with sustainability reporting requirements.

And from your perspective?

I think the revision gives Cotton made in Africa, as well as its partners, retailers, and consumers, assurance that integrity is maintained throughout the production process for verified products. The revision made the indicators clear and precise. Additionally, the involvement of a diverse community, which ranges from the general public to stakeholders and experts, in the revision demonstrates the close cooperation among the groups involved in the process.

Field Impact Highlights

How Empowering Communities Can Contribute to Lasting Improvements for People, Planet and Prosperity



Improving the living conditions of small-scale farmers in rural areas of Africa is directly linked, in several ways, to the conditions in their communities and the state of nature on which small-scale farming depends. Without sufficient support, rural communities will fail. This is equally true if soil quality deteriorates or biodiversity is lost. Consequently, achieving a triple win for people, communities, and nature is a prerequisite for sustaining farmers' livelihoods. For that to happen, all these factors must be promoted through a holistic approach. This is a crucial step in securing smallholders' living conditions for the long term.



COUNTRY
SPOTLIGHT

Côte d'Ivoire

Despite their pivotal role in rural communities, the voices of women are not being heard sufficiently due to a lack of co-determination and participation. It is high time that changed. Similarly, environmental measures' potential for improving soil quality has not yet been fully realised. If these two issues can be linked and the status quo challenged, decisive change could be achieved.

400

Women directly benefiting

~ 5,400

Community members reached

Creating a Triple-Win Through a Knowledge-to-Action Project for Women

Empowering women so that they can share their knowledge and ecological practices for improving soil quality is at the heart of a project in Côte d'Ivoire. It is being coordinated by the Aid by Trade Foundation, implemented by local managing entities, and financially supported by the Bestseller Foundation.

As part of the project, which will run until March 2027, women are provided with the necessary resources to improve their social standing by playing a key role in establishing climate-resilient farming methods through ecological measures to optimise soil quality. This, in turn, increases the resilience of farms and stabilises rural communities.

Overall, the project directly benefits about 400 women, with a broader indirect impact on approximately 5,400 individuals from the surrounding communities. The triple-win for women, farming communities, and agricultural land is made possible by a whole package of measures and resulting changes:

- Through the establishment of formal savings and loan groups at the village level, women gain the opportunity to generate savings and access loans. This, in turn, enables investments in education, housing, and agricultural inputs.

- Due to their economic activities and income from the production and sale of compost, biochar, and bokashi, women's social status increases. Communities benefit from improved family health, nutrition, and food security resulting from the triple-win project. New boreholes not only enable women's farming groups to produce compost, bokashi, and biochar but also guarantee safe drinking water, reduce waterborne disease infections, and promote vegetable cultivation; this, in turn, improves food security for the communities.
- Women's economic activity also secures the productivity and profitability of agriculture in cotton-growing areas. Through the increased use of organic soil enhancers—such as organic matter and living (micro-)organisms—produced by women's groups, healthier plants grow on more fertile soils. This reduces the need for expensive fertilisers and optimises water retention in the soil.

Given what has been achieved so far, it is clear that promoting economic independence ultimately benefits not only the women themselves but also the farming communities in which they live. The resulting economic, social, and environmental benefits are proving to be a pioneering investment in securing the future of cotton production as a whole.

“Competence has no gender”

Adèle Noudjilembaye—the head of sustainability at Cotontchad SN, a subsidiary of Olam Agri—has been instrumental in leading the training of women for sustainable agricultural development in Chad, driven by her personal commitment to the values of servant leadership. Born into a cotton-farming family in Chad, she has not only built an impressive career but also achieved remarkable success in establishing Olam Agri’s sustainability approach in her home country.

We spoke with

Adèle Noudjilembaye
Head of Sustainability
Cotontchad SN



Adèle, 2026 is the UN's International Year of the Woman Farmer. Why is it important to support women in agriculture?

As true pillars of the African economy, women farmers are guardians of food security and economic vitality. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women account for approximately 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries. However, they face a productivity gap, not due to a lack of skill but because of unequal access to resources such as land, credit, and technology. Supporting women would increase agricultural production worldwide, especially in developing countries. Women reinvest up to 90 percent of their income in their households' well-being. I know that women play a key role in crop diversification, and they are often more open to sustainable farming practices and soil conservation.

To what extent does your own life's story play a role in your daily work in Chad?

Born into a family of farmers, I grew up in the heart of this rural world. Farming enabled my parents to finance my education. I did my PhD in agro-entomology. My career has been marked by a constant search for sustainable solutions in agricultural contexts. Today, I translate this vision into concrete actions. I have helped organise more than 600 women's producer groups that cover over 3,000 hectares. We do more than just facilitate access to inputs; for instance, we build their financial autonomy through village savings and loan associations (VSLAs).

Do you encounter gender-related resistance in your work?

In a cotton sector historically dominated by men, the main resistance I encounter is sociocultural in nature, particularly regarding women's technical credibility and their access to decision-making positions. Historically, women have been virtually absent from management and department-head positions at Cotontchad SN. Today, having joined its management team, I am striving to break through this glass ceiling. I draw on my expertise in the field and the results achieved on the ground; the rigour of my scientific expertise commands respect and proves that competence has no gender.

How do collaborations, such as with Cotton made in Africa, support cotton companies like Olam in empowering women in cotton?

They are essential catalysts for achieving our sustainability goals. CmiA strengthens our position so that we can drive profound change. This synergy has enabled us to implement concrete tools, e.g., a robust gender and harassment policy to ensure a safe and equitable work environment. Beyond governance, CmiA's support extends to projects that are vital for women's empowerment and health, particularly through improved access to water. By addressing challenges through CmiA's development-focused approach, the protection of human rights and the economic empowerment of women have become pillars of a modern, competitive, and deeply humane cotton sector.

Organic Cotton



WHY CMIA ORGANIC MATTERS
Only ~0.89 kg CO₂e produced per kg of fibre due to:

- Zero mineral fertilisers or synthetic pesticides
- Zero irrigation
- Low mechanisation
- No GMO seeds

How to Minimise Cotton’s Environmental Impact by Maximising Benefits for the People Producing It

A comprehensive life cycle assessment (LCA) of Cotton made in Africa Organic from Tanzania, carried out by Daniel Thylmann Sustainability Consulting using data submitted to Textile Exchange for its “Life Cycle Assessment für Cotton”, demonstrates the low environmental footprint of CmiA Organic cotton from Tanzania. In addition, CmiA Organic’s commitment goes beyond transparency and environmental protection to also encompass farmers’ well-being.

The LCA confirms that CmiA Organic leads to the development of an environmentally friendly production model. In this way, CmiA Organic cotton not only supports brands and retailers on their journey from conventional cotton to organic cotton, but it also proves to be a reliable basis for fulfilling regulatory transparency requirements, among other things.

Africa’s smallholders suffer massively from the consequences of climatic changes—even though their form of agriculture contributes very little to causing them. A

fundamental component of CmiA Organic is therefore a holistic approach to safeguarding people’s well-being while protecting the environment. Through comprehensive training provided by CmiA Organic partners, cotton producers are empowered to make their farming practices climate-resilient, thereby securing a future for resilient cotton cultivation.



For more on this topic, head to LCA Study for CmiA Organic here: <https://cottonmadeinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/LifeCycleAssessment-CmiAOrganic.pdf>



MEDIA COVERAGE: LCA claims low impacts for CmiA organic cotton | Ecotextile News
AbTF launches transparency standard for sustainable cotton supply, Just Style

Cameroon



Combatting Climate Change by Creating New Sources of Income for Small-Scale Cotton Farmers

Making cotton cultivation climate-resilient is a key goal of all the Aid by Trade Foundation’s cotton standards. The way small-scale producers live and produce cotton contributes little to climate change. Paradoxically, the consequences of global warming are now an existential threat to many farmers.

For this reason, AbTF is supporting a project in Cameroon, implemented by the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and other partners who, in collaboration with bizpando AG, aim to promote access to carbon credits in cotton production. The goal is to enable small-scale farmers to improve soil quality, sequester CO₂, and make the carbon credits market accessible to farmers through digital technology.

Through the use of sustainable agricultural practices such as the use of biochar, minimum tillage, and the cultivation of cover crops, up to 5.75 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year can be sequestered in the soil. Utilising these opportu-

nities would significantly support cotton cultivation through

- additional income through the sale of carbon credits;
- a reduction in the use of expensive pesticides and fertilisers;
- optimised soil quality and yields through soil improvement methods; and
- optimised water retention capacity of the soil and thus greater water availability for crops.

This initiative has the potential to be an ecological and economic game changer that radiates far beyond Africa. It could finally reward small-scale cotton farmers south of the Sahara for what they achieve every day. The Aid by Trade Foundation is therefore committed to further exploring access to carbon credit markets for CmiA-verified small-scale farmers—for the benefit of the climate and of small-scale cotton-growing communities.



COUNTRY
SPOTLIGHT

Benin

9%

Increase in profitability among participating smallholders (in predecessor project)

Fully Seizing the Opportunities
of Organic Cotton

Among the four African countries that produce cotton in accordance with Cotton made in Africa Organic, a special focus was placed on Benin in 2025; it was one of the first countries where the Aid by Trade Foundation became active. Also in 2025, the foundation participated in the consortium project, “Fostering strong partnerships to integrate Benin’s growing organic cotton sector into global supply chains”, which will run until 2027. The consortium—which includes the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK, the Organisation Béninoise pour la Promotion de l’Agriculture Biologique (OBEPAB), cotton trader Reinhart, the Société pour le Développement du Coton (SODECO), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and AbTF—supports small-scale farmers in converting to organic cotton cultivation with CmiA Organic verification. This helps to prevent the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilisers and further expands the organic cotton sector in Benin.

Its success is based on imparting competence and experience:

- The project aims to increase the number of certified organic small-scale farmers in Benin.
- It includes appropriate training for farmers through special training materials and personnel.
- Topics extended beyond organic cultivation practices to include basic business management skills, knowledge regarding financial management, and market access opportunities. The latter are made possible by, for instance, the corporate partners of the Aid by Trade Foundation.

There is much to suggest that these comprehensive measures for implementing CmiA Organic will lead to success. The predecessor project alone led to a nine percent increase in profitability among participating smallholders in Benin.

From Cotton Cultivation
to Textile Production

The project “Fostering strong partnerships to integrate Benin’s growing organic cotton sector into global supply chains” aims to bring together actors in the cotton supply chain and strengthen the resilience of cotton-growing communities. This approach benefits small-scale cotton farmers in several ways. For instance, organic farmers in Benin can grow healthy crops at significantly lower costs; this leads to an increase in income, better health, and better soil quality.

In addition, Benin is successfully establishing itself as a new sourcing and production hub for textiles and apparel, through the Glo-Djigbe Industrial Zone (GDIZ) Textile Park near Cotonou. Instead of Benin, as one of Africa’s largest cotton producers, continuing to export unprocessed fibre abroad, a domestic textile industry has been successfully established. This shortens the global supply chain, creates jobs, and keeps value creation within the country.

 **For more on this topic head to:**
Cotton Farmers in Benin Benefit From Organic Cotton Cultivation

 **MEDIA COVERAGE:** Coton : le Bénin parie sur le durable - Plan B, l’économie autrement - France 24



Shaping the Future of Cotton Through Dialogue

Stakeholder Engagement

Change cannot be achieved alone. It requires partners, trust, and common goals. It is only long-standing cooperation under these premises that has made possible what AbTF has achieved so far. The Aid by Trade Foundation continued down this path—towards sustainably shaping the future through cooperative gatherings—in 2025.

- The AbTF & ACF **Innovations Club** heralds a new era of collaboration, focussed on the latest developments in agriculture. Since 2023, it has been a place where experts come together to exchange ideas and share knowledge with the aim of making real progress. In April 2025, stakeholders from 13 countries met in Benin to discuss forward-looking solutions in the field of soil health and biochar. The three-day event bridged the gap between practice and science and opened up a dialogue on how climate-friendly agriculture can be scaled up as part of the Cotton made in Africa initiative.
- At the meeting of the **Regional Programme for Integrated Cotton Production in Africa** (PR-PICA) held in April 2025 in Douala, Cameroon, CmiA presented its approach to integrated pest management, aimed at reducing risks to humans and the environment while protecting productivity. The conference was attended by leading representatives of the cotton sector in eight cotton-growing countries in Africa as well as by industry experts.
- The 21st **Annual Conference of the African Cotton Association** (ACA), held in May 2025 in Dakar, Senegal, provided invaluable insights into the future of Africa's cotton industry. Under the theme "Strengthening the Competitiveness of African Cotton Sectors: Innovation, Sustainability, and Shared Growth", the event brought together global stakeholders from the cotton sector. Cotton made in Africa participated in the panel on "Sustainable Intensification of Cotton Production: Strategies and Innovations", sharing CmiA's vision for a competitive and sustainably intensified cotton sector in Africa and demonstrating how collaboration, innovation, and sustainability can create lasting change in the continent's cotton sector.
- June 2025 saw a two-day kick-off event for the project "**Transitioning the cotton sector in Benin to climate-friendly practices**", implemented under the **Global Environment Fund** (GEF). The approximately 30 participants who met in Cotonou, Benin, represented ministries, UN organisations, private-sector actors in the cotton industry, and representatives of NGOs and universities. The CmiA representative for West and Central Africa participated in the event and contributed to a working group on marketing and market access for organic cotton.
- In September 2025, **AbTF** and **African People and Wildlife** (APW) organised three-day **classroom training** events in Lusaka, Zambia, and in Bariadi and Singida, Tanzania, on community engagement. The participants were agricultural advisors from four CmiA partners. They were introduced to African People & Wildlife's Community Engagement programme, as adapted to the cotton sector by AbTF and APW, and they shared their feedback.
- For partners of Cotton made in Africa, the **CmiA regional workshops** held in 2025 provided a welcome opportunity to share experiences, discuss challenges, and exchange new ideas. At the CmiA Regional Workshop for East and Southern Africa in **Maputo, Mozambique**, one insight was central to discussions about climate change's increasing threats to cotton cultivation: without the close involvement of every single small-scale farmer and recourse to their traditional knowledge, current challenges cannot be overcome. In November 2025, AbTF invited francophone partners to a CmiA regional workshop in **Cotonou, Benin**. Representatives of CmiA partners from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo, as well as from a verification body, engaged with AbTF representatives and the CmiA consultant for West and Central Africa. Topics of the three-day workshop included an exchange of views on the revision of the CmiA Standard in 2025 and exercises and discussions on risk assessments, stakeholder analysis, and more.

The CmiA Community Cooperation Programme



The Community Cooperation Programme: Driving Impact Beyond Cotton



Placing people at the centre of cotton production is one of AbTF’s core tasks. This is because making cotton production future-proof mainly means enabling the people involved in it to live better lives. That includes access in the village to a safe source of clean water, a school, sanitary facilities, and basic medical care as well as financial and infrastructural support for entrepreneurial ventures and women’s empowerment.

The CmiA Community Cooperation Programme (CCCP) follows a bottom-up approach and places great emphasis on supporting projects that originate from communities themselves and are co-financed and implemented by CmiA partners. A very important aspect of the CCCP is that the communities that benefit from its projects can develop a sense of ownership, which goes hand in hand with a feeling of responsibility for tasks such as the upkeep and maintenance of boreholes once they have been handed over to the communities. By 2025, a total of 93 projects had been implemented, benefiting tens of thousands of cotton farmers and their families. The projects conducted in 2025, which are presented below, were developed within the framework of the CmiA Community Cooperation Programme after a needs analysis of audited local CmiA partners before being implemented together with them and in close cooperation with the village communities. They give small-scale cotton farmers and their families in Africa a chance at a better future.

PROJECT OUTPUTS (2009–2025)

EDUCATION

144	Classrooms
67	School canteens
55	School gardens
3	Girls' dormitories
12	Teachers' houses & admin blocks
33	Buildings equipped with solar panels

GENDER

109	Women's clubs established or supported
7	Other women's projects

HEALTH

218	Water boreholes
563	Latrines
8	Health centres
6	Other health projects
3	Programmes collecting & recycling pesticide containers

COOPERATION PROJECTS IN 2025, FIGURES IN EUR K



541	Disbursed project funds
72	AbTF administrative overhead
253	Funds reserved for future years



Building Stronger Communities Together

Zambia:

IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COTTON-GROWING COMMUNITIES

Project partner:

HIGHLANDS COTTON TRADING LTD



With financial support from Mrs Christl Otto, the CCCP worked with CmiA partner Highlands Cotton Trading Ltd to implement development measures in various village communities in the areas of health, education, and women’s empowerment.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Support for two women’s clubs to kick-start poultry husbandry (purchase of chickens; training in animal health and basic business skills)
- Provision of delivery beds (15) & bedding sets (110) for a local hospital
- Drilling of five boreholes (one at a school)
- Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) training for communities
- Construction of three classrooms (one block) and three latrine blocks; provision of furniture

BENEFICIARIES

- Two women’s clubs (53 club members & 2,124 community members)
- One hospital
- 217 pupils at school
- Community members at borehole locations (1,882 direct and 5,802 indirect beneficiaries)



Côte d'Ivoire:

**SONGONDA MODEL
VILLAGE**

Project partner:

**SOCIÉTÉ D'EXPLOITATION
COTONNIÈRE OLAM (SECO)**



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Setting up an adult literacy centre where courses can be held
- Repair of an existing water pump; drilling of four boreholes
- Construction of a latrine block
- Establishment of a village savings & loan association
- Creation of environmentally friendly cooking areas for eleven households
- Distribution of vegetable seeds and work equipment (ten work oxen; three seed drills)
- Vaccination campaigns against poliomyelitis
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) training for water committees and community members

BENEFICIARIES

- 2,610 community members



In the past, girls and women from the villages of Tobenko, Touala, Nadonankaha, and Siakadugou had to travel two to three hours to fetch water from the nearest water pump—unless they resorted to unsafe water sources. This has now changed. SECO developed the model village of Songonda to further strengthen the community of cotton farmers by providing infrastructure and construction support.

Benin:

LITERACY COURSES FOR WOMEN FARMING ORGANIC COTTON

Project partner:

ORGANISATION BÉNINOISE POUR LA PROMOTION DE L'AGRICULTURE BIOLOGIQUE (OBEPAB)

Many small-scale cotton farmers in the Cotton made in Africa initiative never had the chance to go to school, with women making up the vast majority of those affected. Being unable to read or write makes it difficult to read contracts, keep business records, or confidently participate in community decisions. To change this, the project successfully provided practical literacy training to boost their skills and self-confidence. Building on the successful CCCP project completed in 2024, this initiative was successfully expanded due to high demand. It offered advanced classes for past participants to continue their learning, alongside new beginner courses to empower even more villages.



PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- *Literacy courses for women.*
In the Djidja and Aklampa regions, CmiA Organic cotton producers successfully completed training

BENEFICIARIES

- 160 female cotton farmers and their families

WITH FINANCIAL
SUPPORT FROM
S. OLIVER



Women are economically underrepresented in many rural communities in Africa. Their entrepreneurial potential is far from being fully realised. For this reason, OBEPAB has initiated projects for women in the villages of Kandi, Aklampa, and Djidja to gain entrepreneurial experience. They learn to successfully generate income in the long term by selling products from their harvests in local markets.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Shea butter for cosmetics production in Kandi (45 women)
- Processing of peanuts & soybeans in Aklampa (40 women)
- Processing of peanuts & soybeans in Djidja (40 women)

BENEFICIARIES

- 125 female farmers and their families

Benin:

BUILDING THE BUSINESS SKILLS OF WOMEN FARMERS

Project partner:

ORGANISATION BÉNINOISE POUR LA PROMOTION DE L'AGRICULTURE BIOLOGIQUE (OBEPAB)

Burkina Faso:
BELCÉ SCHOOL EXPANSION

In the village of Belcé, Faso Coton ensured a significant development boost for the local school complex because the existing structures, whose construction had been supported by a previous CCCP project, no longer offered enough space for the growing student population from Belcé and surrounding communities.

Project partner:
FASO COTON

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Construction of an additional three classrooms at Belcé school
- Provision of 39 table-benches
- Distribution of school materials
- Beneficiaries: 87 pupils and their families



Water Access, Community Progress

Benin:

IMPROVING WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

Project partner:

BÉNIN COTON SA

It is one thing to drill a well to provide people with access to drinking water. It is another thing for the water station to be maintained and for access to water to be guaranteed for everyone. Furthermore, it is important to raise awareness through WASH training so that people are more conscious of how they use water and practise hygiene. The project was implemented together with Bénin Coton SA in the two remote villages of Gnokourokali and Honco 1 in northeastern Benin—with participation from the village communities, for whom this project represents great progress.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Construction of two boreholes in two communities
- Construction of one latrine
- WASH training for the community
- Establishment of management committees for the boreholes in each village

BENEFICIARIES

- 6,249 community members from two villages



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Installation of eight boreholes with manual pumps
- Training of village nurses on hygiene measures and the prevention of waterborne diseases
- Implementation of WASH training, for village nurses to share this knowledge with community members
- Support for the creation of water management village committees

BENEFICIARIES

- Up to 12,289 community members from eight villages, including 6,310 women

Chad:

IMPROVING WATER AND SANITATION SERVICES

Project partner:

COTONTCHAD SN

For many cotton farmers in Chad, access to drinking water is a fundamental problem. Girls are often assigned the task of fetching water for the household from a borehole, which may be a significant distance from their homes. In consequence, many girls walk for miles on unsafe paths. Frequently, this time-consuming task also causes them to miss school. Since 2025, this problem has been consigned to the past for eight villages in Chad; CotonTchad SN drilled eight drinking water wells, and hygiene-promoting measures were conducted as well.

Benin:

**IMPROVING WATER
AND SANITATION
SERVICES**

Project partner:

**LE LABEL COTON
DU BÉNIN S.A.**



Access to drinking water is a vital need in many communities in Benin, each village facing specific challenges. Together with local leaders, the needs of the communities were assessed, and access to water was prioritised along with the improvement of sanitation and good hygiene in the region. As a result, the construction of three boreholes as well as latrines was successfully completed to provide the communities with safe drinking water and dignified sanitation facilities, laying the groundwork for a healthier future. Local authorities were actively involved in the project to ensure compliance and site selection, reflecting a successful, community-driven approach to addressing these critical needs.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Construction of three boreholes (hand pumps)
- WASH training for community members
- Creation of management committees for the boreholes in each village
- Installation of three latrines

BENEFICIARIES

- 5,814 community members from three villages

Mozambique:

**COTTON FOR SAFE
WATER**

Project partner:

SAN-JFS

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

- Drilling of five boreholes with manual pumps
- Creation of five water management committees
- WASH and maintenance training for the communities

BENEFICIARIES

- 10,015 community members

The project successfully supported six rural, cotton-growing communities hit hardest by water scarcity. Due to a lack of public investment, women and girls previously had to walk long, difficult paths to reach unsafe water. To change this, new water systems with hand pumps were installed to improve health and living conditions directly. To keep these systems running for the long term, the project built on local ownership; water committees and women-led savings groups were established to manage and fund ongoing maintenance. Targeted training and the active involvement of women and youth have successfully secured a reliable water supply while championing gender equality in the region.





Regenerative Cotton Standard®: Two Continents, One Aim—Moving Agriculture Forward

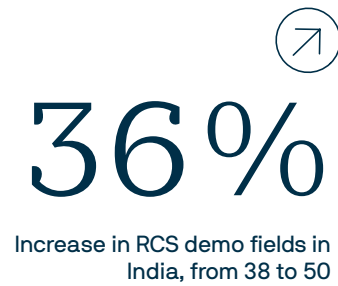
KEY FIELD-LEVEL RESULTS

41,600	RCS-verified farmers
2	Cultivation countries (India & Tanzania)
19,600	Tonnes of RCS-verified lint cotton
46,400	Hectares of land under RCS cultivation
3	Verified managing entities

The Regenerative Cotton Standard (RCS) is currently being implemented in Tanzania and India through a holistic approach. A key component is the introduction of regenerative farming methods to cotton farmers. In addition to securing and restoring the fertility of agricultural soils, these methods bring tangible benefits to agricultural communities by preserving biodiversity and animal welfare. 2025 was a decisive year for RCS—and a successful one too. Following its establishment in Tanzania, the Regenerative Cotton Standard delivered strong results in the Indian state of Maharashtra. It became clear that the standard lives up to its claims: preserving nature, increasing soil quality, keeping ecosystems intact, supporting biodiversity, ensuring animal welfare, and systematically building up the climate resilience of smallholders.

INDEPENDANT VERIFICATION

An independent verification carried out in 2025 noted impressive results for farmers in both India and Tanzania, who achieved significant year-on-year improvements. The 2025 RCS verification results show that more than 75 percent of the indicators received either excellent (41.3 percent) or very good (36.3 percent) ratings on average. Partners performed best in transparency and fairness in cooperation (4.5 out of 5), decent working conditions (4,1 out of 5), and reduction and safe use of synthetic inputs (4.1 out of 5).



MEDIA COVERAGE:
The Great Cotton Question,
Textilwirtschaft



India

Approximately
5,000 farmers
implemented RCS.

- The number of RCS demo fields in Maharashtra increased from 38 to 50. As a result, opportunities for smallholders to access innovative cultivation methods also grew.
- Different biological pest management methods, such as pheromone traps and biopesticides, were introduced, to great appreciation from farmers.
- Positive changes were made to animal welfare in terms of open grazing practices.



Tanzania

Compared with the previous
year, the number of verified
RCS farmers increased to
approximately 36,600.

- Improved market access for crops grown in rotation contributed to greater resilience for small-scale farms.
- Training for smallholders and effective cooperation with authorities ensured the preservation of protected areas and endangered animal species.
- Soil health improved and the proportion of organic soil components were increased.
- Natural pest control methods were increasingly used.



“Bokashi and biochar are outperforming conventional synthetic inputs”



We spoke with
Dorina Nathaniel
Agriculture Field Supervisor
Alliance Gineries Ltd

How can small-scale cotton farming remain efficient and productive despite climate change and market shifts? Combining regenerative farming methods that improve soil health with initiatives to empower women in cotton-growing communities is a promising approach, says Dorina Nathaniel, an agriculture field supervisor at Alliance Gineries Ltd.

Dorina, how does Alliance Gineries support small-scale farmers in revitalising degraded farmland?
Alliance supports small-scale farmers by offering training on diverse topics, including bokashi and biochar. These practices promote soil fertility and resilience by helping reduce reliance on expensive synthetic inputs, restoring degraded soils, and enhancing climate resilience using local resources.

Why is soil quality preservation so important for environmental stewardship, stable incomes, and climate change resilience?
As a significant carbon sink, healthy soil is crucial for the well-being of the planet and future generations, because it reduces the need to buy synthetic fertilisers and helps small-scale farmers achieve consistent crop yields, retain moisture, and improve water absorption.

How are bokashi and biochar produced and used in cotton cultivation?
Bokashi and biochar are tailored to turn agricultural waste—specifically cotton stalks—into valuable carbon-rich soil amendments. Instead of burning the stalks, farmers turn them into biochar by packing dry stalks into a cone-shaped pit and setting the top alight to cook the stalks without oxygen; this reduces harmful gases and turns the stalks into sterile, porous biochar. The biochar is then crushed and mixed with livestock manure, rice bran, and cotton gin trash; this mixture is fermented without oxygen to create nutrient-rich “biochar compost”. Hands-on training at field sites is offered to the community with AbTF’s support.

Have similar soil improvement methods already proven impactful?
They are, in fact, outperforming conventional synthetic inputs. Lead farmers reported an average crop yield increase of 57.7 to 65.8 percent as well as stronger root biomass, thicker stems, and larger cotton bolls. This method alleviates nutrient stress, supporting growth even in low-fertility areas. Replacing imported synthetic fertilisers and pesticides reduced costs by 74.5 percent. Net profitability per hectare increased by over 80 percent. In water-scarce regions, crops treated with this mixture remain vibrant up to two weeks longer than those treated with chemical fertilisers. Traditionally seen as waste, cotton stalks and maize cobs can be transformed into tonnes of biochar. By applying the best practices demonstrated by lead farmers, abandoned plots have been revitalised and, within just one season, become productive again.

What would help scale up the use of biochar among cotton farmers in the future?
Given that smallholders encounter significant labour, capital, and resource constraints, scaling biochar use up requires practical solutions tailored to each village’s needs. The manual labour needed to gather, transport, and chop tough cotton stalks is a major barrier. That’s why Alliance will implement a centralised trash pyrolysis system converting “gin waste” into biochar. At the start of the cropping season, application-ready biochar-bokashi compost will be delivered to farmers along with training in its use, especially for women.

The Good Cashmere Standard[®]

GCS KEY RESULTS

12.5m	GCS-labelled textiles
71	International retail and brand partners from 13 countries
130	Supply chain partners globally
2m	Goats
4,100	GCS-verified farms
12	GCS-verified cashmere producers
1,100	Tonnes of dehaired, GCS-verified cashmere
12	Countries processing GCS-verified cashmere into textiles



Market and Supply Chain Results

Now in its fifth year, The Good Cashmere Standard is driving positive change in cashmere production. It is the world's largest standard for verified cashmere, with 12.5 million GCS-labelled garments entering the market in 2025—more than twice as many as the year before. In the space of one year, the number of retailers and brands partnering with GCS increased by 20 percent, to 71, as companies including Magasin, Mango, and Nordstrom joined long-standing partners such as H&M, J.Crew, and The White Company.

The basis for this success is GCS's continued focus on animal welfare as well as the social and environmental aspects of cashmere production in Inner Mongolia, including the facilitation of full transparency in the textile supply chain. Innovation is crucial to achieving the goals of GCS. It is not just about technology but about a mindset of continuous improvement and challenging conventional knowledge—always with the ultimate goal of improving cashmere goats' welfare.



GCS Success Factors

Direct lines of communication with production areas are key for a sustainability standard. The Good Cashmere Standard has made establishing and maintaining these connections a priority in recent years.

Reliability Is Based on Transparency

By sourcing GCS-verified cashmere that has been verified by independent third parties, our partners are getting more than just a sustainably produced raw material. The cashmere's journey is also traceable from the sales shelf back to its origin in Inner Mongolia—a key capability in times of increasing governmental regulation and rising consumer demands regarding transparency and animal welfare.

In 2025, GCS began collaborating with TextileGenesis®, one of the foremost companies in traceability platforms, to take an important step towards further strengthening transparency throughout the cashmere supply chain.

This system not only builds trust between brands, retailers, and consumers but also helps companies meet growing regulatory and market requirements by enabling digital, secure, and scalable tracking of material flows. The partnership complements GCS's mission to make cashmere production credible and verifiable.



Support and Information

GCS is proud of its partners. With enthusiasm and perseverance, they fulfil the standard's demanding requirements. This can be challenging. That's why The Good Cashmere Standard supports farmers and managing entities in multiple ways. In 2025, GCS organised ten workshops on animal welfare with cashmere herders, covering eight managing entities and reaching 231 farms. In addition, 23,000 printed copies of GCS documents, such as teaching and information materials, were handed out to all managing entities for farm-level distribution. These materials contain detailed information on various aspects of animal welfare—friendly cashmere goat husbandry in accordance with GCS specifications.



In-Person and On-Site Engagement

Local experts for animal welfare organise and lead workshops on GCS topics. On journeys through Inner Mongolia, they gain insight into what is happening on pastureland and maintain constant communication with GCS herders and partners to learn how they are getting along and what challenges they face.

23,000

Printed copies of teaching and information materials distributed



A 24/7 Digital Knowledge Base

However, other issues are just as important when it comes to staying on track. Trainers, auditors, and producers are adopting an innovative tool for GCS implementation: the innovative digital training platform of the Aid by Trade Foundation. As an indispensable part of the extensive training programme, it contains a knowledge library, courses for newly enrolled GCS herders, and training materials on various aspects of animal welfare in the form of texts, images, videos, interactive tools, and quizzes. The platform's modular structure also allows for training courses to be adapted, for example, to address local conditions.

Model Farms: The Look and Feel of GCS

Key elements for the successful implementation of the standard at the farm level are face-to-face exchange as well as observing, studying, and understanding best practices regarding The Good Cashmere Standard. This is where a growing number of GCS's model farms come into play, with three now active in Inner Mongolia. Launched by GCS and its partners, they are characterised by an intense spirit of innovation and pioneering work in animal welfare. To further disseminate best practices, model farms are technically and materially enabled to conduct training sessions with the support of the AbTF team and its partners. Model farms also open their doors to interested herders several times a year.



For more on this topic head to:
thegoodcashmerestandard.org/gcs-model-farms/



“Our goats are members of the family”

In the expansive traditional herding lands of Arbas Sumu—in Otog Banner in Ordos, China—Chaoluomenqiqige, a herder with a deep understanding of animal husbandry, runs a cashmere farm together with her husband, Zhaonashun. Their dedication led them to embrace The Good Cashmere Standard in 2019, a commitment that culminated in their farm being designated a GCS model farm in 2023. In this interview, they describe how GCS has changed farming practices and how running a model farm has redefined their role within the herding community.

We spoke with

Chaoluomenqiqige
Woman Herder Running a GCS Model Farm
Otog Banner, Ordos, China

Chaoluomenqiqige, you run a GCS model farm. In your opinion, what is the most fundamental requirement for this designation?

The primary prerequisite for becoming a GCS model farm is to shift your mindset; my wish is not to see goats merely as animals or as a source of income but rather as members of the family. As herders, our responsibilities and obligations extend beyond managing the goats’ habitat, food, and water; they also involve paying constant attention to their mental well-being. Ensuring that goats have the company of their own kind, are free from mental distress, and receive timely medical care to meet their behavioural and welfare needs—this is the duty we must fulfil as herders.

What tasks come with being a model farm, and who supports you?

We are implementing meticulous management of the farm in strict accordance with The Good Cashmere

Standard and are gradually transforming our grazing practices. At the same time, we actively promote animal-welfare-oriented husbandry practices to neighbouring herders, with strong support from the Aid by Trade Foundation, J.Crew, and our partner Suzhou Niushi Wool Textile Co. Ltd. For example, we were able to expand our goat sheds and install professional goat-bathing equipment.

What do you see as the biggest differences between a GCS model farm and a conventional cashmere goat farm?

Previously, the focus was solely on high production and high yields, resulting in haphazard grazing and extensive farming practices. This changed with the adoption of The Good Cashmere Standard. In addition to ensuring healthy goats and high-quality cashmere, the standard protects grasslands and treats the goats with care. Conventional farming habits are focussed on short-term profits; we are pursuing a long-term, sustainable path.



Chaoluomenqiqige and her husband Zhaonashun, a herding couple from Ordos, China. ↗



Goat-bathing equipment provided by AbTF, J.Crew, and Niushi ↗



A new goat shed, built with the support of AbTF, J.Crew, and Niushi ↗

What makes GCS cashmere beneficial for you as a cashmere herder?

By improving animal welfare conditions and adopting scientific goat-rearing practices, goats fall ill less frequently, lamb survival rates increase, and cashmere quality improves, thereby commanding higher prices and leading to a significant increase in income. Grasslands gradually recover, ensuring that future generations can continue to graze and rear goats. Furthermore, GCS’s technical and material support enables our cashmere to gain easier access to lucrative high-end markets.

Are you confident that other farmers recognise the good practices of GCS and are willing to work towards adopting them as well?

There is a very high level of recognition and enthusiasm within the community. Having witnessed first-hand how our pastures have improved, our goats have become healthier, and our income from selling cashmere has increased, a lot of farmers are realising that the old goat-keeping methods no longer work. There is a willingness to follow our lead, change farming practices, and cooperate in implementing sustainable grazing methods.

Bringing People Together for the Future of Cashmere



GCS Unit Meeting in Shanghai

The future of sustainable cashmere production was also at the centre of a three-day congress in Shanghai, China, from 11 to 13 November 2025. Experts and cashmere producers participated in discussions about the history and current landscape of The Good Cashmere Standard, the importance of traceability, and the latest updates to the GCS verification scheme.

The event featured insightful presentations about trends in animal farming, both globally and specifically in China. It highlighted the importance of animal welfare, with a look at what's next for sustainable cashmere. Further important points at the event included the exchange of experiences with local stakeholders regarding how the standard's requirements are implemented on cashmere goat farms and how important complete transparency of verified cashmere fibres is in the supply chain; the latter topic is gaining importance due to regulations in the EU and the USA.

The valuable insights gained from this conference will be incorporated into the standard's further development, with a view to further promoting animal welfare, transparency, and sustainability in cashmere production.



The Good Cashmere Conference in Hamburg

For two days in spring, the heart of sustainable cashmere production was beating in Hamburg, Germany. On 25 and 26 March, renowned experts from the global cashmere and textile industry, retail and brand partners of GCS, and international non-governmental organisations gathered in the Hanseatic city, alongside scientists, to discuss progress, challenges, and successes in the production of sustainable cashmere.

Through an impressive series of lectures and panels, participants gained insight into the full range of topics arising from the work of The Good Cashmere Standard and from shaping the future of sustainable cashmere production: innovative technologies, efficient implementation of animal welfare aspects, preservation of the natural environment of Inner Mongolia and its biodiversity, and maximum transparency in the supply chain in view of increasing regulations and rising consumer demands.

The conference provided valuable input into how GCS's success story can be continued, be it through blockchain technology for tracing cashmere fibres in the supply chain, new scientific findings on goat welfare, or methods of preserving the biodiversity of Inner Mongolia in times of climate change. The conference therefore proved to be a key event for collaboratively shaping the future of the cashmere industry and navigating a complex landscape of evolving expectations and emerging opportunities.

MEDIA COVERAGE: Good Cashmere Conference focuses on animal and environmental protection, transparency and innovation, Fashion United





GCS Impact Highlight

The 2025 Animal-Related Animal Welfare Assessment

The inspection of GCS farms by independent auditors is one of the fundamental components of The Good Cashmere Standard. The topic of animal welfare naturally occupies a large space here. Alongside complete traceability for cashmere fibres, this is a major advantage of The Good Cashmere Standard: looking beyond animals' physical needs. While meeting these requirements matters, it is equally important to ensure that their subjective experiences are positive. This requires adequate physical resources (housing, feed, space), effective herd management to ensure good living conditions and health, and the monitoring of social interactions between people, animals, and the environment.

To investigate these factors, an Animal-Related Animal Welfare Assessment (ARAWA) was carried out in 2025. ARAWA assessments provide a comprehensive overview of the health status of a herd, going beyond standard verification procedures. That offers support in identifying non-conformities and providing a holistic overview of the herd's well-being. ARAWA assessments investigate whether the resources provided actually lead to improved animal welfare outcomes.



2,300

Cashmere goats

MILESTONES REACHED SINCE THE START OF THE PILOT PROJECT IN 2024

- The scope has been extended from 72 farms in 2024 to 100 assessed farms, from 3 to 9 regions in Inner Mongolia, and from 2,000 to about 2,300 cashmere goats.
- Based on the data obtained, the general health status of the animals was classified as "good." No signs of underlying health problems were found.
- Wintertime audits were also carried out to gain better insights into the living conditions of the cashmere goats during severe weather conditions.
- The review is conducted independently.

OUTLOOK

The Aid by Trade Foundation will continue this crucial project and expand it by 2027.

INTERVIEW

“Good animal farming is not just about physical health”

We spoke with

Dr Alan McElligott
Associate Professor
Animal Behaviour and Welfare
City University of Hong Kong

Dr Alan McElligott, an associate professor of animal behaviour and welfare at the City University of Hong Kong, is an internationally renowned expert in goat behaviour. In this interview, he speaks about the special relationship between goats and human beings and about why good animal husbandry has such a significant impact on the welfare of goats.

Alan, generally speaking, goats—like other farm animals—aren't considered particularly intelligent. Is that a mistake?

Yes, that is a clear mistake. Goats are highly intelligent. They can learn a complex, two step task—pulling a rope, then lifting a lever—to access food, and they can remember this solution for at least ten months (and probably a lot longer). They also interpret human pointing gestures to find hidden food, and they adjust their behaviour depending on whether a person is facing them or has their back turned. Furthermore, goats can discriminate emotional valence in human voices and prefer happy human faces over angry ones. Their cognitive abilities are far more sophisticated than commonly assumed.

How do goats recognise a person's emotional state?

Goats use multiple senses. They can read human facial expressions and prefer to approach happy faces over angry ones. They also tell the difference between a happy and an angry human voice; for example, they notice when a familiar voice changes from happy to angry and adjust how they look towards the sound. Furthermore, when goats hear a familiar person's voice, they can connect it to that person's face. Essentially, goats are very sensitive to human emotions.

And do they also react to how a goat keeper treats them?

Absolutely. Goats remember individual humans and the valence of past interactions. In problem solving tasks, they show audience-dependent behaviour: they gaze

earlier and longer, and they alternate their gaze more frequently towards a forward-facing (attentive) person than towards a person with their back turned. Goats also approach humans for help when food is inaccessible. Positive, calm handling encourages approach; angry or stressful treatment leads to avoidance and increased fear.

Is their reaction to the keeper based on short-term or long-term experiences?

Both, but long-term memory is probably particularly important. Goats can remember individual humans for at least a year and can carry the effects of past treatment for years. One study found that female goats who had suffered neglect several years earlier became more optimistic after moving to good care than did goats who had always been treated well, showing that release from long-term stress can shift mood positively. A single angry episode is likely to be remembered, but accumulated positive or negative experiences over time shape a goat's willingness to cooperate. Consistent, calm handling builds lasting trust.

What does this mean for goat farming on farms?

Good animal farming is not just about physical health but also about respectful, positive relationships. Keepers should use reward-based handling—such as food or gentle stroking—and should avoid shouting or sudden movements. Because goats read our emotions, a calm, happy keeper leads to calm, manageable goats. Providing enrichment and respecting their social nature improves welfare, reduces stress, and makes farming safer and more productive.

Soft Fibres, Strong Partnerships

Behind the soft touch of cashmere lies a complex supply chain, one that The Good Cashmere Standard is actively transforming. At the heart of this transformation are committed partnerships that drive real change the ground. Two prominent examples from the United States illustrate how industry leadership can elevate animal welfare, empower communities, and protect critical ecosystems: J.Crew, the first GCS partner from the United States, and Nordstrom, the latest.

J.Crew Tangible Impacts, From Cashmere Sourcing to Market Results

A US-based multi-brand retailer known for classic style and quality apparel, J.Crew has shown significant dedication to sustainable sourcing, with 96 percent of all J.Crew Group cashmere in 2025 being either made from recycled cashmere or verified under The Good Cashmere Standard. J.Crew's engagement extends far beyond membership, as demonstrated by its active participation on the GCS Advisory Board, which contributes directly to the standard's evolution and strategic direction.

Our highlights with J.Crew in 2025 include the following:

- *Continued support for the GCS Model Farm programme in Inner Mongolia.* This initiative provides technical and financial support to herders transitioning to more sustainable cashmere production methods. The Model Farm concept, initiated by the Aid by Trade Foundation, promotes best practices by hosting up to four training courses annually for peers and neighbouring farms, thereby fostering a vital network of knowledge sharing and practical skill development.
- *Animal welfare research.* Collaborative efforts supported a goat-bedding study, conducted by AbTF, which has been instrumental in strengthening the scientific foundation of animal welfare standards within GCS.
- *Infrastructure for well-being.* Together with AbTF, J.Crew funded the construction of a new, enrichment-focussed goat shelter. This innovative design promotes natural behaviours and significantly improves living conditions for the goats.
- *On-the-ground training.* In conjunction with AbTF and a GCS-verified farm, hands-on training programmes were co-hosted for cashmere producers. These sessions directly imparted best practices in animal care and sustainable herding techniques, equipping herders with the tools to make a long-term impact.



J . Crew

Nordstrom



Nordstrom Defining Quality and Consumer Connection Through The Good Cashmere Standard

The US department store chain Nordstrom, known for its merchandise and customer service, sources the majority of its cashmere fibres from The Good Cashmere Standard. This commitment aligns with Nordstrom's central purpose, which has long been to help customers feel good and look their best. Liz Lipton-McCombie, Nordstrom's head of environmental, social, and governance strategy (ESG) and of sustainability, highlights the intrinsic value of this partnership, saying, "The GCS partnership allows our company to easily explain the values behind our cashmere products, at the product level with GCS hang tags and in our annual impact report. With a transparent approach to safeguard-

ing animal welfare and achieving a traceable supply chain, we can follow every step of the process to ensure the claims we make are credible."

GCS plays a key role in Nordstrom Made's commitment to leaving the world better than we found it, in part by embedding animal welfare in its definition of quality. "It's why we work to support the communities where we operate, take responsibility for the impacts of our business, and foster a welcoming and supportive culture for every Nordstrom customer and employee," underlines Lipton-McCombie.

The dedicated efforts of both J.Crew and Nordstrom, as prominent US partners, powerfully illustrate how brands can move beyond compliance to become catalysts for a more ethical, sustainable, and humane cashmere industry. This aligns with GCS's foundational goals of protecting animals, supporting communities, and preserving the environment.

We spoke with

Liz Lipton-McCombie
Head of Environmental, Social,
and Governance Strategy (ESG)
and of Sustainability
Nordstrom

People & Network

The Aid by Trade Foundation values the strategic commitment demonstrated by its extensive network of partners throughout the global supply chain. This network encompasses agricultural communities engaged in cotton and cashmere cultivation, global supply chain partners who align economic success with social and economic responsibility, and the foundation’s own dedicated governance boards and operational teams. Their collective efforts are instrumental in driving transformative change and optimising impact within the cotton, cashmere, and broader textile industries. This directly underpins the Aid by Trade Foundation’s mission to both transform fibre and textile production through its cotton, cashmere, and transparency standards and to make a decisive and measurable contribution to a future in which farmers, herders, and their communities can thrive, nature can flourish, and sustainable raw materials are verified and traceable from their origins to the final product.

ABTF BOARDS

Our independent boards are composed of internationally respected representatives from various interest groups across the public, private, and voluntary sectors. As of 31 December 2025, the boards included the people listed below.

ABTF BOARD OF TRUSTEES

With a minimum of six and a maximum of twelve members, the Board of Trustees meets twice a year in person to ensure that the foundation’s main objectives are being implemented.

Prof. Dr Michael Otto	Founder and Chair of the Board of Trustees, AbTF / Honorary Chair of the Supervisory Board, Otto Group
Dr Wolfgang Jamann	Deputy Chair of the Board of Trustees, AbTF / Executive Director, International Civil Society Centre
Johanna Adotevi	Commercial Director, Ivoire Coton SA and Faso Coton SA
Olaf Gieseler	Managing Director, CURATAX Treuhand GmbH Steuerberatungsgesellschaft
Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven	Managing Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Dr. Laly Lichtenfeld	Co-Founder and CEO, African People & Wildlife
Mathias Mogge	Secretary General and Chair of the Board, Welthungerhilfe
Stephanie Silber	Managing Director, Otto Stadtlander GmbH; Vice President, Bremen Cotton Exchange
Torsten Stau	Executive Buying Director (Indirect Spend / Non Food), REWE Group Buying
Munir Zaveri	CEO, Alliance Ginneries Ltd
Prof. Dr Johannes Merck	Honorary Trustee & General Representative, Foundations Michael Otto

ABTF ADVISORY BOARDS

With their diverse areas of expertise, members of the advisory boards serve as key dialogue partners and advisors to management.

THE COTTON ADVISORY BOARD

Marco Bänniger	Head Trader, Paul Reinhart AG
Franziska Benninghaus	Head of Strategic Project Management (Non Food), REWE Group
Alessandra Fiedler	Advisor & Portfolio Coordinator, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Cora Gehrmann	Head of Sustainable Product & Quality Management, Bonprix Handelsgesellschaft mbH
Fritz Grobien	Managing Partner, Albrecht Müller-Pearse & Co; President, Bremen Cotton Exchange
Theresa Heering	Senior Advisor, FSS Partnerships & PR, Welthungerhilfe
Louisa Lösing	Deputy Head of Business and Biodiversity, Global Nature Fund
Lydia Schmidt	Senior Sustainability Manager, Tchibo GmbH
Alina Tremmel	Expert for Quality and Sustainability, Human Rights at Lidl Stiftung & Co. KG

THE GCS ADVISORY BOARD

Maria Bauer	Animal Welfare Issues Specialist – Textiles, FOUR PAWS International
Alva Cheung	General Manager, Marketing Erdos Sheng Lin Ltd.
Virginia Halsig	Head of Product Management Knits & Cashmere, PETER HAHN GmbH
Anna Heaton	Fiber & Materials Lead: Animal Materials, Textile Exchange
Hélène Jessua	Sustainability Director, Zadig&Voltaire
Katherine O'Hare	VP of Sustainability, J.Crew Group
Brian Yu	General Manager, Artwell Holdings Limited

In 2025, we had to say farewell to the following board members: Dr Wolfgang Jamann (Executive Director, International Civil Society Centre) and Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven (Managing Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH) from the Board of Trustees; Alexander David (Lidl Stiftung) from the Cotton Advisory Board; and Marlene Kirchner (FOUR PAWS International) from the GCS Advisory Board. New members joined in 2025.

COTTON, CASHMERE, AND TEXTILE VALUE CHAIN PARTNERS

The Aid by Trade Foundation actively involves various supply chain partners, from cotton companies to traders, spinners, and textile producers. By nurturing robust relationships and good cooperation, the foundation aims to enhance its collective impact and contribute to transforming textile value chains. In 2025, about 3,000 partners within global supply chains worked with AbTF to establish credible sustainable sourcing strategies.

STAKEHOLDERS

Through participation in industry-wide initiatives, ongoing dialogue, and knowledge exchanges—as well as collaborations and project partnerships with industry peers, innovators, scientists, NGOs, and thought leaders—AbTF seeks to enhance overall performance, foster innovative solutions, and promote responsible practices in raw material and textile production, from the original raw material to the final product.

Corporate Partners

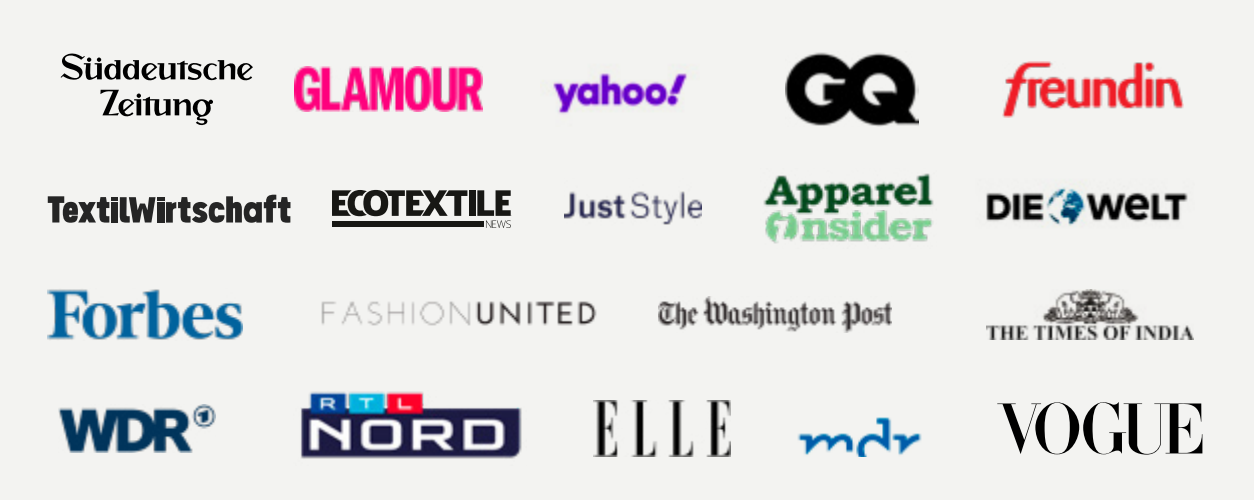
&Other Stories	Gucci
Aldi Nord	Güldenpfenning
Aldi Süd	H&M
Alexander McQueen	Hakro
All Saints	Hanson
Anita Hass	Heine
Anson's	Hersfelder Kleiderwerke
Aritzia	Himalaya Clothing
Arket	Hofer
Asos	House
Avon	Hugo Boss
Banana Republic	IKEA
Balenciaga	Isa-Traesko
Baur	J.Crew
Bestseller	J.P. Boden
Bonprix	Jack&Jones
Bottega Veneta	Jolo Fashion Group
Brands Fashion	Kaufland Stiftung
BRAX	Kering
Brioni	Label Crew
Casmere Victim	Levi Strauss & Co
comma	Licus
Complete Clothing Company	Lidl
COS	Liebeskind
Country Road	Lilysilk
Crate & Barrel	Limango
cropp	Linex
CWS	LPP
Damson Madder	Lululemon
Dibella	Madewell
E.Breuninger	Magasin du Nord
Eric Bombard	Mango
Ernsting's family	Manor
Everlane	Marc O'Polo
Fashion ID	Marimekko
FL Textil	ME+EM
From Future	Miles
Fynch Hatton	Mint Vilvet
Galeria	Modissa
Galeries Lafayette	Mohito
GAP	Mos Mosh
Goldner Fashion	Muji
Green Workwear	Name It

Nordstrom
ONLY
OTTO
Otto Group
OVS
Oxford Industries
Papierfabrik Louisenenthal
Penny
People's Republic of Cashmere
Peter Hahn
PKZ Burger-Kehl & Co
Portwest
Primark
P&C Düsseldorf
P&C Hamburg
Reserved
Rewe Group
s.Oliver
Saint Laurent
Samsøe Samsøe
Schmidt Group
Selected
Sheego
Shinsegae International
Singular
Sinsay
Stefanel
Tchibo
Teamdress
The White Company
Toom Baumarkt
Upim
Van Graaf
Venus
W.F. Gözze Frottierweberei
Weekday
Weitblick
Witt
WoolOvers
Wünsche
Zadig&Voltaire

Raising Awareness in Public

In 2025, AbTF strengthened its position as a global voice for responsible cotton and cashmere production, as well as traceability in textiles, through credible and extensive communication activities. The year was once again characterised by a media presence that was as diverse as it was international. The Aid by Trade Foundation succeeded in securing coverage in a number of high-profile media outlets for its activities. Tangible results included 560 media clippings about AbTF's work, generating 193 million media impressions and an advertising value equivalent (AVE) of EUR 3.55 million. Regular industry updates are shared with stakeholders and partners via its social media platforms on LinkedIn and Instagram and via its newly introduced Cotton & Cashmere Newswire.

Coverage was obtained from a wide variety of sources, including the following:



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Aid by Trade Foundation
Werner-Otto-Straße 13 b
22179 Hamburg
Tel. +49 40 25 76 75 50
info@abt-foundation.org

www.aidbytrade.org
www.cottonmadeinafrica.org
www.thegoodcashmerestandard.org
www.regenerative-cotton.org

Responsibility
Christina Ben Bella
Head of Communications
christina.benbella@abt-foundation.org

Text & Translation
Holger Diedrich
Project Manager Public Relations & Communication
holger.diedrich@abt-foundation.org
Le Loup Translations

Design
Katrín Grimm, Julia Klaus
studioblend.de

Photography
African People & Wildlife (Laly Lichtenfeld, Emmily Tunuka, Ngoteya Wild)
Werner Bartsch
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Martin J. Kielmann
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Information on trademarks: For reasons of readability, the ® symbol is omitted in continuous text, where it would otherwise have been used to identify Cotton made in Africa, The Good Cashmere Standard, and the Regenerative Cotton Standard as officially registered trademarks.

Note on key figures: Some of the figures in this report have been rounded to simplify presentation.

Together with our global stakeholder and partner network, we look forward to another year of making decisive and measurable contributions to supporting producer communities in becoming more resilient to market and climate changes, ensuring decent working conditions, protecting nature and animal welfare, and transforming supply chains to become more transparent.

