



Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) Position Document on GM Contamination in Textiles made from Organic Cotton Fibres

The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is a processing standard, which mandates using minimum 70% certified organic fibre, such as organic cotton. Organic Cotton fibre, which is used as a starting material for production of textiles, is not certified by GOTS. GOTS accepts natural fibres that are certified 'organic' or 'organic - in conversion' according to Regulation (EC) 834/2007, USDA National Organic Program (NOP), or any (other) standard approved in the IFOAM Family of Standards for the relevant scope of production (crop or animal production). The requirement to get certified to GOTS standard commences from the cotton gin.

Organic Cotton & Genetic Modification

While some countries have forbidden the cultivation of GM cotton (such as Turkey) there are others where GM Cotton cultivation has made substantial inroads.

Organic Cotton is not expected to contain any genetically modified content, regardless of whether it was cultivated under organic or conventional practises. The EU regulation 834/2007 states that Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and products produced from or by GMOs are incompatible with the concept of organic production and consumers' perception of organic products.

Despite these facts, recently there have been few cases where different parties have tested certified organic textile products (including those certified to GOTS) and have reported presence of GM contamination at unexpected levels in these products.

This causes anxiety within the organic community from certifiers, producers, brands, retailers and consumers. The very concept of organic is thence questioned by consumers who are committed to incorporate a sustainable, environmentally friendly and clean lifestyle that they have chosen to follow.

ISO IWA 32 for GM screening of Cotton

Based on a concept that was initiated by GOTS, the Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA) fully funded an ISO IWA (international Workshop Agreement) on the matter of GM testing of cotton. The project was helmed by the national standards body of the Netherlands, NEN, in coordination with RIKILT. After a multi-stakeholder consultation, the ISO IWA 32 protocol was officially made publicly available by the ISO in April 2019.

The protocol offers the textile industry a definitive qualitative testing guidance for screening of GMOs in cotton. This will eliminate uncertainty in testing results should test laboratories follow the protocol. The protocol also establishes that GMO screening is only possible for cotton production stages until (including) unprocessed cotton.

The ISO IWA 32 is available for purchase at <https://www.iso.org/standard/76418.html>.



Adoption of ISO-IWA 32 for GM screening of Cotton by GOTS

GOTS has issued an advisory to its accredited Certification Bodies informing them of a decision to adopt the ISO IWA 32 testing protocol when it comes to screening for the presence of GMOs in cotton. Accordingly, testing will now be suggested only until the stage of unprocessed cotton and the said protocol will have to be followed by appropriately qualified laboratories. GOTS requires that testing laboratories should be ISO 17025 or GLP qualified for the tests being conducted.

Current Guidance to Certifiers by GOTS within the Implementation Manual

The current guidance to Certifiers related to GMO screening contained within the Implementation Manual stands superseded by the latest advisory. Necessary changes will be done within the on-going revision process of GOTS. The new version will be released in April 2020.

GOTS and other organisations

Adventitious contamination of GMOs in the organic sector is also a fact that GOTS recognises. GOTS continues to have discussions with fellow organisations, such as Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA; <http://www.organiccottonaccelerator.org/>) and Textile Exchange (www.textileexchange.org) to develop a common strategy to address possible GM contamination in the organic cotton chain.

GOTS is actively engaged with several brands and retailers to address this issue in a positive manner so that the industry and consumers are both appropriately informed of the products they purchase and are also safeguarded from claims that cannot be verified.

As the world's leading standard for processing of organic fibres, GOTS is committed to ensure credibility of organic claims at every processing step. GOTS is a dynamic standard and shall keep responding to new challenges by engaging with responsible stakeholders and scientific community.

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Rahul Bhajekar
Managing Director
bhajekar@global-standard.org
Updated : July 2019