



## HAITI COTTON STUDY

*Exploring the possibility of the Haitian smallholder farming community becoming an active participant in the global supply chain for cotton.*

Cotton was once the fourth largest agricultural export from Haiti before it all but disappeared in the early 1990s. Now with support from Timberland, the Smallholder Farmers Alliance (SFA) and the Clinton Foundation, Impact Farming is undertaking a feasibility study to look into the possibility of reintroducing cotton, this time grown exclusively by smallholder Haitian farmers.

If the study proves successful, the opportunities for cotton farming in Haiti are significant, and companies like Timberland can one day transition from being supporters of the SFA agroforestry enterprise, as they





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are now, to being its customers. Central to the study will be exploring the possibility of organic certification or participation in the Better Cotton Initiative.

This new initiative builds on the Timberland-supported SFA sustainable agroforestry model in which smallholder farmers plant trees in order to earn the seed, tools and training that results in significantly higher yields, and income, from their field crops.

A feasibility study conducted last year by the SFA looked at expanding that basic model to include the cultivation of moringa trees for export. That study led directly to the debut in February, 2016 of a new product being sold in the U.S. at Whole Foods Market stores nationwide: Kuli Kuli's Moringa Green Energy shots made with moringa sourced from smallholder farmers in Haiti.

As was the case with moringa, the cotton study will look at how to use the introduction of an export crop as a way to leverage increased yields on food crops for local Haitian markets as well as triggering the planting of much-needed trees. When carefully designed to benefit smallholder farmers, the introduction of export crops can play an important part in building domestic food security.

Moringa and cotton are quite different, of course. Moringa is a tree that gets intercropped with beans and other seasonal produce. Cotton will itself be treated as a seasonal crop that is planted in rotation with food crops, in sharp contrast to the large-scale dedicated cotton plantations found in many other parts of the world.

An important component in this study is that the SFA will be working with Université Quisqueya, Haiti's leading private university, to explore the possibility of a new smallholder cotton research center that will study cotton growing best practices, undertake field studies and link with universities and research facilities in other countries engaged in similar work.

**(1) Painting titled "Picking Cotton" by Haitian artist Michaele Obin (Indigo Arts Gallery, Philadelphia). (2) A cotton field, circa 1934, at an experimental farm run by the Haitian agricultural school. (3) Workers at a cotton gin in the Haitian city of Gonaives, circa 1980, which has since been converted to the regional headquarters of the UN Peacekeeping Operation in Haiti (MINUSTAH).**



**Women farmers in Haiti, long denied the same support as their male counterparts, have tremendous untapped potential to improve productivity and incomes in the agricultural sector. Photo: A. F. CORTES.**

The study is being undertaken with a clear understanding that there are many challenges to be addressed, a small selection of which are:

- can dryland, rain-fed cultivation of cotton produce the desired results;
- what are the guidelines for growing it in rotation with basic food crops;
- what is the cost-benefit analysis of organic certification and/or participation in in the Better Cotton Initiative;
- what are the best approaches to protecting against pests and viruses, particularly within the framework of organic cultivation;
- where is the best source of starter seed that is going to work well in Haiti and result in the desired fiber length, noting that no genetically modified seed will be considered;
- what will be the investment required to support the training of smallholders in cotton growing, as well as the infrastructure needed to support the export of raw cotton; and
- how can smallholder women farmers have a unique role in the supply chain for cotton, including the possibility of women-owned businesses to remove the seeds from cotton fiber.