

**Nominated for the Public Eye Positive Award 2007
by Helvetas, Switzerland**

Marks & Spencer plc

Headquarters:	London, England
Branche of trade:	Retail
Turnover / Profit :	£ 7.8 billion / £ 856 million (2005)
CEO:	Stuart Rose
Owned by:	Publicly-traded company
Employees:	70,600 (2006)

Summary

Marks & Spencer (M&S), a giant of the British retail sector, recently launched a Fair Trade clothing label that uses organically-grown cotton from Mali. For the next three years, M&S guarantees to purchase Malian cotton on a scale never seen before, and is committed to sustainable production practices.

Organic cotton production in Mali began with a pilot project that Helvetas started with 25 small farmers in 1998. Today, more than 1,700 cotton producers are taking part. M&S has been an official project partner since August 2006 and hopes to make a large contribution to the project's future success. Swiss firms such as Switcher, Migros and Reinhart also use cotton from Mali for their products, and are participating in the development of social and ecological standards.

Responsible Corporate Behavior

Like Switcher, Migros and Reinhart in Switzerland, Marks & Spencer, a giant of the British retail sector, has worked for the promotion of organic cotton production in Mali. M&S is committed to supporting the farmers of West Africa and to integrate African cotton into its products. As of summer 2006, cotton products from Mali can be found in more than 450 M&S department stores in England and a further 150 M&S retail outlets worldwide, and sales are encouraging. The cotton is certified by FLO (Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International) and is monitored by Ecocert Bio for its adherence to the customary E.U. regulations for organic farming. M&S first included Fairtrade products in its collection two years ago. Today, the collection contains more than 50 products, and it is enjoying steady growth.

Organic cotton production in Mali started when the Swiss development organization Helvetas launched a pilot project in 1998. At the time, Mali's cotton market was ailing and in danger of collapse due to the distorted global market structure. Cotton production suffered from inconsistent quality and falling crop yields. Along with 25 interested producers, the organizations Institut d'Economie Rurale (IER) and Compagnie Malienne du Développement des Textile (CMDT) also

took part in the project. While the IER brought its know-how in organic pest control, the CMDT undertook (as a former monopolist in the cotton market) an important role in processing and marketing, as well as in the counseling and education of farmers. The organization of the project was successfully completed with the establishment of the farmer organization MOBIOM (Mouvement Biologique Malien) in 2004.

Marks & Spencer made substantial purchase guarantees to the project and hopes to double the quantity of cotton purchased every year. A volume of 320 tons of organic cotton has been fixed for 2008; an order of this scale is unheard of. Although over 1,700 producers took part in cotton production in 2005, M&S has even bigger plans for the future: to guarantee fair wages and secure workplaces to roughly 5,000 farmers.

Achievements

The Malian organic cotton project found a reliable purchaser and partner in Marks & Spencer. M&S actively searches for dialog and a close partnership with farmers and NGO representatives from the North and South, and through cooperation with the label organizations FLO and Ecocert BIO, the retailer guarantees transparency and fairness in the production process. In the textile market, M&S also presents the advantages of organic cotton production to newcomers, and encourages them to make the switch.

Further improvement

The advancement of the farmer organization MOBIOM holds great potential. Within three years it should be strong enough to emerge as an independent authorized agent that can ensure the continuation of the organic cotton project. Representatives from MOBIOM, M&S and Helvetas held a seminar in Bamako, Mali, in late October 2006 to discuss the future of the farmer organization. M&S plans to assist MOBIOM financially, to advise in long-term financial planning, and to help in the search for additional markets, especially in the area of crop rotation products (sesame, peanuts etc.).

So far, M&S has made its mark only in raw material production. However, the processing conditions could and should be improved, too. This area bears the biggest potential for future improvement of Marks & Spencer's organic and Fair Trade commitment.

Further Information:

- www.fairtrade.org.uk/downloads/pdf/five_guarantees.pdf
- www.helvetas.ch
- www.labourbehindthelabel.org
- www.marksandspencer.com
- www.oxfam.org.uk