



Sumit Gupta, India Representative, GOTS.

GOTS, an ideal tool for sustainable textiles

Increasingly, companies are making apparel, home textiles, and fibre-based products such as mattresses that include organic cotton, organic wool, or other organic fibre. The bottom line is that finished or processed textile products that imply or lead the consumer to believe that the final product is certified organic must meet either the USDA organic regulations or the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS).

GOTS is the worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres, including ecological and social criteria, backed up by independent certification of the entire textile supply chain. GOTS certification ensures organic status of textiles, from harvesting of the raw materials, through environmentally and socially responsible manufacturing up to packing & labelling in order to provide a credible assurance to the end consumer. So the final product is made from organic fibres and processed in an eco-friendly manner using low impact dyes & chemicals. Even stringent waste water norms (environment criteria) and social criteria are followed throughout the production process.

In India, more than 1,000 facilities are GOTS certified. In an exclusive tête-à-tête with Editor of the Indian Textile Journal, **Sumit Gupta, India Representative, GOTS**, shares the importance of GOTS certification and how it is different from other certifications.

ITJ Editor: Please let us know more about Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) and how it all started in India?

Sumit Gupta (SG): In 2002, people from four leading organisations in organic food/ textiles met and discussed that there should be a uniform worldwide organic textile standard. These organisations were (IVN), Germany, Soil Association, UK, OTA, USA and JOCA, Japan. There were some standards in organic food and a few in organic textiles as well, but the consolidated global approach was missing. At the meet, the need for a united global approach with regards to organic textile standard was recognized and an international working group was formed. After

that, consultations were held till 2005 with various stakeholders.

Finally in 2005, GOTS version 1.0 was released. In India, the first GOTS certificate was issued in October 2006. Maral Overseas Ltd, one of the largest vertically integrated textile companies in

India, was one of the three companies that received the first GOTS certification in India. Today, GOTS is the worldwide leading textile processing standard for organic fibres, including ecological and social criteria, backed up by independent certification of the entire textile supply chain.



ITJ Editor: What is the modus operandi behind giving this certificate?

SG: GOTS is the standard organisation. We have an International Working Group and Technical Committee functioning with multiple stakeholders across the globe. Our job is to define the standard. On March 1, 2014, GOTS version 4.0 was released and is currently into effect. Along with GOTS version 4.0, we also released a new document, GOTS manual, which is a kind of interpretation of GOTS. The manual is for the industry as well as auditors to help them understand the implementation part.

The second aspect of this modus operandi is the independent Certification Body. There are 17 certification bodies in the world, accredited by GOTS, to issue GOTS certificate and chemical approval letters on behalf of GOTS. Out of 17, eight certification bodies are having local offices in India. A manufacturer or producer can go to any certification body for the certification. GOTS—as a standard organisation—is perfectly neutral.

The third aspect is the manufacturer or the licensee. For example, if a garment manufacturer needs a GOTS certificate, the first step is to choose a certification body, get in touch with them, fill the application form, pay the fee and get inspected including the social and environment criteria. Once the certifier is convinced and everything is in place, the manufacturer will get the GOTS certification. For a dyes/chemical/enzyme manufacturer, MSDS is a necessary starting document along with the application form.

ITJ Editor: What are the advantages the consumer finally gets?

SG: To the end consumer, GOTS certified product means products that are free from any chemical residues, which can be harmful to their health. End product testing is an integral part of GOTS' certification procedure. The products are safe for skin. It also acts as a guarantee to the consumer that their clothes are not stitched by children from other

countries as this issue is a growing concern worldwide. GOTS certification means all the social and environment compliance-related criteria (chemical waste management, waste water discharge, fire safety, etc.) are followed.

ITJ Editor: India has a number of certifications [like Oeko-Tex, Eco-flower and many more] for the textile industry. What differentiates GOTS from other certifications?

SG: GOTS is an ideal tool for sustainable textiles and is recognised all over the world. If a company or a brand has a goal of producing sustainable textiles, then GOTS is an ideal option. If a company adheres to all the norms with regards to organic fibres, and all the social compliances and environmental policies are in place, one can be very sure that not only the product, but process is also safe. It also provides safe working condition for the workers. If chemical waste management is appropriate and norms for waste water discharge are followed, it is always good for the communities residing nearby.

GOTS has adopted a holistic approach. Within the organic textile standards, we have done the maximum harmonisation possible. Before GOTS came into existence, there were about 6-7 different certifications in the field of organic textile. Getting multiple certifications for the same company is difficult and it also increases their compliance cost. So, we combined these certifications and consolidated them into one. Apart from minimum 70 per cent organic fibre content, GOTS takes into consideration both the environmental as well as social criteria.

ITJ Editor: How much percentage of organic materials should be used in order to deserve the certification?

SG: In GOTS, there are two label grades: 1) Organic and 2) Made with 'x' per cent organic. In the first label grade, which is the higher one, minimum 95 per cent organic fibre content must be there. In second label grade, there is 70 per cent to 94 per cent organic fibre content. For example, a garment may have 70 per cent organic cotton, about 10 per cent nylon and about 20 per cent of other natural fibres. Synthetic fibres are restricted to only 10 per cent – be it nylon or viscose fibre.

According to the new rule with regards to fibre composition, virgin polyester, acrylic fibre, angora wool, asbestos, carbon and silver fibres are not allowed. While we banned virgin polyester, at the same time, we increased the limit for recycled polyester. So if you are using certified recycled polyester fibres/yarns, you can use it up to 30 per cent of the total fibre content. Earlier polyester (both virgin and recycled) was restricted at 10 per cent only. This decision has given more flexibility with regards to designing and performance of the fibre composition part.

The second major change is regarding composition of the regenerated fibres like viscose. Generally viscose is at par with synthetic fibres, which is maximum at 10 per cent. But, if your source of wood pulp is certified organic or FSC certified, then you can use that fibre up to 30 per cent.

ITJ Editor: Does GOTS certification cover the entire value chain?

SG: GOTS certification is applied right from the ginning process to the end product. The whole supply chain must be GOTS certified as well. At the ginning stage, the cotton crop must be certified organic as per accepted farm standards.

ITJ Editor: Globally, how is GOTS placed?

SG: Globally, there are more than 3,000 facilities certified as per GOTS standard. These facilities include production as well as trading. In 2013, we received a tremendous positive response from Europe. Germany showed a 66 per cent growth with 109 new facilities while a 73 per cent growth was registered in Portugal. Switzerland had 27 per cent increase in GOTS certified facilities in 2013. India is still leading with more than 1,000 GOTS-certified facilities. We are at the top position since 2008.

There are some brands that use GOTS label on the end product till retail; while there are some others with a different strategy. They buy GOTS certified garments/ home textiles but do not use GOTS label in retail. The last ones are content with GOTS certified fabrics only for their garments. We are extensively working with these brands to educate them about importance of social compliance at garmenting step so that the whole supply chain can be brought under sustainable production principles.

ITJ Editor: What is the setup in India?

SG: In India, eight certification bodies are having local offices. Control Union is our largest partner in India while ETKO is second in terms of numbers. Other organisations present in India are OneCert, Ecocert, ICEA (RINA), CERES (Adivi), IMO & CCPB. As per the statistics for 2008, we had around 681 GOTS certified organic facilities in India. This figure has increased to 1,029 in 2013. This is more than 50 per cent increase. GOTS has a great growth story in India. India is also the largest producer of organic cotton and the largest exporter of organic textiles.

ITJ Editor: What are the latest developments in GOTS?

SG: Post release of version 4.0 in March 2014, we have uploaded a video that beautifully depicts the changes in Version 4.0 with respect to Version 3.0. This video has been a great hit and getting high hits and very positive feedback, specially from the technical staff of brands and manufacturers. The video is available on the link <http://www.global-standard.org/images/videos/GOTS4changes.mp4>. We are also making a short video clip to educate consumers, brands and retailers about sustainability and GOTS. The clip will soon be available on GOTS website and social media.

In India, GOTS is supporting Biofach-India (Nov 6-8, 2014, Kochi, Kerala) for the third time. The focus of the show is certified organic products, including textiles. The participation of textile sector has increased over the years in Biofach-India and we are hoping for even bigger participation in 2014 show. The organisers are also trying to get more textile buyers this year.