



benchmarking to BCI. The question is, at what point will BCI's standard be raised to the level of benchmarked programmes where these are superior? And when will data showing real performance down to the field level be available?

### Fairtrade externalities

Fairtrade International has been working with TruCost to try and benchmark Fairtrade 'conventional' cotton by looking at externalities, the positive and negative impacts of different production systems. While the data is not clearly localised or directly comparable, there are some interesting findings. The study looked at both environmental and social externalities, and found Fairtrade cotton (which includes a lot of jointly certified organic cotton) to be ahead, especially in areas like child labour, or overtime. That said, there was no clear income benefit from Fairtrade cotton over conventional, but a substantial benefit from Fairtrade cotton on greenhouse gases. Total farmer benefits overall were 13 per cent higher in Fairtrade. The biggest problem in Fairtrade is land use, due to lower average yields in organic-Fairtrade cotton.

Outside of the work done by standards, the International Institute for Sustainable Development, which has previously produced reports on the state of sustainability initiatives, has taken a close look at standards and biodiversity, including cotton standards. Agricultural standards are important, it says, as agriculture accounts for, "70 per cent of projected losses in terrestrial biodiversity due to widespread land conversion, pollution and soil degradation." This fact begs a big question beyond data: can mass market standards based on 'business as usual with slightly less damage' really address the challenge when they do not address fundamental questions of over-consumption and overuse of raw materials?

The report is timely to our discussion as it notes, "an absence of performance requirements and impact data makes it challenging for policy-makers to determine where standards are most effective in preventing biodiversity loss." And we can add that it makes it hard for brands and consumers to make the right choices.

The problem is compounded as the report notes that standard-based production tends to be based where it is easiest rather than where they are most needed and this, we can add, may drive standards to seek to benchmark with production that is an easy match (exceptions being standards like CmiA or Fairtrade, which seek to redress specific imbalances).

The report notes that, "Cotton certification appears to be under-represented in countries where cotton-related water use is most problematic..." The report also warns that standard expansion is likely to increase water impacts, as expansion so far, "only represents a marginal portion of the overall cotton water footprint, accounting for a mere seven per cent of global production."

Cotton standards need to make sure they address questions of water and indeed, soil, substantively. If the easy pickings are already taken, then expanding onto more difficult and marginal lands means stronger, and probably costlier interventions. Are the standards and their impact monitoring up to the job? If not, can data from studies such as this persuade verified cotton users, and standards raising money from users, to invest in identified gap areas, for example drip irrigation and improved water harvesting and management on a grand scale?

The report suggests policy makers should do more to set rules for the credibility of standards, and even contribute to ensuring the credibility of data (although there is little to suggest policy makers have an appetite for this).

## Hugo Boss publishes further LCA data

Hugo Boss has published a second edition of its Environmental Impact Valuation, which combines Life Cycle Assessment and Natural Capital Protocols. Cotton is identified as responsible for half of total impacts. The report however suggests that identifying fibre origins remains difficult, even with sustainability standards. This excuse is a bit thin, given the potential that exists for traceability, even when standards do not offer it. That said, this is a good step forward, and might lead to more companies opening up on their fibre sourcing. The graphic shows the cotton impacts identified in the company's report. ■

