



## I Am an Organic Cotton Bale

—Jimmy Wedel

I am an organic cotton bale, grown in the U.S. In real life I am 500 times this size, weighing approximately 500 pounds. My 500-pound size can typically be produced on less than one acre, depending on weather conditions. I can produce 1,217 t-shirts, 215 pairs of jeans, 249 bed sheets, or 4,321 socks. But I wasn't always organic. Twenty-five years ago I was grown conventionally with the help of numerous synthetically produced toxic pesticides and fertilizers. I will tell you how I got here.

As a Texas farmer, I began to make the switch after realizing the environmental damage I was causing. In 1992, my dad and farming partner, who was an avid friend of wildlife, came upon a pheasant nesting in a field near my house, where he was planting cotton. Upon seeing the mother sitting on her eggs, he opted to lift the planter and skip over the nest, rather than destroy it with the plow, thinking he had done his part to protect the birds.

The next day he informed my young children that he had saved the bird and nest, so we headed out to see the nest. However, instead of finding a pheasant incubating her eggs, she was lying near the nest of 17 eggs—because the planter was also applying a granulated insecticide, and when my dad raised the planter to skip the nest, some of the pesticide dropped out and the mother hen ate it, causing her death.

Although this story seems tragic, it has a happy ending, as

my wife gathered up the eggs and put them into an incubator. My young children watched them daily, and in a few days were excited to watch the eggs hatch. We then raised the birds until they were able to survive on their own.

Then I began to question the safety of the chemicals we were using, and the environmental consequences. The very next year I began converting my land to organic production, and that same year we founded the Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative to provide a mechanism to supply the organic textile industry.

Conventionally grown cotton, particularly that grown in the U.S., is sprayed with numerous toxic chemicals. Most conventional cotton is doused with toxic desiccants just a few days before harvest. Those toxic chemicals can remain in the fiber you wear. So, just as you care about what you put into your body...you should care about what you put on (or next to) your body as well. 🐾

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