

ORGANICS

Organic cotton now grown commercially

THE FIRST ORGANIC COTTON planted on a commercial scale in South Africa was harvested on 29 May at the Hanneline farm in Limpopo.

Woolworths, in cooperation with ComMark, Cotton SA, the Organic Exchange and the Agricultural Research Council (ARC's) Institute for Industrial Crops, had established this project in 2004 to produce clothing made from 100% organic cotton.

"By creating new markets for organic cotton and transferring new farming knowledge and skills, the production of organic cotton in South Africa is a means of significantly enhancing the livelihoods of farmers, their families and communities," said ComMark's Stephen Hanival.

Hein Schröder, quality manager for Cotton SA, said that the Organic Exchange, Cotton SA and the ARC have worked closely to support farmers who are making the transition to organic farming practices.

For this project, Woolworths, which had been advocating that

farmers grow organic cotton for a long time, approached the Willemse family through Cotton SA.

Jacques Willemse had been growing cotton conventionally for nearly 20 years. He explained that although the organic cotton will initially yield less than conventional cotton, over a period of three to four years farming this way will prove cheaper. Currently, he has 1 000ha under cotton of which 20ha is organically grown.

At the fifth annual Organic Exchange Conference held in Monterey, California in November last year, it was announced that Woolworths was the world's third-largest consumer of organic cotton.

"We're thrilled that this first commercial-scale planting has been such a success and believe more strongly than ever that organic cotton offers excellent prospects," said Darren Todd, Woolworths group head of design, sourcing and technology. – *Vivienne Martin*

SA's first commercial organic cotton being harvested by hand.

VIVIENNE MARTIN

