

Welcome address by
Shri Atul S. Ganatra
President, CAI
at the Inaugural Session of
Cotton India 2018
(Domestic Conference)
held on 9th April 2018
in Mumbai

Dignitaries on the Dias, Distinguished Invitees, Speakers, Panelists and Delegates from all over the country, members of media, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me immense pleasure to extend a hearty welcome to you all at this COTTON INDIA 2018 domestic conference.

It has been a longstanding practice at CAI to organise two domestic conferences every year - one in Mumbai and the other at some upcountry centre to provide a forum to all stakeholders in the cotton value chain to discuss their problems and find solutions. Unfortunately, this healthy and rich tradition of the Association was discontinued for some time. However, in the interest of the cotton trade, all my colleagues on the CAI Board have decided to revive this tradition and today's domestic Conference is being organised by the CAI after a gap of about 8 years.

The next domestic conference will be held in Aurangabad in the first half of September 2018 and on behalf of the CAI Board, I would like to assure this august gathering that the CAI will continue to provide this platform and organise two domestic conferences every year in future as well.

Friends, I am humbled by the overwhelming response from all stakeholders in the cotton value chain and the large participation of delegates from all over India. I wish to thank each one of you for acceding to our request and traveling long distances to attend this conference at a short notice.

I am also deeply indebted to the distinguished speakers and panelists for acceding to our request.

We are privileged to have amongst us, Madam Textile Commissioner Dr. Kavita Gupta ji, who has acceded to our request, most graciously accepted our invitation and spared her invaluable time to be here today with us despite her busy schedule. I am indeed grateful to you Madam.

Shri Pasha Patel ji, who is the Chairman of the State Agriculture Price Commissioner, is indeed a true friend of the cotton fraternity more particularly the cotton farmers. We are indeed grateful to him for readily agreeing to bless us with his auspicious presence and guide us about the issues confronting the cotton farmers.

Friends, as you all are well aware, cotton is grown in India across ten states under diverse agro-climatic zones. Land holdings in India are relatively small and about 60 percent of total acreage under cotton in India is rainfed and is dependent on the vagaries of the nature. Despite all odds, the Indian cotton sector has registered an enviable growth and carved a niche for itself in the world cotton market and as you all are well aware, today India is the world leader in the field of cotton production with a crop of over 360 lakh bales of 170 kgs. each. It is the second largest consumer of cotton next only to China. The annual consumption of cotton in India is likely to reach about 330 lakh bales during the ongoing crop year on account of the fact that several new textile mills in Gujarat and other states have started operations resulting in about 35 lakh new spindles this year. India is also the second largest exporter of cotton in the world next only to USA and it also has a vibrant import market.

With over 122 lakh hectare acreage under cotton, India has by far the largest acreage under cotton in the world. In fact, over 1/3rd of the total acreage in the world is in India which clearly demonstrates the importance of cotton in the Indian economy.

I firmly believe that this spectacular achievement of the Indian cotton sector is not all. It still has a huge untapped potential which if exploited to its fullest, India will truly become a cotton super power in the world.

Although it has taken giant strides in terms of productivity, India is well below the world average. Against the world average productivity mark of 779 kilograms per hectare, cotton productivity in India is still hovering over 500 kgs. /ha. The availability of cotton in India will witness a sizeable quantum jump if our country achieves the world average productivity mark. Besides, there are several other areas where our country is lagging behind. Mixing, excess moisture due to pouring of water on the bales, poor quality of bale packaging, lack of uniformity in bale weight and different trading norms prevailing in different parts of the country, absence of contract sanctity and lack of training facilities are some of the areas which beg our serious and urgent attention.

The Governments, both at centre as well as at state levels are trying their utmost and providing various policy support initiatives to cotton farmers for increasing productivity. Our beloved Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has set a target of doubling the farmers' income by 2022. This is possible only when we achieve maximum yield. Our scientists and various NGOs are also supplementing the efforts of the Government and have embarked on various programmes to bring the set milestone to fruition but there is an urgent need for cohesiveness in all these efforts.

Recognising the importance of encouraging the farmers, we have decided to give awards to farmers at this Conference. Similarly, the Association has also decided to felicitate prominent achievers in other segments of the cotton value chain like ginners, brokers, textile mills and senior members of the trade. The idea of giving these awards is not only to recognise the outstanding and meritorious contributions made for betterment of cotton trade but also to encourage others to follow suit.

Friends, you all are well aware of the silent and invaluable work done by Shri Suresh Kotak for the betterment of the entire cotton sector and the volume of his achievements speaks for itself. Befittingly, Shri Suresh Kotak is called the COTTONMAN of India. The Association is proud to recognise his meritorious and outstanding services to the cotton sector at this Conference.

Farmers are the backbone of this nation. They use their farms, deploy their limited resources and toil hard to grow cotton which provides employment to all sectors of entire cotton value chain. It is therefore our bounden duty to ensure that they get a fair and remunerative price for their produce. I therefore feel that the target of doubling the farmers' income by 2022 set by Shri Narendra Modi ji is very just and fair and it echoes the sentiments of the entire cotton industry.

Recognising the importance of creating awareness amongst farmers and educating them to iron out inefficiencies in production techniques and also the marketing aspect, the Board of Directors of the CAI have decided to set up an All India Training Centre for Farmers in its Cotton Green premises. I am conscious of the challenges ahead in realising this dream. However, I am confident that with the support from all of you, we can achieve this goal.

There are a few other areas which need our immediate and urgent attention and despite the limitation of time, I feel it necessary to make a reference to them in my address. Although the country has switched over to the marketing of cotton on the basis of quality parameters rather than varieties, I still feel that there is some degree of reluctance amongst a major section of trade to adopt fully the quality-based marketing of cotton. Majority of the trade sticks to roughly about 2 percent sampling norm insofar as testing of quality parameters is concerned, whereas advanced countries like USA test 100 percent of their entire crop. By not increasing the sample size and the quality consciousness, the country is discounting its own cotton. I think this is a great injustice to the hardwork put in by our farmers.

We at CAI recognise the importance of quality-based marketing of cotton. Apart from changing its rules to provide HVI based testing of cotton for the purpose of quality-based marketing rather than varieties, CAI has also taken upon itself the mandate of setting up cotton testing laboratories across all major cotton growing states. The purpose is to provide to all those connected with the cotton trade, cost effective state-of-art testing facilities to encourage instrument-based testing of cotton in all states locally. The CAI has so far set up 13 cotton testing and research laboratories. However, many more such laboratories are needed to cater to the testing needs.

Looking to the enormity of this gigantic task, if we can strengthen the infrastructure set up by the CAI, we will eventually be able to test the entire cotton crop grown in India with bigger sample size.

Mixing, excess moisture due to pouring of water on cotton bales cotton, different trading norms prevailing in different parts of the country and lack of contract sanctity, are some of the areas that I would like you all to address in order to realising better price for our cotton and for orderly and smooth conduct of the trade.

We have provided a session for each segment be it textile industry, ginners, domestic and international traders to discuss issues confronting them and finding solutions. This conference will witness an exciting and intense discussion of issues and challenges facing the cotton industry. I urge you all to actively participate therein. On behalf of the CAI, I assure you that we shall make our best efforts to implement the suggestion emerging out of this Conference.
