

An Overview of Survey Respondents Interested in Organic Cotton Products

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Naturally colored, organic cotton products are a niche product sold in upscale markets at prices about 10 to 30 percent more than the same items made from conventional cotton (Fadiga, 2003; Goldbach et al., 2003). Two types of consumers purchase organic cotton products (Wang, 2007). One group has chemical sensitivities or allergies and needs to purchase these products for health reasons. The other group is environmentally conscious and purchases these products to help protect the earth. The organic cotton market has increased as major apparel manufacturers like Nike and retailers like Wal-Mart have added organic cotton products (Lin, 2009). The number of retailers selling organic cotton products as well as the number of brands being sold in the USA has increased from a few hundred to more than 1,200 (Wang, 2007).

Researchers report that the organic cotton production costs paid by farmers are about the same as those for cotton grown with conventional methods (Adler, 2006, p. 48). If this is the case, then the higher prices currently charged for organic cotton goods may reflect a premium marketing strategy and may leave room for additional niche markets. If the non-market environmental costs of cotton production are added, including the cost of the pollution caused by the chemicals used in conventional production, the retail price of a t-shirt made with conventional cotton will cost 15 percent more than an organic t-shirt (Wang, 2007).

Before Wal-Mart began to carry them, organic cotton products were not commonly sold in Hawai'i (Nolan, 2006; Nimon and Beghin, 1999). This lack of market information does not necessarily mean that the State's residents and visitors are not interested in purchasing organic cotton products. While cotton is not grown commercially in the State now, it has been in the past. [Hawaiian cotton or ma'o](#) is a native plant that was crossbred with other cotton strains to make commercial hybrids that are more resistant to insects that destroy cotton. This article presents results from a survey of 420 Hawai'i consumers to investigate who prefers organic cotton and who prefers conventional cotton.



*Ma'o (Gossypium tomentosum).
Photo: J.B. Friday*

The results of this study show that relatively small percentages of survey respondents of all ages and ethnic backgrounds prefer organic cotton products (see Table 1). Females, consumers between 18 and 25 years old and those that own no organic cotton products now are the respondents most likely to prefer organic cotton. Respondents were also willing to pay a higher price for organic cotton products based on their personal health and environmental awareness

Table 1. Summary of Survey Respondents Characteristics

Respondent Characteristic	Percentage of Respondents <i>(rounded to the nearest percentage point)</i>	Percentage of Respondents that prefer organic cotton products <i>(rounded to the nearest percentage point)</i>
Consume organic food	52	12
Percentage of organic food consumed		
<25	32	8
25-50	12	3
50-75	6	1
75-100	3	1
Don't know	48	11
Number of organic cotton clothing items owned		
0	82	20
1-5	12	3
>6	6	1
Male	34	8
Female	66	16
Caucasian	35	9
Japanese	24	6
Chinese	8	2
Korean	3	1
Other	30	7
18-25 years old	62	15
26-35 years old	14	3
36-45 years old	9	2
46-65 years old	10	2
66 years old or older	2	0
No answer	2	0

and concerns.

Hawai'i retailers may be able to expand the consumer base for organic cotton products by developing marketing strategies based on the organic cotton consumer profile presented here. At the same time, merchandizing organic cotton products using point of purchase displays and grouping all organic cotton products in one location would make the products more visible to potential consumers. This group of potential consumers is not large and merchandizing will be needed in order to target these consumers.

Literature Cited

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