

Organic in Action

Mecilla Project, China: Seed sovereignty within a novel cropping system



An initiative being co-developed by the Mecilla Project (China) and the Organic Research Centre (UK) aims to develop an innovative and eco-friendly cotton cropping system with a special emphasis on seed sovereignty, in the context of a farmer cooperative in north-west China. The consortium is seeking funding for Chinese farmers with the support of Chinese and overseas academics and agronomists to carry out practical agricultural research for environmentally sound, climate-resilient and economically sustainable organic cotton farming including the local production of seed lines.

The Mecilla Project is obtaining land in the Shanxi province and has employed a group of local farmers as contractors to grow cotton and other textile fibres there along with food crops under organic conditions. The Mecilla Project farmers want to make on-site seed production a key element of their activities, starting with a number of diverse seed lines from which they will develop cotton varieties adapted to both organic conditions and also a hemp intercrop. Using hemp as a subsidiary crop in cotton production offers improved pest control, soil health and economic diversification.

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Louisa Winkler
Organic Research Centre UK

About the [Macilla Project](#)

The Mecilla Project presents an idea for an integrated organic model farm in western China that is developed together with other relevant stakeholders from the international business and NGO communities.

The major idea is to combine the production of significant volumes of organic products, mainly organic cotton lint, with the education and training of small farmers. The overall goal is to offer small farmers in China new options to improve their livelihood, whilst at the same time improving the management of natural resources like soil and water.

With no other implemented project like it in China the Mecilla Project is a unique idea. It is firmly founded upon the principles of sustainable development, leading to land healing (a natural result of converting to organic production methods), social development (by means of providing training and initiating community events), whilst simultaneously delivering a pro-active solution to increased market demand for organic cotton (economic).

Stakeholders who support the idea of the Mecilla Farm Development concept involve a multi-national group of NGO's concerned about shrinking soil fertility and are supported by recognised international garment brands from Europe.

For more information, please visit www.mecilla.com

Although cotton and hemp are both widely grown and well understood, their combination

in a bi-crop situation is not; nor is there much published information on this topic. An appropriate layout and management regime must be established in which cotton and hemp plants can successfully be grown and harvested alongside each other. The Shanxi farmers would like to achieve this with a two-year field trial evaluating several designs of cotton hemp bi-crop system.

In Year 1, a small number of different layout options and management strategies will be tested in randomised block trials, and their performance measured. In Year 2, one to three of the more successful strategies will be re-tested on a larger scale. In both years, five to ten varieties of organic cotton (selected from preliminary

tests during the 2012 growing season) will be grown and evaluated within the intercrop systems. This phase of the project will contribute to the global development of sustainable, low-input cotton farming systems, and at the local level it will generate invaluable information about suitability of cotton lines under organic management in Shanxi.

Once the farmers are confident that they have found a reliable way of intercropping cotton and hemp, they can move on to inter-crossing, selecting and testing cotton lines showing high performance within the bi-crop situation, thus breeding specially adapted seed lines.



PHOTO: Training in the field with organic cotton expert Jens Soth



PHOTO: Intensive training and education is fundamental to the roll out of the Mecilla Project.

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Designed by Evonne Tan

Textile Exchange inspires and equips people to accelerate sustainable practices in the textile value chain. We focus on minimizing the harmful impacts and maximizing the positive effects of the global textile industry. Our signature program focuses on organic cotton value chains; improving lives for farmers, stimulating markets, and supporting best practice.

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