

BEYOND THE GRADE SHEET: ARE COTTON BUYERS MISSING SOMETHING?

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Introduction and Primary Certification

The Certified Cotton Gin Program serves as an information conduit between its member gins and spinning mills around the world. The Program currently represents forty-nine gins in the United States and one in Australia. These gins have a total annual production of approximately two million bales. Representing these gins, the Program informs cotton buyers and mills around the world of the increased value of buying bales processed at Certified Gins. These gins use good ginning principles, technical expertise, and avoid damaging or negligent ginning practices to consistently produce a better bale for the end-user. Each gin must meet the requirements of Primary Certification to become a Certified Cotton Gin.

To qualify for Primary Certification, a gin must:

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- Not use a water spray device for lint moisture restoration
 - Not use a lint reclaimer or any device that reintroduces motes into the lint bale
 - Have both before-mix point and after-mix point thermocouples installed in recommended locations
 - Have automatic high limit protection on each before-mix temperature controller
 - Have a contamination prevention policy that meets the minimum standards adopted by the Advisory Board
 - Have a minimum of a handheld meter to measure both seed cotton and bale moisture
 - Have trained personnel on the importance of the above issues
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The information Certified Cotton provides is best used in conjunction with classing data to determine the best bales to buy. Traditional classing data is used to determine if a bale has desired fiber characteristics such as color, leaf, length, strength, and micronaire. Certification addresses factors not considered by high volume instrument (HVI) testing, yet vitally important to cotton suppliers and users. For example, in the last five or six years, many gins have revived an old fad of using water spray devices to restore moisture to lint before baling. While the results of this practice can be very apparent (see picture below), damage normally appears after a period of storage. Damage can also be internal to the bale and not viewed until it is opened at a spinning mill. Classing data does not predict, nor detect damage from water spray devices. As a requirement, Certified Gins do not use water spray devices, so their bales are free from this type of damage.



The picture shows bales damaged by a gin using a water spray moisture restoration device.

Primary Certification also focuses on other areas of ginning that help predict better bales for buyers and mills. One problem that commonly plagues spinning mills is short fiber content. Short fiber content reduces processing efficiency and spinning quality. Because of this, foreign mills list it as one of their biggest complaints about United States cotton. Unfortunately, there is currently no direct measurement for short fiber content in traditional classing data. Certified Gins reduce the short fiber content in the bales they process in two key ways. One is they do not put motes back into the lint bale. Reintroducing motes increases waste during spinning and is perceived by mills to directly relate to increased short fiber content. Certified Gins are also required to have proper thermocouple placement and automatic high limit protection on their heaters, so they do not expose seed cotton to excessive heat and over-drying. Fiber that is too dry and brittle can break at weak spots during ginning. Broken fibers are inherently shorter which increases short fiber content. As a related factor, over-drying reduces the average fiber length in a bale as well.

The final requirements of Primary Certification — having a contamination prevention policy, moisture measurement standards, and trained personnel relating to these issues — have obvious benefits, but are found at very few gins. These requirements, while beneficial to the gin, are examples of the extra care that Certified Gins take to provide the best product for the mill. For example, a contamination prevention policy offers little to positively affect a gin's bottom line. In contrast, contamination's impact on production and efficiency are so great that many mills employ hundreds of people to sort each bale by hand to prevent contamination from entering their facility. The Contamination Prevention Policy in place at each Certified Gin assures mills that special steps have been taken to reduce the possibility that any contamination enters the bales they process.



Mill workers tediously separate each bale by hand to ensure that it is free from contaminants.

Promoting the Certified Cotton Brand

The Certified Cotton Gin Program helps gins on a technical level provide the best product for mill consumption. While this technical support is the heart of the Program, ensuring that the efforts of Certified Gins are conveyed to the mills is equally important. End-users of Certified Cotton need to know what it is, why it's better, and how to get it. The task of promoting the Certified Cotton brand has been a difficult process, but each month shows marked improvement. Our website statistics show that visitors to www.certifiedcotton.com have increased 500% in less than two years. The message of Certified Cotton has taken several forms in trying to reach cotton buyers and mills worldwide.

CertifiedCotton.com

The Program's website has been a critical access point for the Certified Cotton information since the program's inception. The site has been completely overhauled once and is frequently updated with information such as Certified Gin roster changes, policy updates, promotional videos, recent advertisements, and media coverage. A

feedback section has been added where users can submit comments, ask questions, or report problems to the Program Directors. One of the most significant pages on the site is the Certified Gin Roster. Each Certified Gin is listed on this page with their location, USDA gin code, and Certification number. The direct contact information, annual production, bagging type and additional Certification Ratings are available for each gin through a free sign up form. Buyers and mills use this information to compare prospective bale purchases with the gin code information of Certified Gins. Website statistics provide valuable information on the effectiveness of Program efforts such as advertisements, additions to the website, and global mailouts. Site statistic shows activity at over 1,200 unique visitors per month and growing. Another promising sign that the Certified Cotton brand is receiving world-wide attention is that Beijing, China has been the city with the largest number of visitors to the site for several months.

Print Advertising

While the internet is a proven tool in providing information to a world-wide audience, Certified Cotton has worked with several industry magazines to target key groups in the cotton supply chain. For the introduction of the Program, the focus was educating gins and growers that the Program was available, explaining how a gin should apply, and the benefits of becoming a Certified Gin. Advertisements were run in the *Cotton Gin and Oil Mill Press* and *Cotton Farming Magazine*. These ads featured messages introducing the Program and outlining the benefits of processing at a Certified Gin. The *Cotton Gin and Oil Mill Press* has been diligent in continued coverage on the Program as new information arises.

Advertising directed at cotton buyers and mills has been through the publications *Textile World*, *Textile World Asia*, and *Cotton International World Report*. The ads highlighted issues important to mills such as contamination prevention, water spray damaged bales, and the benefits of additional information about bales. Both magazines later featured educational articles about Certified Cotton's progress. The *Textile World Asia* article was especially helpful as it ran in Chinese, contacting an audience that because of language barriers had been very difficult to reach.

Bale Checklist

- ☒ Staple
- ☒ Strength
- ☒ Color
- ☒ Leaf
- ☒ Micronaire
- ☐ No Water Spray
- ☐ Safe Drying Temps
- ☐ Trained Gin Operators
- ☐ Contamination Prevention Policy

Are you missing some *critical* information about the cotton bales you buy?

Scorching
drying temperatures, water sprays on lint, contamination, and unqualified or uncaring operators can result in problems that don't show up on the grade sheet, but do show up in spinning. Protect yourself from these problems and make the surprises in your bales pleasant ones. Look for cotton from Certified Cotton Gins.

For more information, visit:
www.CertifiedCotton.com

SAMUEL JACKSON
Certified Gin

A mill focused advertisement featured in *Textile World* and *Cotton International* magazines.

Multimedia

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a video is worth a lot more than that. Certifiedcotton.com features five videos, including one music video promoting its message to growers, gins, merchants, and mills. The videos are one of the most popular areas of the website as they are packed with information that can be conveyed in a short period of time. The two newest videos show merchants and mills how to increase the profitability of their business by utilizing Certified Cotton.

The Power of Knowledge = More Valuable Bales

Certified Cotton empowers mills and buyers with the knowledge to predictably buy better bales. The extra value in these bales doesn't depend on the world cotton price or the classing data. To explain, let's consider two bales with identical classing data. The only difference between the two is that one was processed at a Certified Gin and the other was not. The market value for the bales is the same because traditional methods only consider classing data. The real value of the bale ginned at the Certified Gin is much greater. An empowered buyer knows that the Certified Gin: did not use a water spray device, has a contamination prevention policy, did not reintroduce moths into the lint bale, and has safeguards against using excessive heat to dry the fiber. None of this information is known about the other bale. When considering the known versus the unknown, the bale ginned at the Certified Gin is on average, going to be a better bale. When using Certified Cotton to buy thousands of bales per year, the value of predictability becomes very substantial.

Additional Certification

In addition to Primary Certification, there are some gins that choose specific evaluation in categories reflecting further value of their bales to a mill.

Additional Certification Categories and their value to the spinning mill:

- Gentle Drying — protects staple, fewer neps and better cleaning
- Seed Cotton Conditioning — less short fiber, longer staple, higher strength and uniformity
- Lint Conditioning — uniform opening, faster conditioning and processing, and fewer broken ties
- Moisture Monitoring — consistent moisture control results in more consistent bales
- Pedigreed Bale — improves consistency and helps identify the cause of any problems with bales

As there are differences between Certified and non-Certified Gins, there are also Certified Gins that choose varying levels of investment in quality ginning practices and the resources they require. Each of the five Categories requires specialized equipment and trained operators to receive additional Certification. Buyers can use this information to buy bales further defined to their customers needs.

Conclusion

No one can disagree that the cotton industry, especially the link between gins and mills has changed drastically in the last decade. Growers, gins, and mills in the United States have watched the industry transform from largely self-contained to almost 80% of the nation's crop being exported. As most of the bales from the United States are being processed on the opposite side of the world, predictability in the cotton supply chain has become of the utmost importance. The information that Certified Cotton provides is currently free and available to everyone. Utilizing it only requires the user seek it out through the many resources on the website or through the Certified Cotton staff. If a more profitable and predictable cotton buying experience is what you seek, buying from Certified Gins would be a good place to start. Certified Gins are taking extra care to process bales, so they offer mills a more valuable product. By choosing Certified Cotton, a buyer is signaling to the gins that their extra efforts are worthwhile.