

CHANGES IN COTTON STANDARDIZATION

James L. Knowlton
Standardization & Engineering Branch
USDA, AMS, Cotton Program
Memphis, TN

Abstract

The 26th Universal Cotton Standards Conference was held in Memphis, Tennessee on June 13 and 14, 2002. Conference attendance, which exceeded 175 in number, included 84 and 31 domestic and foreign cotton industry representatives, respectively. Additional participants included 36 students from the Rhodes College International Cotton Institute and 25 USDA officials. During the two day event, two of five proposals were adopted and 3,000 boxes of Universal Upland Cotton Grade Standards were approved. The two proposals adopted were the establishment of Universal HVI Micronaire Calibration Cotton Standards and a reference to be made in the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement to the USDA publication "Guidelines for HVI Testing".

Introduction

In 1909, the first official United States cotton grade standards were established by the USDA in an attempt to standardize trade of U.S. grown cotton. In 1914, these standards were promulgated under the authority of the United States Cotton Futures Act and as a result were adopted for use by the majority of the American cotton trade. In 1923, the United States Cotton Standards Act was passed to recognize the U.S. Standards as Universal Standards in order to expand the acceptance of these standards into international trade. In addition, authority was given to the Secretary of Agriculture to effectuate agreements with foreign cotton associations on the use of Universal Cotton Standards. As a result of this authority, the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement was established in June of 1923 to provide for the adoption and use of Universal Cotton Standards by the primary European cotton trade organizations. In 1925, the first Universal Cotton Standards Conference was held in Washington, D.C. to examine and approve copies of the original standards.

Over the years, the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement has continually gained global acceptance and today twenty-three foreign cotton associations representing twenty-one countries (Table 1) are signatory to the agreement. As part of the agreement, Universal Cotton Standards Conferences have been held regularly since 1925. Conferences were held biennially from 1925 to 1933 and then were changed to a triennial schedule from 1936 to present. The only interruptions in the history of the conference occurred during World War II and in 2001. The 2001 postponement was due to a U.S. cotton industry request to postpone the conference for one year to study a proposal regarding changing the leaf content of the Universal Grade Standards.

26th Universal Cotton Standards Conference

Participation

On June 12 and 13 of 2002, the 26th Universal Cotton Standards Conference was held in Memphis, Tennessee. Representatives from nineteen foreign cotton associations, representing seventeen signatory countries along with twenty-four Secretary of Agriculture Advisory Committee members were in attendance. Advisory committee members are made up of representatives from the producer, ginner, merchant and manufacturer segments of the U.S. cotton industry. Also in attendance were official conference observers from Turkey, Australia and China. An invitation was issued to an association in Turkey to become a signatory prior to the conference. The association is expected to join but the approval process required by the Turkish government is not complete.

Total attendance, which exceeded 175 in number, included 84 domestic participants made up of 24 Advisory Committee members, 6 alternates, and 54 cotton industry guests. Representing foreign interests were 22 signatory representatives, 6 observers and 3 foreign cotton industry guests. Additional participants included 36 students from the Rhodes College International Cotton Institute and 25 USDA officials.

Voting

Thirty-six votes are distributed among the advisory committee and signatory representatives. Foreign merchants and foreign spinners have six votes each. The merchant and manufacturer advisory committee members have six votes each and the producer and ginner advisory committee members have six votes each. A 75 percent majority (or at least 27 votes) is required for adoption of any new proposal.

Results

A total of five proposals were made and considered at the Universal Cotton Standards Conference (Table 2). The first four proposals involved adopting additional cotton classification standards into the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement. The fifth proposal recommended that a reference be made within the agreement to the USDA publication "Guidelines for HVI Testing". In accordance with the Universal Standards Agreement, all proposals were submitted and distributed to the Secretary of Agriculture's Advisory Committee and to the foreign signatories six months prior to the conference to allow time for consideration.

The first proposal recommended the addition of two Universal HVI Micronaire Calibration Cotton Standards. The proposed standards represent the high (~5.5) and low (~2.6) ends of the American Upland micronaire range. The intended use of these standards is for verification and/or calibration of the HVI micronaire measurement. All thirty six votes were cast in favor of this proposal.

The second proposal recommended the addition of a set of twelve Universal HVI Cotton Color Standards. Each standard in the set consists of a cotton sample with standard values for Rd and +b. The color range in the set of standards covers the range found in American Upland cotton. Voting resulted in all 24 Advisory Committee votes cast in favor of the proposal. However, all 12 foreign signatory votes were in opposition resulting in the rejection of this proposal.

The third proposal recommended the addition of a set of six Universal HVI Cotton Trash Standards. Each standard in the set represents a cotton sample with standard values for the HVI measurements of percent area and count. The proposed set of standards covers the range of leaf content found in American Upland cotton. Voting was identical to the voting on the HVI color standards with all 24 advisory committee votes cast in favor and all 12 foreign signatory votes cast in opposition. Therefore, this proposal was not adopted.

The fourth proposal recommended the creation of level 1 and 2 extraneous matter standards for bark and grass. All twelve foreign signatory votes along with all six manufacturer advisory committee representative votes were cast in favor of the proposal. The merchant advisory committee representatives cast four votes in favor and two opposed. The producer and ginner advisory committee representatives cast all 12 of their votes in opposition to the proposal. A total of 22 votes in favor and 14 opposed was the outcome resulting in rejection of the proposal.

The fifth proposal recommending that the USDA publication "Guidelines for HVI Testing" be referenced in the Universal Standards Agreement received all 36 votes in favor of adoption.

In accordance with the Universal Cotton Standards Agreement, the adopted changes cannot become effective until at least one year after the date of promulgation. As a result, the changes will become effective on July 1, 2003.

Matching Process

A second objective of the Universal Cotton Standards Conference was to obtain approval of the grade standards. To begin this process, guide box standards were matched and approved against the original standards sets that are kept secured in long term storage. Next, all 3,000 of the 2003 Universal Upland grade standards boxes were matched against the approved guide box standards. This task was conducted by the foreign signatory and domestic advisory committee members. The approved 2003 Universal Cotton Grade Standards were then individually photographed and later shipped out to the cotton industry.

Conclusion

The Universal Cotton Standards conference represents an international effort to develop and promote universal standardization of cotton classification. The longevity and growing acceptance of the Universal Standards, the Agreement and the conferences show the need and importance of a universally understood and accepted language of cotton quality determination. Changes and additions to the Universal Cotton Standards are expected as instrument classification continues to advance and be adopted around the world. The 27th Universal Cotton Standards Conference, which is tentatively planned for June of 2005, will no doubt be asked to address these additional standardization needs.