

Welspun launches sustainable cotton cultivation project to improve farmers' income

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Welspun Living Limited (WLL), previously Welspun India Limited, has launched a project — Wel-Krishi — to encourage sustainable cotton cultivation by providing support and training to farmers to raise their income through higher productivity and lower income costs. “We help growers produce better cotton as well as non-GMO cotton through our sustainable farming projects. And we also assist our farmers in cultivating superior crops,” Dipali Goenka, CEO and Managing Director, Welspun Living Limited.

By emphasising on training, education and sensitisation in three major cotton-growing States — Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Telangana — WLL enhances farmers' livelihood and standard of living through systematic sustainable development, she said.

Over 26,000 farmers across 390-plus villages have benefited from the 2.5 lakh acres pro-

ject, sponsored by the Welspun Foundation for Health and Knowledge. About 2,500 women farmers are part of this project, which has improved the lives of one lakh farmworkers.

13% HIGHER YIELD

Closely aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal, the WLL's ESG (environmental, social and governance) initiative has resulted in farmers getting 13 per cent higher yield, while cutting production costs by 10 per cent. Of this, fertilizer costs have declined by 14 per cent, their use by 13 per cent, water offtake has declined 11 per cent and pesticide costs have dipped by 19 per cent.

Through Wel-Krishi, the company guides farmers to access government schemes and provides support in the terms of artificial intelligence (AI)-enabled technology. AI comes into play to ensure quality of seeds, weather forecast and soil quality, Goenka said.

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DIPALI GOENKA
CEO and MD, WLL



AI and machine learning (ML). “Actually, AI helps the farmers to ensure the quality of seeds and inform the quality of soil that they're working on. Everything is actually inter-linked, offering crop solutions and impacting them directly,” the company CEO and MD said.

Welspun is into a whole blockchain initiative where the cotton can be traced back to the farm where it is grown. The company ensures that the project complements the needs of farmers, who get the minimum support price for the natural fibre. If there are no buyers for the cotton, then

WLL buys it from them if farmers are willing to sell. “But if they are getting a better price, they can sell it to anybody,” she said.

TIE-UPS

WLL has joined hands with Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), a non-profit organisation which promotes better standards and practices in cotton farming, to create a self-sufficient ecosystem for the growers as part of Wel-Krishi. Apart from BCI, the company is partnering with the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare for accreditations and validations along with other

textile certifications such as Control Union, Global Organic Textile Standard and Life Cycle Assessment.

Welspun has come up with zero freshwater initiatives, including sewage treatment plans and rainwater harvesting, to not only conserve water resources but also provide access to clean water to the local communities. The initiative has been launched in Kutch, Gujarat, where the people are provided with potable water.

WLL pays royalty to the communities to make use of the sewage water and reprocess it to ensure not a single drop of fresh water is used at its production facilities. “To sum it up, the communities get water for drinking, farmers get water for irrigation and we don't use a drop of fresh water here,” Goenka said. Parallely, the company has developed a 2,300-acre green patch in Anjar, Kutch, that looks like a “mirage in a desert” but has been created wholly through recycling.

Stating that WLL, a \$3.5 billion company with 20,000 em-

ployees, is completely aligned to India's green targets such as renewable capacity of 500 gigawatts by 2030, Goenka said there has been a 19 per cent overall reduction in green house gas (GHG) emissions between FY22 and FY23. “We already invested in a 30 megawatt solar plant in Anjar, which got commissioned in March 2024. By 2027, we want to be 100 per cent green for WLL, including biofuel,” she said.

The company's Telangana plant uses rice husk as biofuels for the boilers. For Anjar, it is looking at using sawdust. “We are converting our food waste into biogas and reducing fossil fuel consumption. We use STP and ETP waste sludge as a source of fuel to reduce coal burning and the GHG footprint. This also gets measured by our AI industry 4.0,” Goenka said.

WLL is tracking its emissions and out of the total 15 categories of emissions, it tracked eight categories last fiscal. This fiscal, it will track 13 categories.