

# Large Farm Symposium 2023

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On October 11, 2023, Better Cotton hosted its third Annual Large Farm Symposium, bringing together approximately 100 growers and partners from six continents to hear success stories from the field and discuss what's needed to bring about real change.

## Speakers

- **John Kempf**, founder of [Advancing Eco Agriculture](#) (AEA) and the host of the [Regenerative Agriculture Podcast](#), spoke about his journey to better understand soil and plant health based on the sciences of plant physiology, mineral nutrition, and soil microbiology. AEA has been working with cotton growers for four years in the US and has seen impressive results in yields and fibre quality. John spoke about strategic fertiliser management to take advantage of nutrient requirements in different crop stages, and how sometimes it helps to bring in an outsider to see things from a different angle and find new solutions.
- **Adam Kay**, CEO of [Cotton Australia](#), has spent almost 40 years working within the Australian cotton industry and now represents 1,500 cotton producers. He highlighted the 30-year effort to improve the water use efficiency of the cotton crop. Cotton producers in Australia now use 48% less water per bale compared to a 1992 baseline, as well as 34% less land and 97% fewer insecticides. Adam highlighted the gradual adoption of cultural practices and technologies like deeper water storage and tile water return systems, improved soil condition and cover, water scheduling and laser levelling. He also discussed the ongoing debate and research to determine the best irrigation methods. Ultimately, he recommended assessing each farm's resources and optimising the system based on those resources.
- **Ilkhom Khaydarov**, Chairman at the Uzbekistan Employers Confederation, shared the story of the transformation of Uzbekistan's cotton sector from production for export to a vertically integrated system. 134 farm clusters feed into the "Perfect Textile Chain" that produces the final garment without leaving Uzbek borders. The system has increased traceability and transparency, using blockchain to track sustainability data and DNA markers to trace the cotton from farm to garment. It has also helped cotton farms in the country adopt more sustainable technologies such as drip irrigation with laser levelling.
- **John Bradley** recently retired from a 45-year career as a research director, consultant, and educator promoting conservation and no-till systems. When he started, West Tennessee had the highest soil erosion rate in the country. Cotton farmers tilled 10-12 times a year and some fields

lost 80 tons of topsoil per acre per year. Despite initial scepticism from leadership, John worked with a team of scientists and representatives from industry and state and federal government to develop no-till farming systems. The research eventually transformed the region to lead the nation in no-till adoption, with 75% of cotton acres now no-tilled in West Tennessee. He stressed the need to enlist support from a broad team, including local farmers, and the critical need for economic analysis to make the business case for practice adoption.

## Learn More

- View the recordings [here](#)
- The [Regenerative Agriculture Podcast](#) features cotton growers include Kelton Coleman (TX), Adam Chappell (AR), and James Johnson (NM).
- Visit [AEA's YouTube channel](#) to see highlights from cotton field days.
- Cotton Australia publishes its sustainability report every five years; you can find the most recent one from 2019 [here](#).
- The [Milan No-Till Field Day](#) continues to highlight the latest information on no-till systems.
- A decade of change in Uzbekistan's cotton industry has resulted in the Privatization and vertical integration of [Uzbekistan's cotton industry](#)

## Breakouts

We split into six breakout groups to discuss three key questions:

1. What key factors need to be in place to create real change?
  - Access to resources
  - Early involvement of farmers with program and research development
  - Technical support
  - Political and governmental support
  - Understanding of local needs and specific challenges
  - Peer support
  
2. Which of these factors has been the most difficult to establish and why?
  - Adoption of technology due to affordability and availability
  - Changing mindsets due to high risk, peer pressure, and lack of trust
  - Support from different parts of supply chain
  - Access to markets
  - Large scale increases risk and some practices do not work on larger scale
  - Need for more mentors and technical support

### 3. What kind of support would help you move past the current barriers to change?

- Access to finance/ loans
- Research partnerships
- Research at the right scale
- Shared experiences with other growers
- Practical field training
- Government support and political will
- Systems thinking
- Market demand



Better Cotton looks forward to more opportunities to bring together large-scale cotton growers and partners to take on these challenges and work towards these solutions.

### Stay in touch by:

- Joining us on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December from 15:00-17:30 GMT for the Large Farm-led session at our Programme Partner Meeting online. You can register [here](#).
- Joining the global mailing list: [Newsletter sign-up - Better Cotton](#)
- Signing up for the Large Farm Symposium mailing list – to join, please email [amanda.thompson@bettercotton.org](mailto:amanda.thompson@bettercotton.org)