



# Sustainability is in the water

when it comes to cotton production

## It all comes down to water use

Whether it's in our own personal lives or the fashion brands we patron, lowering our water use is a significant part of how we reduce our environmental impact. And it matters in the raw materials these brands and retailers decide to source.

Contrary to popular belief, cotton is not a water-intensive crop. According to [Transformers Foundation](#), global averages about cotton's environmental impact can be misleading, as they fail to capture huge local variations in resource usage and impacts. While global data can be useful to tell whether cotton's overall impact is going up or down decade over decade, content and local data are key.<sup>1</sup>



2/3

of cotton grown  
in the U.S. is  
not currently  
irrigated,  
utilizing natural  
rainfall to grow



≈ 1/3

uses irrigation  
to supplement  
natural rainfall



2%

is solely  
dependent  
on irrigation

<sup>1</sup>Transformers Foundation, "Cotton: A Case Study in Misinformation", [transformersfoundation.org](https://transformersfoundation.org)



Water sensing technology helps growers map and track where water is needed throughout their fields. Irrigation scheduling technology and drip irrigation ensure water is soaked into the ground. Growers can also measure water evaporation from the soil and plants. All these practices ensure growers are taking advantage of every drop of water. Thanks to these innovations and technologies **U.S. cotton growers have reduced water use by 79% since 1985.**

The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol aims to tell the true story about U.S. cotton and its water use. With a growing demand for transparency about brands' and retailers' water use and their raw materials, the Trust Protocol sets a new standard in more sustainably grown cotton. It brings quantifiable and verifiable goals and measurement to sustainable cotton production and drives continuous improvement in key sustainability metrics.

It is a system that underpins and verifies U.S. cotton's sustainability progress through sophisticated data collection and independent third-party verification, providing brands and retailers the critical assurances they need to show that the cotton fiber element of their supply chain is more sustainably grown with lower environmental and social risk.

In the face of climate change, brands and retailers have set comprehensive sustainability plans with significant objectives for their businesses. And U.S. cotton growers are continuously improving their sustainability practices by employing new technologies to their lower water use.

Growers have introduced systems like computer-driven moisture sensors to improve water efficiency by alerting them to periods of sufficient rainwater and showing them water-level measurements at a series of distances below ground level. These advancements enable growers to understand if their cotton is receiving enough water at all levels. By receiving a picture of the soil's moisture, farmers can irrigate their fields more efficiently—if irrigation is needed at all. Over 90% of Protocol growers now employ some type of precision technology.



“We track every drop of water that we apply to our fields year to-year. We’ve got soil probes in the field and use satellite imagery.



We have an agronomist that helps with irrigation scheduling and crop coefficients. All of these changes allow us to eliminate waste and put every drop of water to use.”

---

**Aaron Barcellos**  
Cotton grower, California

**Become a member today at [TrustUSCotton.org](https://TrustUSCotton.org)**



79%

U.S. cotton growers have reduced water use by 79% since 1985

In 2022/23 Trust Protocol grower members showed significant improvement in water use increasing efficiency by 14% on track with the 2025 U.S. National Goal for Continuous Improvement of increasing efficiency by 18%.

As a member of the Trust Protocol mills, merchants, brands and retailers will gain access to U.S. cotton with sustainability credentials proven via Field to Market: The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture measured via the Fieldprint Calculator and third-party verified.

Mill and manufacturer members can also be identified as part of a fully transparent supply chain and selected by brands and retailers as they look to source more sustainably grown U.S. cotton fiber. Since its launch the Trust Protocol has welcomed over 40 companies and their brands such as Ralph Lauren, Gap Inc. and Next – as well as 2,000 mill and manufacturer members.

40+ companies and their brands

2,000 mill and manufacturer members

welcomed into the Trust Protocol since its launch

It's on all of us; growers, brands, retailers, mills, manufacturers and consumers to use water more responsibly. The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol provides the verified data to show that we're using less of our natural resources when it comes to the clothes we wear.

Become a member today at [TrustUSCotton.org](https://TrustUSCotton.org)