Organic Cotton

What is organic cotton?
Organic cotton is produced according to the internationally recognized organic farming standards of the EU regulation 834/2007, of the USA National Organic Program (NOP), the Indian National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) or the Japanese Agricultural Standard (JAS). The standard has to be certified by an accredited certification body (3rd party certification) and the chain of custody system requests a transaction certificate. Organic cotton production is labeled.

What makes it different?
The systemic approach aims to establish a diverse and balanced farming ecosystem which includes all types of crops and farm activities. Farms need to complete a two-year conversion period to change their production system from conventional to organic.

Seeds
Do’s careful selection of varieties adapted to local conditions in terms of climate, soil and robustness to pests and diseases.
Don’ts genetically modified seeds.

Fertilizers
Do’s close nutrient cycles on farm by the use of farm yard manure, compost and legumes for N fixation, phosphate of low solubility with permission only.
Don’ts Nitrate, ammonium and urea fertilizers as well as readily soluble phosphorus fertilisers.

Pest Management
Do’s prevent pests from becoming a problem by establishing a diverse and balanced farm ecosystem, by monitoring pest populations carefully and by applying:
Crop rotation and mixed cultivation: helps to keep pests at a low level by establishing a natural balance.
Promotion of natural enemies: Natural enemies of cotton pests such as birds, ladybirds, beetles, spiders, parasitic wasps, bugs and ants to keep pest attacks at tolerable levels.
Trap crops: Some cotton pests prefer crops like maize, sunflower, okra (lady finger), sorghum, pigeon pea or hibiscus. By growing these crops along with cotton as a trap crop, the cotton crop is spared.
Natural pesticides: Such as neem (Azadirachta indica) spray (against sucking pests, bollworms and thrips); pyrethrum (against red cotton bug, cutworms, grasshoppers); and other botanical extracts from castor, thorn apple, etc.
Don’ts synthetic pesticides.

Pricing model
For organic cotton usually a market premium is paid to the farmer. The level of the organic premium is not determined by the standards but ranges around 10% of market price.

The organic cotton production has not one single representing organism like other identity cotton standards. But relevant stakeholders are:
IFOAM www.ifofam.org
Textile Exchange www.textileexchange.org
HELVETAS Swiss Intercoporation www.helvetas.org, www.organiccotton.org