**Cotton Scrubs Makes Case for Re-shoring American Manufacturing**

*It's October. A nurse who works at a rural hospital in a South Georgia community looks at the clock as it ticks steadily toward 5 a.m. With a few minutes left to finish her morning routine, she finds her scrubs and sneakers to get dressed for the day. She welcomes the soft material of the cotton scrubs on a day she knows will be hectic. As she pulls out of her driveway, her lights shine across the clay road into the cotton field. The bright white cotton bolls illuminate as the beams sweep across and fill the field through still-dark morning.*

*As the nurse comes home that afternoon, the cotton picker is rolling through the field, harvesting six rows of the Southern snow one pass at a time. She knows the hard work and hours the farmer puts in to provide a comfortable garment for her and her fellow healthcare workers, while they also put in long hours helping patients. And they all like the extra layer of protection provided by ProTX2® AV, an antimicrobial technology, added to the material during production. Knowing American grown and made is on the rise again, and that it started right here in her home state, brings a smile to her face.*

***Background: The Cotton Project***

An initiative from Field to Closet is making the concept of American grown and made, 100 percent cotton scrubs a reality. The long-term vision for this initiative is bold: Bolster the U.S. cotton farmer, increase domestic demand for cotton, and re-shore American textile manufacturing.

The kick-off project featuring the scrubs woven with cotton grown in Georgia and crafted entirely in the U.S., highlights the possibilities for achieving the initiative’s far-reaching goals for both the grower and the textile industry.

The medical scrubs project, spearheaded by Field to Closet, is the result of collaborative partnerships with America Knits, Deltapine® seed, Helena® Agri-Enterprises, LLC, Nutrien AgSolutions®, Georgia's Rural Center, and HomeTown Health. To spotlight the venture, 15 hospitals in rural Georgia will receive sets of the scrubs at no cost later this spring.

“We are so excited to share the success of this project with hospitals in rural Georgia by providing scrubs,” said Victoria Kopyar, VP, Market Brand and Innovation, Field to Closet. “With frontline healthcare workers wearing scrubs made from Deltapine cotton grown in the region where they work, the project truly comes full circle.”

The initiative recognizes the rebirth of a U.S. cotton garment industry simply isn't possible without the grower. Therefore, Field to Closet established the Farmer GiveBack program to address a fundamental issue in the garment industry which typically sees the brand or end seller with the most significant profit. The Farmer GiveBack is designed to ensure the grower is included financially by sharing in the profit of the goods sold.

"Field to Closet was founded to work with brands and retailers to increase the use of cotton in the products, change the economic distribution of the supply chain to include the farmer, and allow people access to sustainably produced, 100% natural cotton fiber with traceability to farm where the Deltapine cotton was grown,” said Ed Jernigan, founder and CEO of Field to Closet. “It’s incredible to be part of a process that connects people and brands to the farm, along with increasing awareness of creating garments from beginning to end in the U.S.”

***Reshoring U.S. Textile and Manufacturing***

This project also spotlights the textile and manufacturing opportunities available in the U.S. using cotton grown in America. As the U.S. textile industry makes strides toward re-shoring American manufacturing, America Knits is already making it happen in rural Georgia. The company not only serves as the final step manufacturing the medical scrubs, it steadfastly focuses on providing prosperity for rural, smaller communities and creating quality, environmentally sustainable products made in America.

“This initiative is exciting and goes to show when people work together, extraordinary things can happen. There was a time when an end-to-end US supply chain for cotton garments would have been considered a pipedream. We’ve shown with hard work, dreams do come true,” said Steve Hawkins, CEO of America Knits.

Field to Closet partnered with America Knits in Swainsboro, Georgia, to source Georgia cotton grown from Deltapine® seed. They also selected industry partners Parkdale Mills in Rabun Gap, Georgia to spin the cotton into yarn, and Hornwood in North Carolina to weave the yarn into fabric, before it arrives at America Knits for the final cut and sew of the scrubs.

Making the project even better for medical personnel, the fabric is treated with PROTX2® AV, an antimicrobial technology that inhibits the growth of bacteria and has been shown in lab tests to destroy viruses. This is the first time PROTX2® AV has been formulated for use on 100 percent cotton medical scrubs, marking these scrubs as an industry first.

***Why Cotton?***

Cotton fibers are natural, biodegradable, and recyclable, making it a sustainable fabric to wear. This project is bringing cotton back to the forefront of the garment industry to support our farmers and provide an environmentally friendly medical scrubs, along with other garments. Moreover, cotton producers and the agriculture industry have worked year after year to improve the sustainability of cotton production.

When cotton breaks down, it enriches the soil and leaves less of a carbon footprint than synthetic materials. In fact, the cotton plant is carbon-sequestering when considering the stalks, leaves, and other plant material are left in the soil, meaning cotton aids in the long-term removal of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and works to slow or even reverse CO2 pollution even after the cotton is harvested.

Over the last 40 years in the U.S., innovative technologies, new production methods, and research have all led to significant gains of sustainability while growing cotton. According to Cotton Inc., pesticide application to cotton has become 50% more efficient, and applying water by irrigation has reduced by 45%, all while increasing production and improving fiber quality - without expanding the amount of land used to grow cotton.

These cotton production advancements would not be realized without agricultural companies like Deltapine ® seed, Helena Agri-Business®, and Nutrien Ag Solutions® who have joined in support of this project. These companies provide critical research and agronomic recommendations as well as innovative digital tools and cutting-edge farming inputs to help growers produce more cotton with less environmental impact.

Not only is cotton sustainable for our environment, but it also provides direct economic impact to rural areas where it is grown. In 2019, cotton lint and seed represented a $7 billion value to the United States from the nearly 20 million bales produced. Cotton is primarily grown in 17 Southern states, known as the Cotton Belt, with Texas and Georgia being the top-producing states.

Cotton ranks as the second-largest commodity by value in Georgia. Furthermore, UGA Extension forecasted cotton's overall impact on the state was greater than $3 billion and provided around 53,000 cotton-related jobs.

“Rural Georgia is home to agriculture, Georgia’s largest industry. Georgia is the second largest producer of cotton in the U.S.,” said Dr. David Bridges, Director of Georgia’s Rural Center and President of Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. “Cotton plays a prominent role in the economic prosperity of many rural communities in the state. Now, with this particular project, cotton can be more profitable to our farmers and also contribute to better rural healthcare.”

***Supporting Rural Communities from the Field to the Hospital***

The overarching vision is for this initiative is to serve as an inspiring example of the possibility and profitability for re-shoring American manufacturing and create a long-lasting impact on rural communities.

This project demonstrates a 100 percent U.S. supply chain, that includes crafting products from cotton grown and sewn in rural Georgia, is more than wishful thinking. A movement toward 100 percent cotton scrubs and other cotton garments creates a positive domino effect resulting in higher domestic cotton need and demand; fair compensation for farmers' sustainability efforts, and a positive light on an end-to-end U.S. supply chain, while supporting healthcare workers.

The 15 rural Georgia hospitals receiving medical cotton scrubs include Brooks County Hospital, Burke Medical Center, Crisp Regional Medical Center, Colquitt Regional Medical Center, East Georgia Regional Medical Center, Emanuel Medical Center, Irwin County Hospital, Jeff Davis Hospital, Jenkins County Medical, LifeBrite Community Hospital of Early, Memorial Hospital and Manor, Mitchell County Hospital, SGMC Berrien Campus, Southwell Medical, and Taylor Regional Hospital.

"It’s no secret 2020 was tough on hospitals, including those in rural areas,” said Jimmy Lewis, CEO of HomeTown Health. “For this initiative to provide scrubs at no cost to some of these hospitals is an extraordinary way to kick off a truly worthy vision of using Georgia grown cotton to fully create scrubs in the U.S.”

To highlight this initiative, a kick-off event was held April 9, 2021, 11 a.m. at the Georgia Museum of Agriculture in Tifton, Georgia. This summer, the scrubs will be delivered to the hospitals in rural Georgia as the cotton grown in the region returns home to healthcare workers on the frontlines.

For more information about this initiative, visit AmericaKnits.com or FieldtoCloset.com.