CHAPTER 11
"THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES"
Cotton Incorporated

"By the 1960s, the age of the miracle fibers, polyester and synthetics had arrived in full force." This statement by Morgan Nelson, a grower from New Mexico, explained the threat facing growers and why they organized Cotton Incorporated in 1970 and gave it a clear purpose: to raise cotton consumption. In 1970 Cotton Incorporated (CI) went into operation and quickly became the organization the public associated with cotton. It became the advertising arm of cotton and produced catchy commercials for national television, of which the "Fabric of Our Lives" campaign is the best known. The NCC had promoted consumption since its inception in 1938 but could not raise the funds to carry out advertising on a level necessary to combat the promotional and research efforts by the manufacturers of synthetics. Cotton Incorporated originated owing to this threat, which by the late 1950s had reached such proportions that it prompted NCC's Clifton Kirkpatrick to comment, "We have got a devil, and a real devil … in synthetics."[1]

The roots of the new organization lay in the NCC. Indeed, in the 1930s Oscar Johnston and his colleagues had sought to increase consumption to prevent the surpluses that depressed the price of cotton. In the early stages of forming the NCC, growers saw this objective as a benefit of unifying the various segments of the cotton kingdom. Johnston considered synthetics the worst danger, and though artificial fibers had not yet grabbed a large chunk of the consumer dollar, he anticipated further losses to them. At the end of World War II, synthetics began expanding in the market, but the strong price of cotton overshadowed the threat and slackened the anxiety.

Troubles soon mounted. After the Korean War, cotton glutted the market, and the price declined. Small operators and tenants were disappearing in the South as a consequence of the "revolution in cotton." Others operated on the edge of collapse. Members of Congress and the USDA received pleas for relief as farmers struggled to keep their land and possessions. For them it was a question of survival, while the commercial growers saw a gradual slippage in their ability to prosper. It was commonly accepted that the unrelenting growth of synthetics—rayon, nylon, Dacron, and polyester—into the fiber market worsened the cotton farmers' predicament.

SYNTHETICS' CHOKE HOLD

The NCC had not failed to challenge artificial fibers. It fought back through radio and television advertising, magazines, and promotional campaigns. In 1957 it arranged for Maid of Cotton Helen Longdon to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In 1938, when the NCC established its fund-raising practices, television was not a factor, but the new medium now commanded consumers' attention. Industries dependent on the mass market could not ignore television, but this new form of advertising was costly. Giant chemical corporations such as DuPont could afford television advertising, but the meager budget of the NCC allowed only limited spending for it. This inability to compete in advertising occurred when “women found that there was life outside the home,” recalled Morgan Nelson.[2] Housework had come to be regarded as an impediment to a fuller life, and the drudgery of ironing 100 percent cotton clothes became anathema. Textile mills had started blending polyester with cotton at a 65/35 ratio. Synthetic manufacturers became so bold that they forced textiles to weave blended sheeting or lose their supply of polyester. It became obvious that research and promotion had to be undertaken on a much larger scale for cotton to remain viable in U.S. households. “We were just badly outgunned,” commented the NCC’s Macon Edwards.[3]

The NCC continued to rely on the financing program it designed in 1938 and raised membership dues periodically, which worked satisfactorily until the injury from artificial fibers became severe. That point arrived in the mid-1950s, when the organization again raised the dues, with growers paying twenty cents per bale beginning in 1957.[4] Growers now paid twice as much as other segments and felt they carried the burden of financing while the market for cotton shrank steadily.

ORIGINS OF THE CPI

The 1950s were a decade of frustration for other reasons. Boll weevils began to show resistance to organophosphates and would pop up like a killer disease and then go into hiding. The West experienced sporadic outbreaks of the pink bollworm. Mother Nature played her part by foisting a severe drought on the Southwest, comparable to the years of the Dust Bowl. This prolonged dry spell ended in 1957 with severe flooding that sent lobbyists to Congress, pleading for an adjustment in allotments to overcome a shortage of premium cotton wrought by heavy rains and high waters. The number of small-plot farms fell drastically. Frustration over synthetics was just part of the general angst in the cotton kingdom, and when the newest assessment hike put the burden of financing on growers, they became restless and dissatisfied. The traditional system used by the NCC for raising revenue for research and promotion appeared to fail, and further increases in dues were unacceptable. More money had to be found. “Oh my Lord,” Rhea Blake remembered thinking, “what can we do?”[5]

Growers in the West grew restive as they saw the NCC almost paralyzed by the dilemma of increasing funding for research and promotion. They knew that textile mills were not likely to help because the synthetic manufacturers gave them incentive payments to use artificial fibers. For the textile mills to enter into an agreement with growers for promoting cotton might also violate antitrust laws.[6] If the NCC hiked assessments for gins and compresses, the fees would likely pass back to the growers, so the conviction grew among growers that if they had to pay the new cost in hidden charges, it would be better for them to absorb the costs and control the expenditures. With their large investments, western growers felt that they had more at stake and that if an answer came forth they would have to provide it. Hence the momentum to erect a system for raising more money began in the West among large-scale operators and cooperatives like Calcot, Ranchers Cotton Oil in California, and the Plains Cotton Growers Association in Lubbock. Their objective was to raise “some real folding money,” Kirkpatrick recalled.[7]

This bone pile of short budgets, loss of market share, falling prices, abandoned farms, and the new immunity of boll weevils generated a feeling of helplessness. Growers wanted answers. Unrest was strongest in the West, perhaps owing to the youth and adventuresome spirit there, but unease stretched across the Cotton Belt. Mindful of this malaise, in 1955 the NCC created a special task group, the Industry Wide Committee on the Future of the Cotton Council, to examine the future prospects of the organization.[8] The committee had sixty-eight members from all the cotton growing states, who were expected to study all the issues of the day and provide advice and recommendations with no implications for making policy.

D. W. Brooks, general manager of the Cotton Producers Association in Atlanta, made one of the first calls to set forth the concept that led to Cotton Incorporated. Brooks was a thinker, a longtime correspondent with Oscar Johnston, known for offering proposals to deal with issues facing the cotton industry. In 1955, as a member of the Industry Wide Committee, Brooks made known his conviction that the NCC needed to employ more technical personnel to work with the textile mills to make cotton fabric more competitive. While he admired the NCC for a marvelous job in promotion, he saw research lagging. To fund more research, Brooks proposed an assessment of $1.00 per bale on growers and urged the committee to push the idea as fast as possible.[9] Jerry Sayre chaired the special committee and had the perspective of the grower since at the time he managed D&PL.

In 1958 the election of Harry Baker as the first president of the NCC from the West gave fresh momentum to the fight against synthetics. His recognition was unsurpassed. He had attended the founding meeting of the NCC in 1938 and had long been a delegate for the ginner segment. Baker served on the board of directors of the Bank of America and the California Manufacturers Association. He traveled in circles of influence, accompanying President Truman on his whistle-stop tour of 1948 through the San Joaquin Valley, and riding also with Republican nominee Thomas Dewey on his trip through the Golden State. Baker was well acquainted with senators James Eastland and John F. Kennedy. California growers remembered Baker for extending credit to them after World War II.[10]

In the meantime, Sayre's committee moved to the conclusion that a new system of fund-raising had to be employed beyond the regular mechanism used by the NCC; it needed "a fresh organizational initiative," according to one account.[11] The committee followed the suggestion made by Brooks that each grower would pay an assessment of one dollar per bale on each year's crop. Participation would be voluntary, but with the high percentage of producers already holding membership in the NCC, there was general assurance they would accept another assessment. Each participant would thus pay $1.20 per bale for belonging to the NCC and contributing to the campaign to fight synthetics. To administer the program, the recommendations included the creation of a separate organization for dispersing the funds raised by the special fee, but staffing should come from the employees of the NCC, who would be expected to perform double duty. The NCC's Field Service would handle the recruitment of participants, so by incorporating this last proviso, proponents claimed that little in overhead costs would be incurred. The plan placed the responsibility for fighting artificial fibers on the growers, with the supervision coming from the NCC.

Although the assessment hike made in 1957 brought revenue for the NCC to a new high, hitting $3,027,995 for 1959, it paled beside the monies spent on behalf of synthetic fibers.

Besides the incentive payments for textile mills, synthetic manufacturers helped retailers with advertising costs if they carried polyester clothes. By 1959 cotton growers recognized that "they were trying to put out a bonfire with a water pistol."[12]

The NCC welcomed the proposal to create a new branch within its ranks. Indeed, it saw the move as a way to raise the funds that had never been available through regular membership dues. Behind the discussions among growers, the NCC provided consultation and arranged meetings. It identified growers who had influence and fund-raising experience and would likely participate in setting up a self-serving body for growers. Though westerners were the most adamant about such an undertaking, the NCC realized the importance of bringing in supporters from all regions of the Cotton Belt and did not overlook the power and influence of the Farm Bureau. For these reasons, the election of Boswell Stevens as president of the NCC in 1959 proved fortuitous.

Born and raised on a farm in Noxubee County, Mississippi, Stevens came from a family that migrated there in 1837. He had experienced the hazards of cotton farming, particularly boll weevils and low prices. He became active in the establishment of the Mississippi Farm Bureau and was elected its president in 1950; he headed the organization in his home state for twenty-two years. His association with the NCC began when Oscar Johnston requested his help in forming the organization in 1938. Stevens wore two hats, one as president of the Mississippi Farm Bureau and another for the NCC, and when in 1959 he called a meeting of growers from around the Cotton Belt to discuss the creation of a separate producer organization within the NCC, his experience and recognition in agriculture gave the concept much integrity.

The NCC created a committee to advance the idea and carefully recruited growers with wide acquaintances and recognition. Jimmy Hayes, president of the Alabama Farm Bureau, and Harold Ohlendorf, head of the Arkansas Farm Bureau, agreed to serve. D. W. Brooks joined along with E. L. Story of Missouri. The cooperatives were not overlooked: Jerry Sayre, now head of Staplcotn, Russell Kennedy of Calcot, and the highly influential Roy Davis from the Plains Cotton Growers Association in Lubbock. No one outranked Jack O'Neal, a producer in California, in name recognition. He had founded Producers Cotton Oil. Keith Welden and Russell Griffin, California producers, joined. O'Neal, Griffin, and Walden "were the three biggest in the United States" recalled Kirkpatrick. "If we can't get the folks with the most prestige, influence, money, and time, we are defeated to begin with."[13]

The momentum for a separate organization now moved faster. To the NCC board of directors, this committee with the "big three" recommended the creation of a separate organization to collect funds voluntarily from growers. Acting on this recommendation, the directors created the Cotton Producers Institute (CPI) in 1960, which represented the most significant change in the structure of the NCC since its founding. It meant that growers now had the dominant voice in promoting research and advertising, considered to be the best weapons for fighting synthetic fibers. Proponents hoped to raise $10 million annually, and "the rallying cry was Dollar a Bale."[14]

Russell Griffin of California stood out as the logical person to lead the new CPI. Born near Fresno, he farmed one of the largest cotton operations in the United States, only a few miles from the Kettleman Hills and Black Mountain on the western edge of the San Joaquin Valley. In 1960 he had an allotment of seventeen thousand acres that produced over sixty thousand bales. He raised other crops, but "it was cotton that carried the load."[15] Griffin had done some fund-raising on behalf of the NCC but showed no further interest until 1960, when the NCC's Kirkpatrick, along with Jim Mayer from Producers Cotton Oil, John Benson, Fresno County cotton adviser, and Sherman Thomas, another large grower in the valley, visited Griffin in his home. After dinner, they explained how they were trying to organize the CPI to advertise cotton and conduct research to "reverse the trend of the market that we were losing to the man-made fibers."[16] They asked Griffin to chair the CPI and help raise $10 million for it. Undoubtedly his experience with fund-raising had drawn attention because large sums of money were the key to the plan. Griffin accepted the new responsibility; he quickly invited growers and related interests to a large meeting at the Tagas Ranch in Tulare County. About six hundred people came, and after explaining the proposed CPI to them, Griffin called for a hand vote. The hands in favor of the experiment were so overwhelming that he did not call for the nays. Griffin credited the NCC for the CPI. "It was their idea, not mine."[17]

The creation of the CPI was a bold step that went largely unnoticed. None of the other staple crop organizations had taken such steps to generate demand for their product, but wheat, corn, and rice had no alternative foodstuff threatening to grab their market and drive their farmers out of business. Cotton enthusiasts needed large sums of money for television advertising, and they resolved to rely on themselves through the "dollar a bale" program. However bold and innovative it might be, the CPI nonetheless had to raise $10 million.

Kirkpatrick and the Field Service would have to do the heavy lifting. They needed large-scale participation from NCC members, but since the Cotton Belt was so vast, the campaign had a three-year plan: it began in the West, moved to the mid-South for the second year, and ended the last year in the Southeast. Serving as chair of the CPI, Griffin worked in sync with the Field Service, holding meetings across the Cotton Belt, sometimes drawing a group of thirty to forty, or getting only a handful. Growers were assured their contributions would go solely for research and promotion and that all funds would be held in escrow and returned to them if the drive fell short. From California, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico, the campaign got over $1 million. About the same amount came from the second-year drive in the mid-South, but the third year fell short in the Southeast. All cotton-growing states participated except for Georgia and Tennessee. To facilitate and administer the disbursal of funds for advertising, the CPI had a special governing body, the Cotton Board, whose membership consisted of growers from all regions of the Cotton Belt. The board awarded contracts for advertising that appeared on popular television shows across the United States. "The CPI television ads certainly were not bashful," reported one account.[18] They were well designed, classy, and effectively aimed at the consumer, touting 100 percent cotton for being comfortable, absorbent, and static free.

But the CPI had inherent flaws. To begin with, it advertised 100 percent cotton, and despite the ads' slick look, they could not overcome housewives' dislike for ironing. Homemakers wanted to reduce their household chores, not increase them by using all-cotton garments. When shirts and dresses could be more easily pressed with a blended fabric, housekeepers could not be expected to stand any longer than necessary at an ironing board for the sake of cotton farmers. And two advantages of cotton, its ability to breathe and its absorbency, meant less by the 1960s owing to the widespread use of air-conditioning in homes and offices. That new convenience had spread widely in the late 1950s, and the ability of clothes to absorb perspiration no longer meant as much to shoppers. Blended fabric put 100 percent cotton on the defensive.

Worst of all, the CPI never had enough money. Because of the expense of television advertising, the ads appeared only about three times per week, not enough to hold consumer attention. Repetition was a key tactic of television advertising; it was necessary to employ the "saturation principle." Consumer awareness of cotton improved, but not enough to overcome the preference for blends. Synthetic manufacturers were still winning the battle over the airwaves with more frequent advertisements "that best captured the convenience-fixated, push button spirit of that era."[19] Cotton would have to step up the fight or else succumb to defeat. America's cotton farmers were not willing to withdraw from the arena, but they knew money had to be raised on a much larger scale. "Cotton needed a lot more than advertising by a bunch of amateur cotton farmers," recalled Morgan Nelson.[20]

Griffin regarded voluntarism as the chief flaw of the CPI. Small-plot agriculture dominated the Southeast, so support there was minimal. In west Texas, the enthusiasm of the initial enrollment waned, and some ginners began to drop out of the program, which put ginners that continued to collect the assessment at a disadvantage. Some merchants and shippers used the refund as a competitive tool to buy directly from growers. Once that occurred, Rhea Blake explained, "The whole thing fell like a house of cards, and that's what happened."[21]

COTTON INCORPORATED

Both the CPI and the NCC realized they were not raising enough money. "We reached the point," Griffin recalled, "that we either had to go to the growers and say we can't do it for this amount of money and we'll just have to kill this thing and stop, or we are going to have to persuade the growers that there will have to be some more positive approach to collecting money."[22] In usual fashion, the NCC appointed a committee to examine the situation, while Griffin headed a similar study in the CPI. Together they saw volunteerism as the weakness and concluded that a "mandatory-volunteer" system of collection had to be adopted or else the fight against artificial fibers would be lost. In other words, all growers would have to pay the dollar-a-bale assessment at the gin, but any grower could apply for and receive a full refund. Few growers would be inclined to make a request, so went the reasoning, after they had paid the assessment. Congress would have to pass legislation authorizing any mandatory assessment.

The NCC tackled both tasks. In maneuvered the proposal through Congress, and President Lyndon Johnson signed the legislation in 1966. This new measure, the Cotton Research and Promotion Act, followed the CPI practice of requiring a Cotton Board to be appointed by the secretary of agriculture, which had the responsibility for collecting the assessment. Farmers would have to pay the fees at the gin but could apply for a full refund with no argument. The Cotton Board would rely on the grower organization, the CPI, to award contracts for research and promotion projects, but the law required a referendum of the country's half million cotton farmers, who had to approve with a two-thirds majority for the plan to go into action. Thus the USDA had oversight of the program but had no particular authority or discretion to carry out the measure. Provisions for the refund had to be included because of the strong dislike for government mandates among cotton farmers, an attitude particularly strong among growers with membership in the Farm Bureau. Many of them, including Boswell Stevens, split with the NCC.[23] To win approval, the NCC "carried the ball," citing the sixteen-million-bale surplus and the steady loss of market to synthetics. Mac Horne told the Memphis Rotarians that the Memphis economy was in jeopardy because of the looming collapse of cotton farming.[24] In December 1966 farmers approved the program by 68 percent. "The old CPI became the new CPI," wrote Albert Russell, "with its own charter and bylaws," but it remained connected with the NCC by relying on its personnel to carry out the program.[25]

How well did this revised program meet the competition of artificial fibers? By 1969 the CPI raised $10 million and devoted two-thirds of the money to advertising, but the total expenditures, both public and private, made on behalf of cotton were no measly figure. One estimate placed the annual figure at more than $30 million, but that number included USDA and land-grant school research on farming practices, insect control, seed research, irrigation, and the like. Across the Cotton Belt, Experiment Stations tackled the woes of farmers, gin companies invested in new technology, and implement manufacturers developed bigger and better machines. Federal subsidies remained in effect, with the Agriculture Act of 1965 setting price supports for 1966–68 at 9.42, 11.53, and 12.24 cents respectively per pound.[26] Mandatory-volunteer assessments did not undermine enthusiasm for the program. "We fully support the Research and Promotion Act of 1966," the Arizona Cotton Producers Association resolved, "and urge all cotton producers to support this program."[27]

But the demand for an organization totally separate from the NCC continued in 1968 with the creation of the Producer Steering Committee, made up of grower representatives from across the Cotton Belt. The new committee remained in the NCC but became the repository and advocate for proposals to obtain better representation for growers, and the next year committee chair Griffin assembled a small group of business-oriented growers to come up with ideas. They decided to hire the consulting firm Booz, Allen and Hamilton (BAH) to make a study and furnish recommendations. They expected BAH to reinforce their conviction that growers should strike out on their own and form an organization completely independent of the NCC. They got what they wanted.

For the most fundamental change, the consultants thought the CPI would have to leave the NCC because the NCC represented all segments of the industry. Aggressive marketing had to be undertaken, and only a separate organization with its own funding could give growers the muscle they required to fight effectively in the marketplace. It would be impossible for the NCC to provide the time and money needed to expand the cotton market. The consultants envisioned a promotional operation unlike anything seen in agriculture, something akin to an advertising agency. Such an undertaking would furthermore require a highly motivated and assertive leader.[28]

By this time, a malaise had spread among growers, who vented their frustration on the NCC. "You couldn't put your finger on it," Russell wrote, "but harsh and unfair criticism of the

Council began to creep into conversations among cotton people in some sections of the Belt."[29] Likely this attitude thrived in the West, where interests thought the NCC remained too close to the mid-South, that the NCC made the CPI ineffective because the two bodies worked so closely together in Memphis, and that even the older organization had outlived its usefulness. But discontent originated from more than dissatisfaction with advertising. The price of cotton had steadily spiraled downward, dropping from 31.52 cents per pound in 1960 to 22 cents by 1969, while the cost of living, the level of wages, and the general price index moved upward. Planting restrictions via allotments led to a drop in the annual yield. In 1966 the United States produced almost fifteen million bales, but in 1967 and 1968, the yields dropped to 9.5 million and 7.5 million respectively. Yet the price of raw lint remained below the levels of the 1950s. Mac Horne and Dabney Wellford made a special study in which they explained the cotton puzzle as a three-legged stool with research and promotion as one leg and price and supply as the others. For cotton to remain competitive with synthetics, they pointed out that the price must not get too high, or else textile mills would further concentrate on artificial fibers. Growers needed higher prices, but Horne and his fellow economists never offered figures, only keeping price and supply in focus. They shied away from political issues but saw the CPI as a step forward.[30] Leaders in the producer segment acknowledged the point about prices, but overpriced cotton seemed more like a fantasy than an irritating reality.

Like the multiheaded Hydra, cotton's problems increased. Critics began to lambaste growers because some large landowners received hefty sums of taxpayer dollars, a consequence of the Agricultural Act of 1965, which provided direct payments to farmers. In June 1967, after the first year of the new program, Senator John Williams of Delaware pointed out that some growers in the San Joaquin Valley had received over $2 million in direct payments from USDA. His list included Griffin's operations at Huron and the J. G. Boswell Company at Corcoran. For Williams, this was inexcusable at a time when small-plot farmers were leaving the land. He proposed a $10,000 limit on subsidy payments. But the most adamant critic was Congressman Paul Findley of Illinois, who spoke frequently against subsidy payments. He identified some growers as wealthy beneficiaries but also pointed to the unintended effect of subsidies by citing the example of the Texas correctional system, which received $288,911 in 1966. Findley wanted to see subsidies phased out over several years for crops in surplus and had introduced a bill for that purpose. Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman defended the payments on the grounds of reducing surpluses: "Commodity programs are not welfare grants." *Time* magazine sarcastically replied that the recipients are not "exactly welfare cases."[31]

"Mr. Findley is a very worthy adversary," recalled Macon Edwards, NCC's Washington lobbyist. "He knows how to use the publicity of the press."[32] The arguments against subsidies presented a challenge to the NCC, so as the CPI struggled against the powerful synthetic manufacturers, the issue of subsidies came up, and growers felt threatened and worried that subsidies might be taken out of farming. Further pressure came with the election of President Richard Nixon, who saw the use of payment limitations as a means toward a balanced budget, so the NCC had to accept the inevitable when the Agriculture Act of 1970 established a maximum payment of $55,000 for each farmer. It was in this unsettling and shaky atmosphere that more and more growers came to believe they needed an organization separate from the

NCC and free of oversight or influence from cotton's related segments—ginners, textiles, brokers, and shippers.

Growers felt they were putting up the money and not seeing results. Griffin wanted the CPI to get off "dead center" and have some "new eyes" look at it.[33] He met with Blake and his staff in Memphis and said it might be time "to change managers." Specifically Griffin meant the NCC's managers for research and promotion, who along with the NCC staff still thought in terms of 100 percent cotton. Griffin and Blake then attended a meeting in Lubbock, where sympathy for Griffin's view was strong. At the Lubbock meeting, the decision was made to put a new person in charge of research and promotion.[34]

DUKE WOOTERS

"I could see that Mr. Wooters was a little bit brash, and that he wasn't very impressed with some of these older southerners that were reluctant to make changes."[35] So Russell Griffin described the personality and management style of CI's first president. Growers, particularly westerners, wanted a self-confident and aggressive executive who would shake things up, and they found their man in Duke Wooters. In 1970 the CPI hired Wooters to lead the new venture, which proved to be, Kirkpatrick remembered, the beginning of "trying times" and "normal growing pains."[36] It would be an era in which CI began to change the public's association of cotton with old South farming to thoughts of stylish and comfortable clothing made from a product of the natural environment.

Wooters was a native of New England with the advantages of good upbringing and solid schools; he graduated from the Harvard Business School. He knew nothing about cotton and referred to it as "that fluffy white stuff."[37] He has been described as "bright and quick, imaginative, high-energy, hard-driving, and possessed of a deep and arresting voice."[38] Wooters's natural world was New York's Madison Avenue, the nation's advertising center, and he was working as the marketing vice president for *Reader's Digest* when the CPI search committee interviewed him. He traveled among a fast-paced business set who could be irritating to some southern growers, but Wooters understood marketing and had a reputation for being effective. If "cotton need shock treatment," as suggested in the BAH report, he was the man.[39]

Wooters took over the leadership of the CPI in 1970 and with it the responsibility to restore cotton as the fabric of choice. He disliked the name Cotton Producers Institute and in 1971 pushed through a replacement, Cotton Incorporated. The new organization still answered to the Cotton Board, made up of growers, which collected the assessments from farmers and released them to Wooters's organization. Wooters had broad leeway, partly because he seized it, but growers saw the need for a broad-minded approach to promotion, so they left him alone. Some grumbled about his management style, but others liked his fresh approach.

Federal appropriations began supplementing the assessments when in 1970 the Agricultural Act authorized $10 million to be added annually to the program. The act furnished another $10 million for the secretary of agriculture to use as a discretionary fund for support of research and promotion. These supplements were made available for two years and then were to be cut to $3 million annually. Known as 610 funds, these appropriations ended with passage of the

Cotton Research and Promotion Act of 1977.

If anything, Wooters moved fast and treated the new organization as a profit-making company with a responsibility to the farmers whose livelihoods were at stake. Increasing the consumption of cotton was the order of the day, and he felt time should not be wasted. He acted like a missionary compelled to bring cotton back to its preeminence among fibers. He gave himself the title of president, which ruffled some feathers in the South because the NCC president had always served without compensation. His salary was high because the CPI had thought it necessary "to pay competitive Madison Avenue salaries," recalled a member of the CPI. "It was a wise decision, and it caused considerable trouble."[40] Wooters located the headquarters of the new operation in a tony high-rent building in New York City in the midst of the fashion center. The offices were plush. It "raised eyebrows" in Congress, the USDA, and the Cotton Board, wrote CI's historians, but Wooters wanted to welcome designers and buyers in flourishing and prosperous surroundings and present the operation as a class act. He established the organization's new research branch near the location of textile mills at Raleigh, North Carolina. For him, common sense meant researchers needed to be close to the mills for the "fluffy white stuff" to rekindle interest. He made these decisions without consulting the NCC or cotton leaders. To ignore the traditional guardians of the cotton kingdom in such heady matters engendered resentment, and when Wooters did consult with growers, he turned to his allies in the West.[41]

Wooters realized that CI needed a symbol that would instantly be recognized by the public, one that conveyed a positive and admiring image. Like Will Clayton, who complained about the South's "barefoot standards," Wooters wanted to "get rid of the image that cotton had of blacks in the field with a hoe."[42] In other words, cotton needed a logo. Through a friend at BAH, Wooters learned about Walter Landor, a designer in San Francisco. Landor showed little interest in creating the perfect logo for an agricultural commodity, but a year later he agreed to produce a design for the hefty sum of $50,000. A few months later, Wooters and two of his executives chose a logo designed by Landor's daughter, Susan. It was a boll based on top of the word "cotton." In 1973 the logo became the trademark of CI and became a hit as consumers associated it with the soothing comfort of a naturally grown fiber. This identifying mark alone did not create a new image of cotton, but it succeeded in becoming an instantly recognized symbol.

Cotton Incorporated quickly proved to be an effective combatant on behalf of the cotton farmer. It exploited the popularity of blue jeans, the most American article of clothing, by advertising the natural feel of jeans made of 100 percent cotton. It encouraged consumer loyalty by identifying jeans with youth. Sales of blue jeans rose steadily, reaching over five hundred million pairs in 1981 alone.[43] No item in retail clothing did more for the farmer than these 100 percent cotton indigo pants.

But the craze over blue jeans was greater than the management skills of CI or the foresight of cotton growers. All benefited as cash registers rang with the sale of jeans. To be sure, the slick ads coming from cotton's new promotional arm contributed, since they emphasized denim as a natural fiber, but the popularity of wearing jeans went beyond the efforts of trade organizations. Mothers liked blue jeans for the same reason they preferred blended shirts: ease of care. Blue jeans, especially for children and teenagers, needed no ironing and were unsurpassable for long-lasting wear.

Indeed, blue jeans became synonymous with youth; they served as raiments of identity. Cultural historians associate them with rogue independence, citing the example of actors like James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (1953), and Marilyn Monroe in *Clash by Night* (1952).[44] The singer-songwriter Neil Diamond expressed this connection in the song "Forever in Bluejeans," and in Britain a rock group took the name "Bluejeans." The growth of a teenage culture after 1945, dependent on rising affluence, drove this market, and the sight of young screen actors or sitcom regulars dressed in jeans provided the best advertising.

Not even youth's rebelliousness, however, explains the overwhelming popularity of blue jeans. All age groups wore them, as seen in *The Misfits* (1961), starring Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe. By the new century, jeans were ubiquitous in life and on-screen. The growth of leisure time in the last half century created a demand for all-purpose durable clothes, and for relaxation consumers wanted easy-to-wear garments. Jeans fit that purpose. With the rise of the relaxed look, including "casual-dress Fridays" in business offices, sales increased. The country-and-western craze also spurred sales, and blue jeans entered the world of haute couture when name designers began to produce their own brands. Expensive skintight jeans, some embroidered with rhinestones and other finery, became the rage. But the craving for denim included common wear as skirts, shorts, dresses, and jackets. Artificial fibers went through the polyester craze of the 1970s but had nothing to match the popularity of blue jeans. In 2005 the Internet sale of jeans worn by the Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio in the Celebrity Jeans Auction ("How much would you pay for a chance to get into a celebrity's pants?") raised money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Referring to jeans as the "American uniform," the cultural historian James Sullivan wrote that "the classic pair of blue jeans might carry more implications about the American consumer than anything else we consume."[45]

Cotton Incorporated scored a hit with the "Fabric of Our Lives" campaign, which debuted Thanksgiving 1989. Researchers noticed that people rubbed their arms when they described the soft feel of cotton next to their skin. "Body and mind apparently worked together," they reported.[46] From these observations, CI hit upon the theme of "cradle to grave," meaning that cotton was commonly used throughout life from beginning to end. The campaign featured no brand names but promoted the use of cotton for various age groups in the events of life. It was subliminal advertising, a soft-sell generic pitch with pleasant scenes of weddings, anniversaries, and the like, focusing on women in the eighteen to thirty-four age group. Ogilvy and Mather, the advertising agency that CI employed, kept the ads updated and won a 1998 Silver Effie Award for television advertising. The campaign successfully established cotton as a desirable item in American consumer culture, and along with the logo and the Seal of Cotton, the "Fabric of Our Lives" was recognized "as a masterpiece of the sloganeering art."[47] In 2003, however, CI replaced Ogilvy and Mather with DDB New York and retired "The Fabric of Our Lives," but the new agency intended to keep the same target audience of young women.[48]

For all its success, CI went through some bumpy years. In 1976 the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) began investigating whether Wooters had arranged a consulting contract for $60,000 per year with America's largest cotton producer, J. G. Boswell Company in the San Joaquin Valley. The press reported allegations that the "agreement amounted to a conspiracy to circumvent the intent of Congress by avoiding a law limiting Wooters's salary in 1975–76."[49] In 1975 Congress had ruled that no person employed by CI could have a salary above that of the secretary of agriculture, which at the time was $63,000. Wooters had agreed to a cut and went without pay for nine months, although his contract permitted him to have consulting assignments if they did not impair his work as president. The CI board had approved the consulting agreement, but only two years later. Suspicions were further aroused because the Boswell Company applied for and received a refund of $60,000 from the Cotton Board soon after making the agreement with Wooters. By law the California grower was entitled to the refund, but the timing of the agreement raised suspicion.

When the powerful voice of W. B. "Billy" Dunavant, a broker in Memphis, demanded the resignation of Wooters, the matter acquired deeper significance. Dunavant's anger began when he and members of the American Cotton Shippers Association held a closed-door meeting with officials of CI. After the meeting, Dunavant was quoted in the Memphis *Press Scimitar*: "I have felt threatened for our association because of this man [Wooters] and members of his staff."[50] The Shippers Association wanted to know if CI had been suggesting the names of suppliers to foreign mills, a charge that the Office of the Inspector General planned to investigate.

Old suspicions between southerners and westerners rose again. Wooters's lavish offices on Madison Avenue had raised eyebrows, but he wanted advertisers to see cotton as modern and sophisticated and thought the headquarters should not convey a shabby image. He understood marketing and knew the old image of cotton with "barefoot standards" had to be overcome. Only if the public associated cotton clothing with fashion could the losses to synthetics stop. His supporters embraced this reasoning and had no objection to his actions, and from the Cotton Board he received a formal statement of support commending his willingness to take a temporary cut in salary; it was backed up with a further resolution that his actions had been in the best interests of growers.[51]

Morgan Nelson exemplified the western perspective. He was a member of the Cotton Board, but his influence went further. Nelson was a prominent legislator in the New Mexico House of Representatives, where he served as chair of the Public and Military Affairs Committee and also the Board of Educational Finance. He had long tenure on the 1517 Cotton Association, the New Mexico State University Cotton Advisory Committee, and the state's Crop Improvement Association. He was well known in educational and agricultural circles as a heavyweight, and his voice did not go unheeded. "The inquiry into any compensation Wooters possibly could have received from private sources is meddling into his private civil rights and is beyond the legitimate functions of government."[52] Nelson saw Wooters taking cotton in the right direction.

Wooters had nonetheless miffed powerful southerners. They found themselves left on the sidelines when CI moved to New York with its enormous budget. Illinois congressman Paul Findley attacked Wooters, and there was speculation in western circles that disgruntled southerners had fed information to the congressman.[53]

Soon afterward, however, the Department of Justice dropped its probe without giving reasons. Wooters felt exonerated. Members of the Cotton Board were pleased that no criminal investigation would now develop, and Dunavant thought the decision would help CI survive the upheaval.[54]

When the Office of the Inspector General filed its report in August 1979, it cited CI for misusing funds in activities related to foreign sales and for using information about growers, furnished by the Cotton Board, to discourage requests for refunds of bale assessments. Such actions violated federal law, and the report recommended that the USDA would have to implement tighter budget controls and better oversight or else the federally mandated assessments would have to stop. A special committee of CI had been formed to look into personnel issues, but it stood behind Wooters. Paul Findley called for Wooters's resignation. The Office of the Inspector General thought the USDA and the Cotton Board had not provided effective oversight, which had enabled CI to develop "a degree of autonomy not envisioned under the act, the implementing order, or the contract with the Cotton Board."[55] Investigators reported that the Cotton Board had disclosed the names of growers who requested refunds to other producers, a claim that was denied.

Other issues included the use of funds raised by the old CPI to entertain textile executives at the 1976 Olympics. The Office of the Inspector General reported some cheating on expense accounts and recommended that all accounting systems within CI be brought up to standard and audited yearly by an independent certified public accountant. On the matter of foreign sales, the report revealed that staff at CI had recommended foreign mills to buy from specific suppliers and had notified those suppliers of the mills' interest, but there was no evidence the organization had taken orders to sell cotton on "behalf of any firm."[56] Investigators faulted the USDA for poor oversight and recommended that the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) initiate procedures to ensure that CI's foreign activities remain in compliance for foreign sales. Likely it was this activity that disturbed the American Cotton Shippers Association. In 1981 CI and Wooters agreed to resolve the dispute over his consulting contract by paying the USDA $120,000, which would return to the Cotton Board. They denied any wrongdoing but chose to settle to avoid further litigation. Wooters did not like to compromise, a "characteristic that made him a lightning rod for Cotton Incorporated's critics," stated one account. In 1982 the Cotton Board did not renew his contract.[57]

Only the activities relating to foreign sales caused resentment among growers. "I personally am not in favor of their trying to go overseas," stated NCC president Chauncey Denton.[58] Through the Cotton Council International (CCI), an arm of the NCC, efforts to sell cotton overseas had been under way since 1956, and any intrusion on that program worsened the criticism. Much of the discontent stemmed, however, from personality clashes. In 1976 the USDA had arranged for an outside evaluation of CI by a New York consulting firm that reported: "In trying to divorce itself from traditional industry practices and relationships to concentrate on its promotional mission, Cotton Incorporated's management had alienated friend and foe alike."[59] Throughout the industry, the study discovered strong approval of the "objectives, organizational concept, and overall program of CI" but found the organization “insensitive to how its activities may be perceived.” There was a consensus that the new organization ignored or overlooked opportunities for cooperation that might have “avoided the hard feelings which have developed.” However, the evaluation pointed out that cotton’s slide in market share had slowed and had “resisted competitive inroads better in the last three years than at any time in the past two decades.”[60]

How should Wooters be judged? Nearly all agreed that he was brash, arrogant, and insensitive. He particularly offended southerners and felt they were mired in the old cotton culture, conservative to a fault, and locked in their own inertia. Wooters saw himself as saving cotton from its own mishaps and worried little about bruising feelings along the way. But he misjudged the southerners. To be sure, westerners had shown much leadership in establishing a separate organization for growers, but southerners like Jerry Sayre had made major contributions. Indeed, the Memphis-based NCC had made the original commitment a generation earlier to the same objectives Wooters now sought. In the CPI’s early years, the NCC had drawn from its limited finances to keep the experiment going, and while the NCC welcomed a new partner, it had to tread softly among the unhappy southerners. The responsibility to protect the funding arrangements for CI from congressional interference continued to rest with the NCC.[61]

To what extent did Wooters see correctly? The CPI had foolishly continued to advertise 100 percent cotton in spite of the popularity of blends when he came aboard. He understood how a large part of the population still saw cotton farming as backward and immersed in poverty. He knew that to carry out his task it was necessary to overcome this perception and to give cotton a more respectable place in the mainstream of popular culture. He wooed and courted textiles and pulled them closer to cotton after they had drifted to synthetics, and though artificial fibers understandably remained an important part of textile production, the turnaround in the falling consumption of cotton spoke loudly. Much of the contribution achieved by CI came after Wooters left, but his vision remained.

The bumps in the early years did not impede CI. Growers saw the facts unveiled by the Office of the Inspector General as a worthy correctional measure, a spanking for misbehavior, but they did not demand an end to the organization. Dissatisfied growers could still obtain a refund of their assessments. Drought or excessive rains, which led to low yields, were often responsible for refunds. Bill Pearson of Mississippi remembered that the bale assessment was automatically deducted from the sale of his crop like a payroll income tax withholding. “We gave it little attention,” he said.[62] Growers instead had to think about maintenance of machinery, insect control, diseases like wilt, and the threat of nematodes, the microscopic parasite that attacks plant roots. After the departure of Wooters, CI continued to pursue its original objective of raising consumption and public awareness of cotton. In 1988 it began a cooperative program with textile mills known as the Engineered Fiber System (EFS) that improved the ability of mills to obtain the grade of cotton they desired for a particular market. This program has significance because the quality of cotton varies within a bale as well as among bales. Since synthetic fibers consistently retained the same quality, expectations rose for cotton, a product of nature whose characteristics of strength and length are conditioned by soil and weather. Just as flowers in the same plant bed will vary in the size and beauty of blooms, so will cotton have some variations within a five-hundred-pound bale. EFS proved to be popular with mills, and CI expanded the program to Europe and started an EFS program in China in 2006. Through EFS, foreign mills tend to buy more American cotton because it has consistent grade and quality.[63]

In 1990 Congress revised the Cotton Research and Promotion Act to end the opportunity for growers to get a refund. For CI this would both increase and stabilize revenue, which it had long wanted. The measure also put a mandatory assessment on the importers of cotton textiles because imported clothing had become a large force in the retail market, and growers wanted importers to bear a share of the burden of promotion and advertising. The inclusion of importers softened the growers' objections to a nonrefundable assessment, and they ratified the new legislation in 1991. This action slightly lowered the supplemental assessment, first started in 1977 at .4 percent of each bale and raised to .6 percent in 1985. Now Congress set the supplemental figure at .5 percent. If he deemed it necessary, the secretary of agriculture could call a referendum each five years; the new measure also established a mechanism for growers to initiate a referendum should the secretary ignore their request for one. No referendum on the 1990 measure had been held by 2006. Much authority continued to rest with the Cotton Board, and the legislation specified that only "cotton producer organizations" could make nominations for the thirty directors of the board. Certified organizations include the Farm Bureau, cooperatives, the NCC, and various producer organizations. If a farmer has no membership in such an organization, he is voiceless, though he must pay the assessment. By 1998 CI had a budget of $61 million, with the importers' share reaching 25 percent.[64]

Table 2. Cotton and Synthetic Fibers: U.S. Mill Use, 480-Pound Bale Equivalents, 1965–2005

Year	Cotton	Synthetic	Cotton's Percentage of Total
1965	9,595,000	2,267,885	80.9
1975	7,249,667	3,762,567	65.8
1985	6,412,861	3,534,810	64.5
1995	10,647,329	2,981,412	78.1
2005	5,871,318	1,121,092	84.0

Source: Leslie Meyer, Stephen MacDonald, and James Kiawu, *Cotton and Wool Situation and Outlook Yearbook* (USDA Economics Research Service, November 2008), 47, http://www.ers.usda.gov.

Cotton's share of the world market was less than in the United States. In 1989 cotton held 48 percent of the world market, which amounted to 83 million bales. Synthetic fibers, and particularly polyester, amounted to the equivalent of 91 million bales. Over the next decade, however, cotton consumption rose by only 3 million bales, but the use of artificial fibers rose to the equivalent of 139 million bales. It left cotton with a world share of 39 percent.[65]

CONCLUSION

By 2000 Cotton Incorporated's research and promotion arm had begun to think globally. It had allowed its logo to be used with imported goods over the objections of domestic textile mills. Through the Engineered Fiber System, CI attempted to nudge foreign mills to buy more U.S.

cotton, but serious concern arose whether the organization had peaked in the domestic and international markets. The new organization faced the same reality that had confronted the cotton kingdom for two hundred years: each triumph led to another barrier, as if the future amounted only to an endless path of resistance.

Cotton Incorporated vastly improved the image of cotton. By law it could not involve itself in political matters; it could not lobby Congress or otherwise seek to influence policy. These constraints allowed CI to escape nearly all the controversies over pesticides, fights over water rights, issues over trade policy, and the thorny question of farm subsidies. The organization had an enormous budget compared with the NCC, which enabled CI to entrench itself in the glamorous world of advertising and fashion. When NCC lobbyists delicately tiptoed through the cloakrooms of Congress, agents of CI waltzed through the salons of fashion designers. But glamour was a dimension that Wooters had understood, and he realized it would be necessary to undertake initiatives that might be disturbing in order for cotton to penetrate the world of chic designers and style makers. Therein lay CI's contribution. Safe from political involvement and richly funded, CI moved the fruit of common farming into an expanded market.