

An economics report

1 Read the report. Match headings a–e with paragraphs 1–5.

- a Improving productivity b What's the history? c The cotton production process
d Egyptian cotton e Where does cotton come from?

Egypt's white gold

1 _____

The cotton plant is used for thousands of things, including sheets, clothes, spacesuits, salad dressings and other food ingredients. The major producers today are China, India, the United States, Pakistan, and Brazil. However, it is Egyptian cotton that people think of when it comes to quality.

2 _____

Pieces of cotton cloth have been found dating back thousands of years. It is generally believed that people first cultivated cotton in India, although people living in Egypt's Nile Valley were also using cotton from early times. Originally, the quality of the cotton grown in Egypt wasn't good enough to be traded successfully in European markets. But when a new type of cotton plant was introduced in the early 1900s, the Egyptian economy went from strength to strength. In fact, the impact of the crop led to the overall modernisation of Egypt's manufacturing industry.

3 _____

The hot, wet climate and strong sunlight along the Nile River Valley create the perfect conditions to grow long cotton fibres. Egyptian cotton is grown exclusively in Egypt and has the longest fibre of all the types of cotton. It is a light brown colour and therefore must usually be bleached to make it white. The long fibres of Egyptian cotton produce a soft, strong and flexible thread, which produces fabric with a high 'thread count'. The 'thread count' is the number of threads woven together to form each square inch of fabric. The high thread count associated with Egyptian cotton is commonly regarded as a sign of quality, particularly in sheets and bed linen.

4 _____

As the cotton plant is often affected by pests such as the boll weevil, it has traditionally been grown using a lot of fertilisers and pesticides. Nowadays, there is an increasing market for cotton that is grown without pesticides. The earliest movement for organic cotton was the SEKEM organisation in Egypt (1990). Participating farmers encouraged the Egyptian government to convert 400,000 hectares of conventional cotton production to organic methods. This achieved a 90% reduction in the use of synthetic pesticides and a 30% increase in cotton yields. With each year more and more clothing companies in a number of cotton-producing countries have changed from conventional farming of cotton to organic.



5 _____

- 1** Cotton pickers harvest the cotton and put it in a cotton trailer.
- 2** When the trailer is full, the cotton is compressed to form a block of cotton called a *module*.
- 3** The cotton fibre is separated from the cottonseed and then the fibre is cleaned at a cotton gin.
- 4** The cottonseed is sent to a mill where it is processed to make oil. The fibre is compressed and wrapped to make bales, and is then shipped to textile mills.
- 5** The fibre is processed to make yarn, which is then woven to make cloth. The cloth is dyed and cleaned, and shipped to clothing producers.

2 Read the report again. Choose the correct answers.

- 1 China produces _____ cotton than Egypt.
a better quality **b** more **c** stronger
- 2 The first cotton is believed to have been cultivated in _____.
a India **b** Pakistan **c** Brazil
- 3 Egyptian cotton is treated with bleach because it has _____.
a soft, strong and flexible threads **b** a light brown colour **c** long fibres
- 4 Chemicals are commonly used on cotton crops _____.
a to reduce pest damage **b** to increase the market for cotton
c to increase the quality of the cotton
- 5 The cotton is first compressed and then _____.
a dyed and cleaned **b** sent to textile mills **c** the fibre is separated from the seed

3 Answer the questions about the text.

- 1 What prevented the Egyptian cotton industry from being successful in Europe before 1900?

- 2 Why does cotton grow easily in Egypt in the Nile region?

- 3 Why do people often think that a high thread count is important when buying cotton products?

- 4 What is a boll weevil? How has it affected the way that cotton is grown?

- 5 What happens to the cotton fibre after it is separated from the cottonseed?

4 Answer the questions with your own ideas.

- 1 What natural products come from your country? Are they exported to other countries?

- 2 Do these products require a production process? If so, what is this process?

- 3 Which organic products are commonly available in your country?

- 4 Do you use any organic products? If so, which? If not, why not?
