

THE INNOVATION LAB

In association with Change Agency

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

A number of innovation researchers have identified “liquid networks” as being essential to enable innovation to flourish¹. Organic Cotton supply chains are an excellent example of a liquid network, where participants know each other, are confident in the context they are working in, and have a purpose-driven approach. As a result they feel more able to take the risk of innovating than they would do alone, outside the network.

At last year’s Organic Cotton Round Table (OCRT) in Mumbai, India, Change Agency hosted the inaugural Innovation Lab – a celebration of new ideas in organic cotton, with applicants competing for the OCRT Innovation Award.

We received such positive feedback to this initiative in Mumbai that we are making it a permanent component of the OCRT. We are now accepting applications for 2016 innovators who will be in with the chance of pitching their innovation at the OCRT in Hamburg, Germany, on 6th October 2016. The deadline for applications is Friday 19th August - [click here](#) or see below for more details on how to apply.

How does it work?

Echoing the “Dragon’s Den” TV program which shows in many countries, a number of innovators – shortlisted from applications received by email – will present their idea at the OCRT in Hamburg (either in person or via video link) to a panel of judges. There are no strict rules for entry but ideally pitches would broadly fit into the themes prioritized by the Organic Cotton Round Table Task Forces: Seed & Soils, Business Models and Consumer Engagement.

How to apply?

In order to apply, applicants must send a one-page overview of their project/idea to Innovation@TextileExchange.org by Friday 19th August.

¹ For example Steven Johnson, *Where Good Ideas Come From*, 2010

What will happen on the day?

The Innovation Lab will take place towards the end of the OCRT meeting in Hamburg on 6th October. After a brief introduction to the principles of Innovation by Change Agency, innovators – who may be individual or in teams – will get just 3 minutes to pitch their idea. They can have just one powerpoint slide to support them, but can use any other artifact they wish to enliven their presentation - creative presentation techniques will be encouraged. Change Agency will operate a strict timing check to make it fair for all.

Once all innovators have pitched their ideas, they will each be asked to join one of the tables in the room to discuss their innovation in more detail with the audience members seated there, for around 20 minutes. This will increase audience understanding of the innovation and the process which led to it, and contribute new ideas and contacts to the innovators.

After the discussion period, the chair of the judges will speak about the judges' thoughts on the innovations they have heard. A quick round of audience reactions will be taken on radio microphones around the room.

Then the results are announced: the two runners up (3rd and 2nd place) are announced and then the winner of the OCRT Innovation Award is revealed and brought up on stage to receive their award.

There will be a cash prize for the winner to be spent on taking their idea to the next stage. The TE Communications team will publicize the winning idea, bringing valuable public profile to the innovator. As the competition runs each year, we will revisit past winners to find out how their idea has progressed since they won, and all of the innovators who pitch their ideas will be placed on a group email list for peer-to-peer support and advice.

Conclusion

Organic value chains are hotbeds of new ideas and innovation. The Innovation Lab will showcase these ideas and reward the best of them. As a day-long event leading to an afternoon climax, it presents an excellent sponsorship opportunity for a company which wishes to emphasize its credentials as an innovator.