



Ewelina Morawska¹

COTTON INDUSTRY IN UZBEKISTAN: THE SOVIET HERITAGE AND THE CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY

Abstract

This article examines development of cotton industry in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era and nowadays. The aim of this paper is to present the significance of cotton industry for Uzbek economy. The work presents the change of export structure and agricultural production in Uzbekistan during 26 years of independence. The article briefly depicts environment problems such as child labor and forced labor issues in Uzbekistan.

Key words

Cotton industry, Uzbekistan, export, agriculture

Introduction

Uzbekistan belongs to “the cotton states” which are the biggest producers of cotton in the world. Uzbekistan holds the sixth position as a global producer of cotton in 2016/2017². A dynamic development of cotton industry occurred during the Soviet era. Each Soviet republic specialised in production of different goods. The well-developed cotton industry easily adapted to the new conditions of reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, the economy basing on the monoculture of one particular good is vulnerable to price fluctuations on the global market.

This article tries to present the cultivation of cotton monoculture during the Soviet era and these days. Additionally, the research shows that despite the decreasing share of cotton in the Uzbekistan’s GDP. In the research a hypothesis is put forward that despite of the economy and agricultural reforms, cotton industry is still relevant for Uzbek people. In the article statistic methods was used to present to changes in

¹ Ewelina Morawska, Ph. D. Student, Jagiellonian University.

² *Leading cotton producing countries worldwide in 2016/2017 (in 1,000 metric tons)*, The Statistics Portal, [online:] <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263055/cotton-production-worldwide-by-top-countries/>, (8.11.2017).

Uzbekistan's economy and agriculture. Content analysis of written text, i.e. articles, reports and studies, was applied to show the importance of cotton industry in Uzbekistan and its impact to social-economy issues.

Development of cotton monoculture during the Soviet era

The cultivation of cotton in Central Asia has a long tradition which goes back to the times before the Russian Empire and the Soviet era. One of the reasons for including this region to the Russia Empire in the second half of the 19th century was a huge demand for cotton on the Russian market. At the same time the civil war broke out in USA and the import of cotton to Russia was suspended. During the cotton rising popularity in Central Asia, this plant was called “the white gold”³.

After the October Revolution, the area of the cultivation of cotton and its production base expanded rapidly. The investments in the irrigation systems and the water infrastructure were completed. In turn, “in the 1970's a clear-cut cotton nomenclature had been developed [in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic – E.M.], with “cotton-barons” dominating the complex, making use of falsified output and yield data, illicit trade practices and forced labour”⁴.

The Uzbek “cotton affair” broke out in 1983. The scandal disclosed a scale of falsification of statistic during harvest and other corrupt practices. The crop sizes had been artificially inflated, thus the nomenclature received various benefits, and the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic gained additional inflows from the state budget. What is more relevant, this affair showed Uzbekistan's position in the Soviet Union, connections of elites in Moscow and Tashkent and allowed them to benefit from cotton industry⁵.

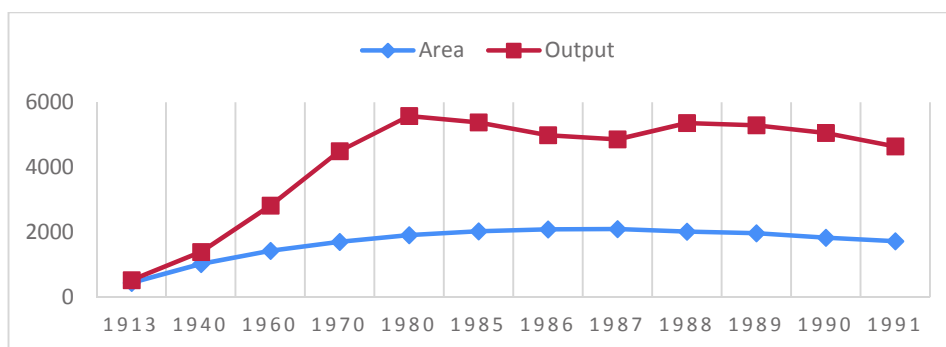


Figure 1. Cotton in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (1913-1990)

Source: *Agricultural Sector Uzbekistan (1913-1991)*, [in:] M. Spoor, *Transition to Market Economies in Former Soviet Central Asia: Dependency, Cotton and Water*, ‘Working Paper Series’, No 160, September 1993, p. 19.

³ M. Spoor, *Transition to Market Economies in Former Soviet Central Asia: Dependency, Cotton and Water*, ‘Working Paper Series’, No 160, September 1993, p. 4-5.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 11.

⁵ M. Kuryłowicz, *Polityka zagraniczna Uzbekistanu wobec Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Księgarnia Akademicka, Krakow 2014, p. 71-73.

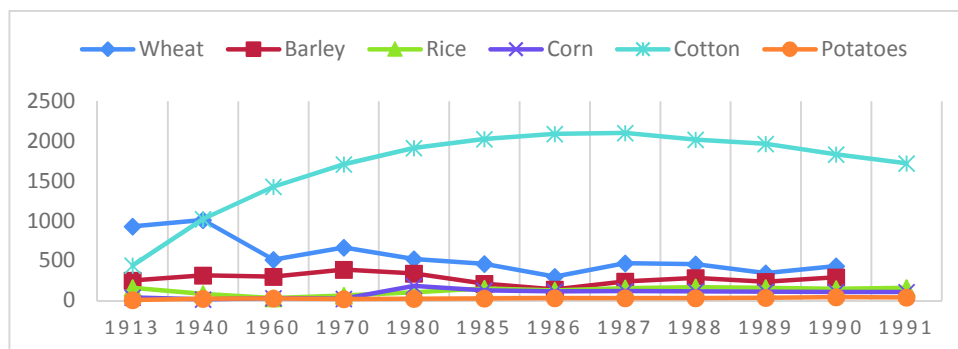


Figure 2. Area of the cultivation of plants in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in 1913-1991 [*1000 ha]

Source: *Agricultural Sector Uzbekistan (1913-1991)*, [in:] M. Spoor, *Transition to Market Economies in Former Soviet Central Asia: Dependency, Cotton and Water*, 'Working Paper Series', No. 160, September 1993, p. 19.

Cotton is a resource which can be sold and exported easily, because it does not require any special transmission infrastructure. During the first half of 1990's Uzbekistan was exporting about 20 different goods of which cotton accounted for 82.6 percent of the general export volume⁶. The state had a valuable product which guaranteed cash inflow to the budget. It also helped to mitigate the negative results of the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic crisis afterward. Despite the fact that the cotton's export slightly decreased in the late 1990's, it maintained its position as one of the most desirable goods from Uzbekistan. Over the period 1994-2000, the sale of cotton provided about 25 percent of foreign currency income in the budget⁷.

During the first years of Uzbekistan's independence, export of cotton generated a significant part of the national GDP. Export also provided inflow of hard currency. The whole production of cotton remains under the state control. The cotton price is annually determined by the state bodies and bases directly on market prices. The enter price, which government pays farmers, is lower than the one on the world market. This gap represents an invisible tax and extra income⁸. In Uzbekistan "double pricing system" was implemented in order to encourage farmers to fulfill state procurement targets. Under this system, "half of the SP [state procurement – E. M.] quota of cotton could be sold either domestically or abroad at a negotiated price that is 20 percent higher than the SP price"⁹.

⁶ A. F. Fasulev, *Uzbecki model transformacji gospodarczej* [in:] *Uzbekistan. Historia – społeczeństwo – polityka*, T. Bodio (ed.), Elipsa, Warszawa 2001, p. 301.

⁷ N. Sirajiddinov, *Handel zagraniczny i polityka handlowa*, [in:] *Uzbekistan. Historia – społeczeństwo – polityka*, T. Bodio (ed.), Elipsa, Warszawa 2001, p. 365-366.

⁸ N. Djanibekov, I. Rudenko, J. P. A Lamers, I. Bobojonov, *Case Study #7-9 Pros and Cons of Cotton Production in Uzbekistan*, [in:] F. Cheng (eds.), *Food Policy for Developing Countries: Case Studies*, P. Pinstrup-Andersen, Ithaca, New York 2010, [online:] <https://cip.cornell.edu/DPubS?verb=Display&version=1.0&service=UI&handle=dns.gfs/1279121771&page=record>, (2.11.2017), p. 3-4.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 4.

A challenge for the independent Uzbekistan was a process of agrarian transformation. The state retains the right of land ownership, so Uzbek farmers only lease land from the state. The system of subsidies for farmers is developed in Uzbekistan¹⁰.

Cotton share in country's economy

Table 1. Cotton in structure of export in official statistics

Year	2000	2005	2010	2015
Share of cotton in the whole export	27,5%	19,1%	12,1%	5,2%

Source: *Foreign trade statistics*, The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on statistics, [online:] <http://stat.uz/en/141-analytical-materials/1136-foreign-trade-statistics> (28.10.2017).

At the beginning of the 20th century cultivation of cotton was uneconomic and made losses for farmers¹¹. It prompted Uzbek authorities to take specific actions to diversify the structure of country's export. In 2000 cotton was still the main export good, but in 2016 the share of its export significantly declined and reached just over 5 percent¹². Today, the main importers of Uzbek cotton are China, Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran and Russia¹³. Uzbekistan sells cotton to Iran, Portugal and Poland as well¹⁴. The value of the Uzbek export of cotton yarn, textiles and readymade clothes amounts about US\$1 billion annually¹⁵.

In the first years of its independence Uzbekistan avoided an economic crisis. The authorities were mitigating the collapse of the industrial sector through state management and subsidies which were financed from incomes from cotton export¹⁶. They promoted the policy of diversification of export of goods and services. Currently chemicals, energy, oil, food products and services are dominating in export structure¹⁷.

During the Soviet era, petroleum and energy sectors were not developing in Uzbekistan. The situation changed at the beginning of the 21st century. At the same

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 4-5.

¹¹ A. K. Bedrintsev, *Reformy ekonomiczne*, [in:] *Uzbekistan. Historia – społeczeństwo – polityka*, T. Bodio (ed.), Elipsa, Warszawa 2001, p. 317.

¹² The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on statistics, *Foreign trade statistics*, [online:] <http://stat.uz/en/141-analytical-materials/1136-foreign-trade-statistics>, (28.10.2017).

¹³ I. Sirtioğlu, *Uzbekistan – Republic of Cotton and Products Annual, Annual Report*, Global Agriculture Information Network, 4.04.2016, [online:] https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Cotton%20and%20Products%20Annual_Tashkent_Uzbekistan%20-%20Republic%20of_4-4-2016.pdf, (2.11. 2017).

¹⁴ I. Sirtioğlu, *Uzbekistan – Republic of Cotton and Products Annual, Uzbekistan Cotton and Products Annual Report 2017*, Global Agriculture Information Network, 30.03.2017, [online:] https://gain.fas.usda.gov/Recent%20GAIN%20Publications/Cotton%20and%20Products%20Annual_Tashkent_Uzbekistan%20-%20Republic%20of_3-30-2017.pdf, (2.11.2017).

¹⁵ I. Sirtioğlu, *Uzbekistan – Republic of Cotton and Products Annual, Annual Report*, op. cit.

¹⁶ N. Djanibekov, I. Rudenko, J. P. A Lamers, I. Bobojonov, op. cit., p. 7.

¹⁷ *Foreign trade statistics*, Op. Cit.

time global prices of cotton were declining, however gas and oil prices were increasing. The inherited transmission system from the Soviet Union enabled to export gas only to Russia¹⁸. The Uzbek authorities had to find new ways of gas exporting. Uzbekistan develops energy cooperation with China too. In 2009 the first leg of the Central Asia China pipeline was opened. Since 2012 Uzbekistan is transporting gas to China uninterruptedly¹⁹.

Table 2. Global prices of cotton 1991-2017 (U.S. dollars per Metric Ton)

Year	Global prices of cotton 1991-2017	Year	Global prices of cotton 1991-2017
1990	8255916	2004	6200600
1991	7690688	2005	5516826
1992	5793396	2006	5805246
1993	5801942	2007	6328369
1994	7971569	2008	7139986
1995	9830080	2009	6275203
1996	8053967	2010	10354455
1997	7922867	2011	15460834
1998	6553038	2012	8924097
1999	5312609	2013	9040061
2000	5904772	2014	8309674
2001	4799691	2015	7041718
2002	4626013	2016	7421382
2003	6344370		

Source: *Global price of Cotton (PCOTTINDUSDM)*, FRED® Economic Data Economic Research Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PCOTTINDUSDM>, (5.11.2017).

¹⁸ M. Kuryłowicz, Op. Cit., s. 99.

¹⁹ Ł. Gacek, *Azja Centralna w polityce energetycznej Chin*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Krakow, 2013, p. 145.

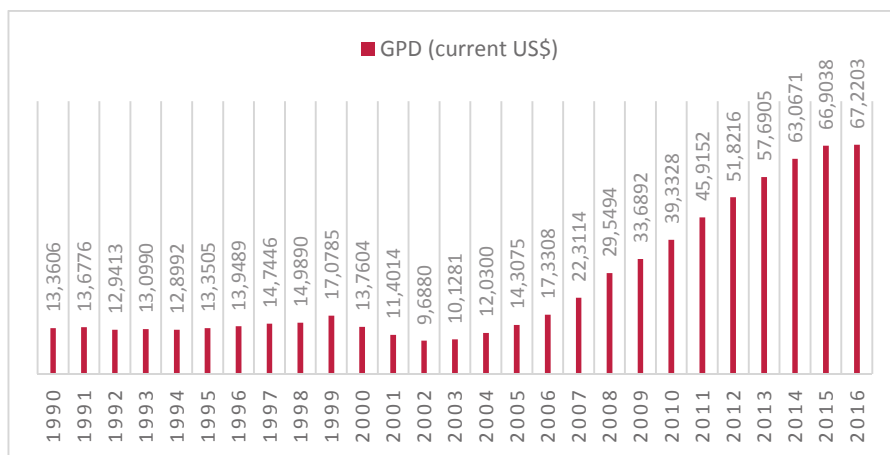


Figure 3. Uzbekistan's GDP 1990-2016 (in Bln current US\$)

Source: *GDP (current US\$)*, The World Bank, [online:] <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>, (5.11.2017).

In 2016 and 2017 the planting area totalled 1 255 000 ha and 3 287 000 t of cotton was collected. About 40 percent of local production of cotton is consumed domestically. The textile industry plays an essential role in Uzbek economy as well. Over 30 percent of workers in industry are employed in the textile industry. Moreover, this sector of economy shares 26% of the general output²⁰. The Uzbek authorities are planning to reduce the production of cotton to 3 million tons in 2020. This actions are part of the policy of modernization of agriculture which is successively implementing by the government²¹.

In Uzbekistan three authorized trade companies were specialised in cotton export and had a special state license to sell this plant abroad²². The Uzpakhtasanoat was engaged in receipt and processing of raw cotton and the Uzpakhtaeksport specialised in storage and export of cotton fibre. The production of cottonseed oil was down to the Uzpakhtae. In October 2015 the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, announced a creation of a new holding company Uzpakhtasanoateksport. The company is responsible for production and export of cotton. Uzpakhtasanoateksport is a complex conglomerate which absorbed three aforementioned companies²³. This reform enables to control the whole cotton sector in the country²⁴.

²⁰ I. Sirtioglu, *Uzbekistan – Republic of Cotton and Products Annual, Annual Report*, Op. Cit.

²¹ D. Azizov, *Uzbekistan to decrease cotton production*, Trend News Agency, 18.01.2016, <https://en.trend.az/casia/uzbekistan/2481269.html>, (2.11.2017).

²² B. Muradov, A. Ilkhamov, *Uzbekistan's Cotton Sector: Financial Flows and Distribution of Resources*, Open Society Foundations, October 2014, [online:] <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/uzbekistans-cotton-sector-20141021.pdf>, (6.11.2017), p. 30.

²³ *Chairperson of cotton complex appointed in Uzbekistan*, Trend News Agency, 2.12.2015, [online:] <https://en.trend.az/casia/uzbekistan/2463854.html>, (6.11.2017).

²⁴ I. Sirtioglu, *Uzbekistan – Republic of Cotton and Products Annual, Annual Report*, op. cit.

The ecological aspect

During the Soviet era, centrally planned economy contributed to cessation of various vegetation and rotation of cultivations. Cotton culture covered about 90% of all agricultural area. The chemical fertilisers were using in agriculture on a mass scale and caused soil degradation and environmental damage²⁵. In a result of developing of irrigation systems in Central Asia in the second half of the 20th century, ecology balance was seriously compromised and led to environmental disaster. The most well know examples of the Soviet overexploitation are environmental disasters in the Areal Sea basin and Areal Sea's desiccation. Eventually, the Areal Sea morphed into a salt desert. The last sources of water in this region are heavily contaminated and cannot be consumed by people. The other problem is a toxic dust.

The intensive use of water resources for irrigation and outdated infrastructure caused decrease of the water level in local rivers. The change of ecosystem negatively affects the economic and cultural development as well as the quality of life in this region. The waterloggings, soil salinization and ecosystem changes reduce agricultural production, contribute to economic losses and poverty.

Currently, agricultural chemicals are still used on a mass scale. Polluted water and sewage which flow down from the fields cause contamination of rivers. To make things worse, this water is intended for the needs of households. More than a half of fields in Uzbekistan is contaminated. The lack of access to clean drinking water causes serious health problems among Uzbek population²⁶.

The agricultural reforms in Uzbekistan

At the beginning of the 21st century the Uzbek authorities commenced a process of differentiation of crops, especially vegetables and fruits. Global cotton prices were on the low level and export of this resources did not pay off. According to Nizamiddin Khaydarov "gradual reduction in cotton fields has been directed for cereals, vegetables, potatoes, forage crops which enabled to prevent shortages and rising prices of food in early transition and global financial crisis periods"²⁷. Livestock are

²⁵ G. C. Capisani, *Nowe Państwa Azji Środkowej*, Dialog, Warszawa 2004, p. 172.

²⁶ R. Strickman, M. Porkk, *Water and social changes in Central Asia: problems related to cotton production in Uzbekistan* [in:] *Central Asian water. Social, economic, environmental and governance puzzle*, M. M Rahaman, R. O. Varis (eds.) Helsinki University of Technology, Water & Development Research Group, 2008, p. 10-11 [online:] https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Muhammad_Rahaman2/publication/259452313_Rahaman_M_M_Varis_O_Editors_2008_Central_Asian_Waters_Social_Economic_Environmental_and_Governance_Puzzle_148_pages_Water_and_Development_Publications_TKK-WD-03_Finland_ISBN_978-951-22-9593-7/links/0c96052bb21d8db47f000000/Rahaman-M-M-Varis-O-Editors-2008-Central-Asian-Waters-Social-Economic-Environmental-and-Governance-Puzzle-148-pages-Water-and-Development-Publications-TKK-WD-03-Finland-ISBN-978-951-22-9593-7.pdf#page=113, (5.11.2017).

²⁷ N. Khaydarov, *Agricultural Development in Uzbekistan: Agricultural Reforms versus Transboundary Water Issues*, "Developing Country Studies", vol.5, No 10, 2015, [online:] <https://www.google.pl/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKewi0m>

being developed in Uzbekistan too. The share of livestock in the whole annual agricultural production accounts for about 45%²⁸.

In comparison with 2000, in 2016 the structure of country's agriculture productions significantly changed. The production of vegetables and potatoes increased more than four times and fruits almost four times. Concurrently, the production of cotton slightly decreased²⁹.

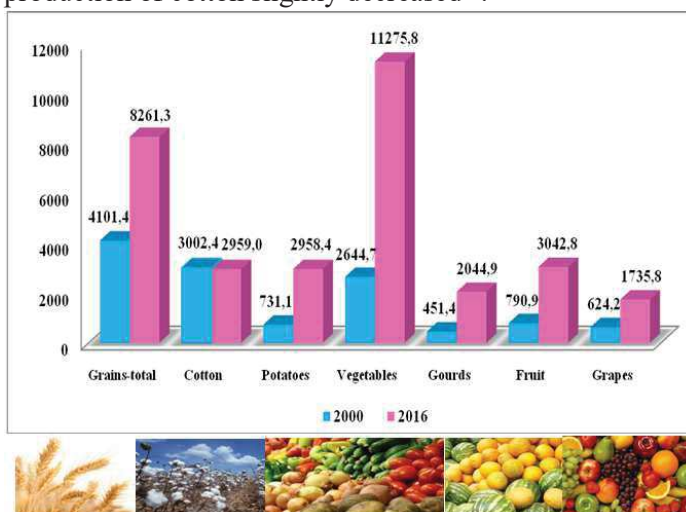


Figure 4. Production of main crop products (thousand tons)

Source: *Key indicators of agricultural sector. Statistical analysis of the key indicators of agricultural sector of Uzbekistan in 2000-2016*, The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics <https://stat.uz/en/435-analiticheskie-materialy-en1/2070-key-indicators-of-agricultural-sector>, (7.11.2017).

The social aspect

Every year the Uzbek authorities force about 1 mln citizens to work during harvest time. Schools are closed during a crop season and children and teachers work on cotton fields. Only in 2012 did authorities create first antichildren labour law which forbade mass scale working on the fields for children under 16. However, children still have to work during harvest, because local authorities are afraid of penalties. Moreover, students, doctors, nurses, office workers and employees of private businesses are forced to work too.

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²⁸ Ibidem, p. 105.

²⁹ *Key indicators of agricultural sector. Statistical analysis of the key indicators of agricultural sector of Uzbekistan in 2000-2016*, The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics [online:] <https://stat.uz/en/435-analiticheskie-materialy-en1/2070-key-indicators-of-agricultural-sector>, (7.11.2017).

The profits from cotton's selling are not shared with farmers and other workers. According to International Labor Rights Forum "the profits of the Uzbek cotton sector support only the inner circle of Uzbek government. (...) The profits disappear into a secret fund to which only the highest level officials have access, known as the Selkhozfond".

The government created "the largest state-orchestrated systems of forced labor to produce it" and "a state-controlled system, under the direction of a president in power since the end of the Soviet Union"³⁰. Farmers have to supply established quotas of cotton under the threats of penalty.

Every year several Uzbeks lose their life during the crop season. People are exposed to negative impact of unknown chemicals and they suffer from lack of access to drinking water³¹.

In 2012 a global scandal erupted when Anti-Slavery International was informed that H&M, one of the most popular Swedish clothes chains, had bought cotton in Uzbekistan. A similar problem was revealed in the case of IKEA purchases³². In consequence of the international pressure more than 100 brands decided to boycott Uzbekistan because of their government's forced labour practices³³.

Conclusion

Is Uzbekistan condemned to cultivation of cotton? The authorities undertake activities aimed to change the character of Uzbek economy. The cultivation of vegetables and fruits is dynamically developing in the agriculture sector. Uzbekistan also develops the energy sector through gas cooperation with China. However, the boycott of Uzbek cotton by international brands may deter potential foreign investors. The environmental damages negatively influence decreasing volume and quality of cotton production as well as life standards of Uzbekistan's people.

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³⁰ *Uzbekistan's Forced Labor problem*, Cotton Campaign International Labor Rights Forum, <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/uzbekistans-forced-labor-problem.html>, (2.11.2017).

³¹ Ibidem.

³² *H&M comes under pressure to act on child-labour cotton*, The Guardian, 15.12.2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2012/dec/15/cotton-child-labour-uzbekistan-fashion>, (6.11.2017).

³³ *More Than 100 Top Brands Boycott Uzbek Cotton Over Forced Labor*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2.11.2012, <https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-cotton-boycott-top-brands/24758554.html>, (6.11.2017).

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Streszczenie

Artykuł ukazuje rozwój przemysłu bawełnianego w Uzbekistanie od czasów Związku Radzieckiego do czasów współczesnych. Główny cel opracowania stanowi przedstawienie znaczenia przemysłu bawełnianego dla uzbeckiej gospodarki. Omówione zostało również kształtowanie się struktury eksportu i produkcji rolnej w Uzbekistanie na przestrzeni 26 lat od odzyskania niepodległości. W artykule poruszono też takie kwestie jak degradacja środowiska czy przymusowa praca i wykorzystywanie dzieci przy zbiorach bawełny.

Przemysł bawełniany w Uzbekistanie: sowieckie dziedzictwo i wyzwania dla rozwoju kraju

Słowa kluczowe

Przemysł bawełniany, Uzbekistan, export, rolnictwo

Ewelina Morawska, M.A., PhD student at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. She is graduate of political science (B.A., M.A) and e urasian studies (M.A.) at Jagiellonian University and economy & public administration (B.A.) at Cracow University of Economics. She is interested in energy security and environmental issues in Central Asia.