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The cotton industry has traditionally been a man's world. 2019 was a historic year for the International Cotton Association. For the first time in its 178 years, the industry elected 2 women to join the Board of Directors. It sent a clear message that the cotton industry values diversity and inclusion. Creating an inclusive culture is essential for the success of every industry today.

That year the Association also launched its Women in Cotton initiative. In the past 2 years, the initiative has set wheels of change in motion. Women in Cotton offer free virtual events for men and in the cotton community. These events provide educational opportunities for diversity awareness, personal development, global networking, and spotlight women's achievements.

In January this year, the International Cotton Association was shortlisted for the Diversity and Inclusion Award by the UK's Trade Association Forum recognizing the Women in Cotton initiative for its innovation and outstanding progress in increasing female membership and representation within committees, leadership, and board positions.

Women represent over 50% of the population but still represent a small portion of the global cotton community's leadership. We are working to future-proof our industry by creating bias awareness and giving women a stronger voice. We challenge association members to create dynamic environments within their organizations where individual differences are appreciated. The most creative, innovative, and profitable solutions are realized when people feel valued and are free to contribute to their fullest potential.

We all have unconscious biases, and it is up to each of us to recognize what they are and change them. If we can't #BreakTheBias that exist for half the world's population, how can we expect to achieve an inclusive culture that reflects the diverse global industries that exist today?

It may take some time, but the cotton industry is walking the high road to achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion. Let us all commit to #BreakingTheBias every day by talking about and calling out bias as it is recognized. Together we will build a more sustainable world all people in every industry will flourish.