

## Did You Know?

**T**oday, cotton textile products are lightweight, soft, easy-to-wear, wrinkle-free, and durable (and some even flame-retardant) thanks to revolutionary contributions of scientists more than 60 years ago at ARS' Southern Regional Research Center (SRRC), New Orleans, LA.

At a facility then named the Cotton Chemical Reactions Laboratory, the ARS researchers developed new processing methods that have had significant and lasting impact on the U.S. cotton textile industry. Countless innovations relating to cotton led to the Center being designated an [American Chemical Society landmark in 2004](#).

The creation of “wash-and-wear” cotton fabric is among the team’s most notable achievements. In addition to freeing 1950s-era consumers from having to iron the wrinkles out of their cotton garments, the invention put the straggling natural plant fiber squarely back in contention against the likes of nylon, polyester, and other synthetic fabrics.

The hard work and creativity of the researchers at the laboratory (known today as the ARS Cotton Chemistry and Utilization Research Unit) also gave rise to other key inventions.

In addition to wrinkle-free clothing, the team also created a way to make cotton fabrics stain-resistant and flame-retardant. Spaghetti lovers rejoice! Drip-dry and permanent-press fabrics also got their starts in the New Orleans laboratory—as did renewed hope for a U.S. cotton industry reeling from the loss of prized markets to nylon and other synthetic fabrics.

ARS scientists filed several dozen patents associated with these pioneering technologies. According to Cotton, Inc., “cotton is the single best selling fiber in America today, outselling all man-made fibers combined.”

The dog days of summer may be upon us, but at least we can rely on the cooling comfort of our favorite cotton garments. And, if you happen to be wearing cotton today, give thanks to those ARS pioneers’ contributions!

Written By **Jan Suszkiw**, ARS Information Staff.



**Cotton socks.**



**Cotton boll.**

*Please submit story ideas and national award items to Tara T. Weaver-Missick, [tara.weavermissick@ars.usda.gov](mailto:tara.weavermissick@ars.usda.gov) or call 301-504-1663.*