

Better Cotton Working Group on Natural Resources

Terms of Reference

October 2021

Background

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is a multi-stakeholder initiative and the largest cotton sustainability programme in the world. Better Cotton's mission is to help cotton communities to survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment.

The Better Cotton farm-level standard, known as the [Principles and Criteria](#) (P&C), covers 7 principles: crop protection, water management, biodiversity and land-use, soil health, fibre quality, decent work, and management systems. The current version of the P&C was released in 2018 and currently applies to more than 2 million cotton farmers across 23 countries, with the majority being smallholder family farmers. Requirements in the P&C, and their application at field level, play a crucial role in driving sustainability improvements across a large part of the cotton sector.

Better Cotton is now launching a revision of the P&C, with the aim of improving its local relevance and effectiveness and strengthening alignment with key elements of the Better Cotton 2030 strategy, including decent work and climate change.

As part of the P&C revision process, Better Cotton is convening several advisory groups of thematic experts to work with the project team to revise and improve the current standard. This document sets out the Terms of Reference for the **Natural Resources Working Group** (WG) which will help oversee the development and revision of water, soil, biodiversity, and related requirements in the P&C.

Focus of the Working Group

Water Stewardship, Soil Health and Biodiversity & Land-Use are respectively covered under Principles 2, 3 and 4 of the current P&C. These three principles encourage BCI producers to adopt personal time-bound plans to enhance the quality and quantity of these natural resources, key to the livelihood of cotton growers, but threatened by Climate Change and pollution. Undertaking an increasingly holistic approach, Better Cotton is now seeking to revise all three natural resources dimensions together to ensure all encouraged practices complete each other and lead to a clear improvement for farmers' livelihoods and their natural environment.

As part of the P&C revision, the WG will support Better Cotton in reviewing the relevance and effectiveness of the current indicators under Principles 2, 3 and 4 and identifying recommended improvements.

The work of the WG will cover the following main areas, though other related areas may be discussed and added:

- **Water Stewardship:** *Includes understanding water resources, managing soil moisture, applying efficient irrigation practices, managing water quality, engaging in collaboration & collective action, addressing water–related climate change adaptation/mitigation nexus.*
- **Soil Health:** *Includes identifying and analysing soil types, maintaining, and enhancing soil structure and fertility, improving nutrient cycling, etc.*
- **Biodiversity & Land-use:** *Includes enhancing biodiversity resources, restoring degraded areas, enhancing beneficial insects, protecting riparian areas, consideration of a High Conservation Value (HCV), or similar approach in the case of proposed land conversion, etc.*
- **Overarching climate-smart farming practices:** *promoting cross-cutting practices that enhance resource management and support climate change mitigation and adaptation; e.g., complex crop rotation, livestock grazing, intercropping, etc.*

Although the primary focus of the WG will be on natural resource management; recommendations are likely to cover a broader set of related elements, such as climate change adaptation or farmer livelihoods. These recommendations will be taken into consideration by the Better Cotton project team.

Activities and timeline

The WG will work closely with the Better Cotton team to advise on the drafting of revised soil, water, biodiversity, and related indicators and guidance. The Better Cotton core team will draft the majority of content based on feedback and input from the WG; however, members of the WG may be requested to contribute specific indicators or guidance directly if it falls under their areas of expertise (and capacity allows).

The WG will launch in **January 2022** and is **expected to conclude by December 2022**. The work of the WG will include the following phases:

January - February 2022

Understand the current approach and key challenges/ areas for improvement:

- Review current indicators under Principle 2, 3, and 4 and related guidance of the P&C and feedback from Better Cotton on known issues and gaps
- Review summary outcomes of relevant research carried out by Better Cotton teams and consultants, including the BCI Climate Change Strategy (promoting agricultural practices for mitigation & adaptation in cotton) and recent soil health research
- Consider also existing knowledge and information sources around natural resources use in cotton production.

February – March 2022

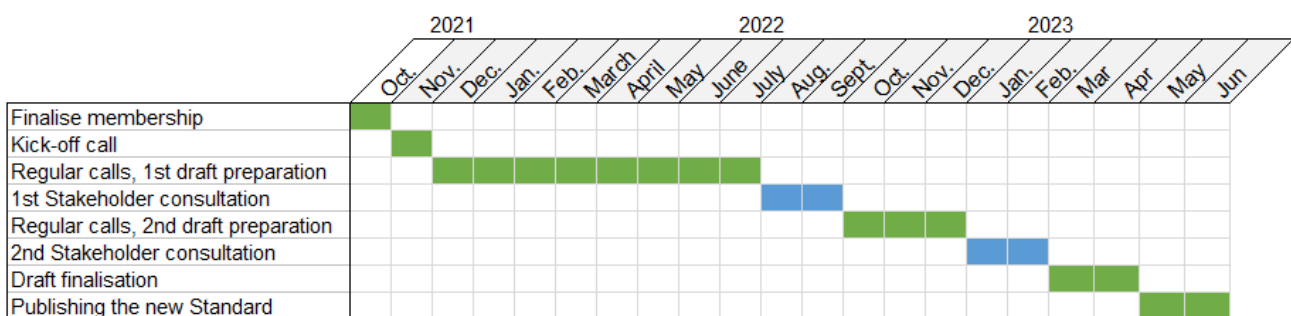
Identify initial gaps and areas for improvement; based on this review; provide initial feedback to BCI team to support draft revisions to indicators

<u>April – June 2022</u>
Review and feedback on draft revised indicators; highlighting where further work is required
<u>July 2022</u>
Provide feedback on the consultation draft of the revised P&C before public consultation
<i>August – September: Expected public consultation on draft revised P&C</i>
<u>October – December 2022</u>
Review and discuss public consultation feedback – identify key implications for the revised draft
<i>If needed: January – February 2023: Second public consultation on draft revised P&C</i>
<u>March – April 2023¹</u>
Provide feedback and comments to Better Cotton on the further revision of indicators, based on incorporating consultation feedback

The total expected time commitment for Working Group members is estimated below.

Activity	Monthly estimate	Comments
Participate in calls	2 hours	It is anticipated calls will be reduced during public consultation, with an additional call expected in October after consultation finishes.
Review documents between calls	1 hours	
Total monthly estimate	3 hours	

Overview of expected Working Group timeline



¹ The majority of work of the WG is expected to conclude by December 2022. However, there is a chance that if a second consultation is required on crop protection requirements, an additional discussion or two may be required in early 2023.....

Composition & Applications

The WG will be composed of approximately 3-5 individuals. Membership will be approved by the Better Cotton Director of Standards & Assurance and Better Cotton Council representatives of the Standards Committee, the dedicated oversight body for the P&C revision. The WG can include independent experts or consultants, civil society organisations, retailer/ brands with relevant expertise, or others.

Potential members will be asked to submit a short application form, along with a CV. Final member of the WG will be confirmed by the Better Cotton Core Project Team, based on the following factors:

- Relevant technical knowledge and expertise
- Knowledge of agricultural standards; especially in varied contexts (smallholders, large farms)
- Experience participating in consensus-based multi-stakeholder processes
- Consideration of cross-sectoral representation, geographic diversity, and gender

Please refer to the P&C Revision [project website](#) for further information and applications.

[Apply here](#)

Responsibilities and ways of working

The WG is responsible for advising Better Cotton on the development of indicators and guidance – this includes identifying key issues, giving feedback and suggestions on draft revisions to indicators, and discussing/ responding to stakeholder feedback and concerns. The P&C Revision process is overseen by a dedicated [Standards Committee](#), which will include representation from technical working groups where possible. The Standards Committee will approve consultation versions of the draft P&C; and final approval of the revised P&C is the responsibility of the Better Cotton Council (please refer to the [Better Cotton Standard Setting and Revision Procedure](#) for further details).

The WG will convene through regular virtual meetings (approximately 1.5-2 hours every month), except during public consultations when no meetings are expected. Meetings will be coordinated and facilitated by the Better Cotton project team. All WG meetings will observe Chatham House rules – participants are free to use information discussed during the meeting but should not identify the source of the information or his/her organisation. The WG participation will be made public with brief information about members published online on the Better Cotton website.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the WG will be working remotely. If budget allows and the group is willing, an in-person working session in mid-2022 might be considered (with costs covered by Better Cotton).

Participation on the WG is generally expected to be voluntary. However, a limited budget is available to provide a stipend to cover a portion of time for members who are unable to cover costs. Availability will be subject to the total demand and availability of funds; and will be covered in the WG application form.

Further information

For additional information or questions, please contact standards@bettercotton.org