

Better Cotton Standard Revision

Project Overview – October 2021

Background

Better Cotton is the world's leading sustainability initiative for cotton. Our mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. The Better Cotton farm standard is known as the Principles and Criteria (P&C) and sets out global requirements for Better Cotton across seven principles. The P&C ensure that Better Cotton meets clearly defined requirements on 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 applies to more than 2 million cotton farmers across 23 countries, through both Better Cotton direct programmes and benchmarked partnerships with equivalent standards.

Project objectives and scope

There are various negative social and environmental impacts associated with cotton cultivation worldwide that threaten its sustainability. Inefficient irrigation techniques, poor cultivation practices, and improper use of pesticides and fertilizers threaten the availability of clean water, soil fertility, human health, and biodiversity around cotton-farming communities. In many regions, the impacts of climate change will only exacerbate these pressures over the coming decades, as weather patterns become more extreme, growing seasons are shortened, and water stresses intensify.

Child labour is a continuing concern in many cotton-growing regions, especially due to the prevalence of family farms in rural areas with limited access to education. In addition, cotton farms often rely on migrant or seasonal workers, who are particularly vulnerable to unsafe working environments, coercion, indebtedness, or other risks of forced or exploited labour.

Improving the social and environmental conditions of cotton production is therefore essential for human and environmental health, the livelihood of millions of people world-wide, and the future of the commodity. The Better Cotton (P&C) is one of the key elements of the Better Cotton Standard System, which work together to drive more sustainable cotton production. The P&C addresses these challenges through a holistic approach, covering a wide spectrum of social, environmental, and economic criteria.

Better Cotton is now launching a standard revision process, with the aim of strengthening the P&C to ensure it continues to meet best practice, is effective and locally relevant, and aligns with Better Cotton's 2030 strategy. Over the last five years, we have seen increasing focus on areas such as climate change, decent work, and soil health. The P&C revision is an opportunity to ensure the standard aligns with leading practice and supports Better Cotton's ambitions to drive field-level change.

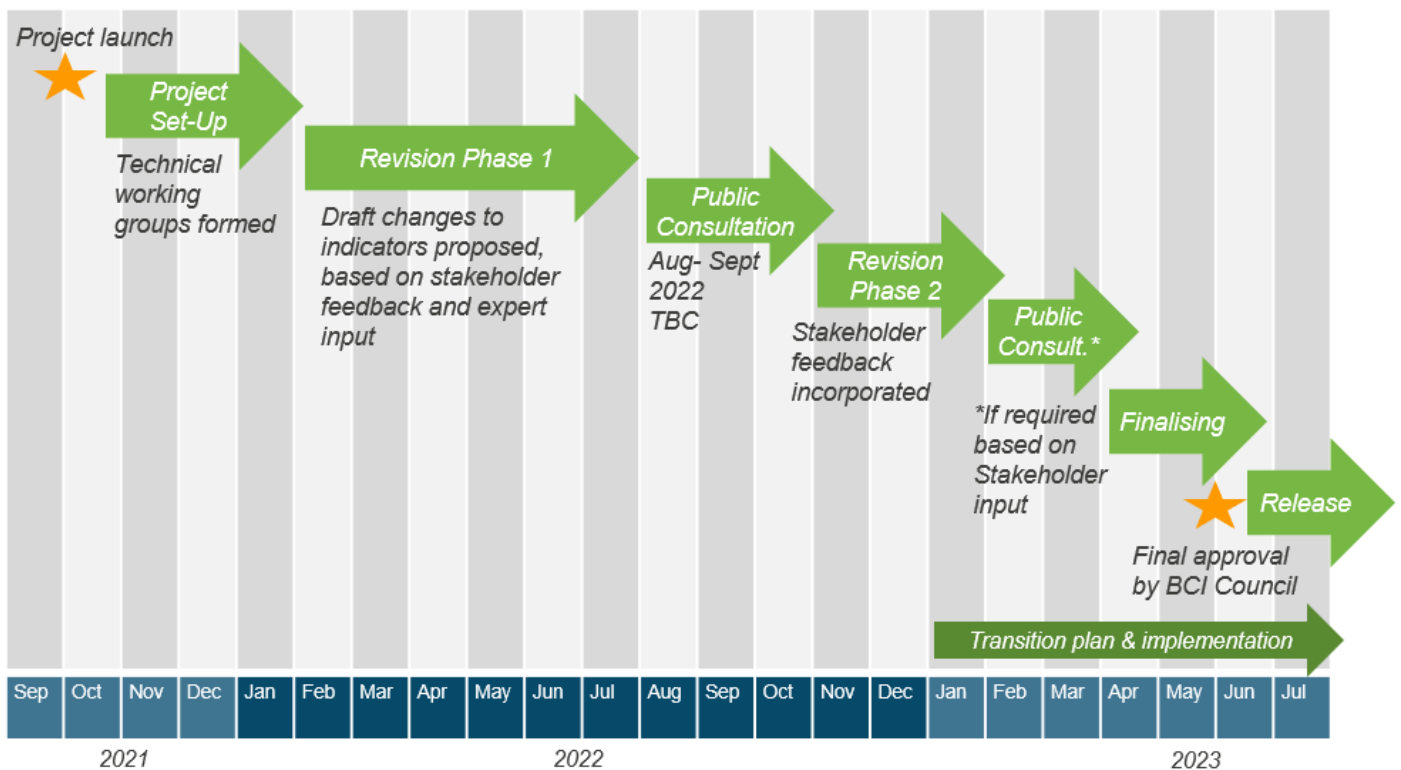
Stakeholder feedback on the current P&C also indicates that while the seven Principle areas remain broadly relevant and effective, there are a number of opportunities to make specific requirements more locally-relevant. These include for example areas such as soil testing, and biodiversity and water mapping. These focus areas and others will be further explored with stakeholders once the revision process gets underway.

The scope of the revision will include all indicators and guidance in the P&C, which is applicable to all farms and farmers participating in the Better Cotton programme, as well as those covered by Better Cotton’s benchmarked partners¹.

Timeline and opportunities to engage

The P&C revision will launch in October 2021 and is expected to run until early 2023. There will be at least one public consultation period (likely Aug- September 2022), with a second consultation period in early 2023 if required. It is expected that the revised P&C would be released in Q2 of 2023, with a transition period to be defined.

Figure 1: Anticipated project timeline (subject to change)



¹ Better Cotton has benchmarked partner relationships with strategic partners in several regions, including Brazil, Greece, Israel, Australia, and parts of Africa: <https://bettercotton.org/who-we-are/partners/strategic-partners/>

Project phases

Note this is subject to change based on the scope and nature of stakeholder feedback.

October – December 2021: Project launch; Standards Committee formed; agreeing membership of technical working groups

January – June 2022: Draft revisions underway

July 2022: Standards Committee approves public consultation version of revised P&C

August – September 2022: Public consultation – online consultation + selected in-person workshops or smaller events

October – December 2022: Working groups and Better Cotton core team review stakeholder feedback and adjust draft versions based on feedback

January- February 2023: Second consultation round (*if required based on feedback*)

February – May 2023: Finalisation of draft P&C; final version approved by Better Cotton Council (based on Standards Committee recommendation)

Ways to engage

[Visit the project website](#): Learn more about the project and register your interest in future updates

Apply to join a technical working group:

The P&C revision process will be supported by several technical working groups, who will advise Better Cotton on the drafting of revised indicators and guidance. If you have expertise in one of the areas below and are familiar with the Better Cotton programme, [please apply to be part of a working group](#). Please click the links below to review the Terms of Reference and apply by 5th November 2021

- [Crop protection working group](#)
- [Decent work and gender working group](#)
- [Natural resources working group \(water/ soil/ biodiversity\)](#)

Please refer to the Terms of Reference (available on the project website) for further details.

Participate in public consultation: Public consultations will be carried out through a combination of online consultation/ survey tools and in-person workshops or focus groups. Visit the [project website](#) for further information or to sign up to receive the latest information.

Project governance and decision-making

The P&C revision will follow [ISEAL's Standard-Setting Code of Good Practice v6.0](#), which sets out best practice guidelines to develop or revise sustainability standards. Several technical working groups will be convened to advise Better Cotton on the drafting of indicators in the following areas: crop protection, decent work and gender, and natural resources management. The project will be overseen by a multi-stakeholder Standards Committee, comprised of dedicated technical experts, representatives from the Better Cotton Council, and representatives from Better Cotton's membership

categories. The Standards Committee will have the responsibility to approve the consultation versions of the revised P&C. The Standards Committee makes decisions by consensus; however, if consensus cannot be reached, several options can be presented to the Better Cotton Council for final decision-making.

Final approval of the revised P&C is the responsibility of the Better Cotton (BCI) Council, based on a recommendation from the Standards Committee. The Better Cotton Council also seeks to make decisions based on consensus; if consensus cannot be reached, the Chair of the Council may call for a vote. Further information can be found in the [Council by-laws](#).

For more information

For any enquiries or comments kindly email us at standards@bettercotton.org.