

BCI Summary of Assurance Revisions

4th February 2020

This document summarises the primary changes in the BCI assurance model, which will become effective for the 2020/21 season. Please refer to the **BCI Assurance Manual v4.0** for full details on the revised assurance procedures, available on the [assurance page](#) of the BCI website.

Summary of main changes

1. **New Producer Units¹ (PUs) are generally expected to spend their first season in a ‘set-up’ phase (without licensing)** – this allows new PUs to spend their first season focusing on training farmers and field staff, and establishing their internal management system, before being assessed for licensing.
 - a. A variations process exists for specific cases only (i.e. PUs set up well in advance of the current crop season) – please refer to the BCI Assurance Manual v4.0 for more information
2. **Mandatory BCI or third-party assessment before licensing new PUs**– new PUs will only be licensed after they receive an assessment by BCI or a third-party verifier and are found to be compliant with all Core Indicators. Licences will no longer be given on the basis of a self-assessment or IP visit only
3. **Revised roles for Implementing Partners (IPs)** – IP visits will no longer affect licensing decisions directly. Instead IPs will carry out two kinds of visits:
 - a. ‘Readiness Checks’ on new PUs before recommending them for licensing – to ensure that the PU fully meets Core Indicators before a Licensing Assessment is carried out
 - b. ‘PU Support Visits’ on licensed PUs - to help identify strengths and gaps in the PU’s performance, measure progress against priorities in the Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), and provide detailed capacity building support.

Refer to the revised BCI Assurance Manual v4.0 for more detail. New reporting templates for both the Readiness Check and PU Support Visit can be found on the [assurance page](#) of the BCI website.

4. **Standard 3-year licences for all Producer Units (PUs) and Large Farms** – licence duration will no longer be linked to self-assessment scoring on improvement indicators. All PUs and Large Farms will receive a standard 3-year licence, and will therefore also receive a Licensing Assessment at least once every three years to maintain the licence
5. **Self-assessment will no longer be linked to licensing – instead it will be used as a learning tool:** an annual self-assessment will still be required for all PUs and LFs; however, the outcome will not be ‘compliant’ or ‘non-compliant’. Instead, the self-assessment will focus more on identifying gaps against Core Indicators, reporting progress against the Continuous Improvement Plan, and identifying areas where additional support or corrective actions are needed.
6. **A new provision has been introduced to allow additional verification activities (such as labour assessments) in specific cases if sustainability risks are identified** – this new element of the BCI Assurance model allows BCI to commission additional remote or field-based verification activities in cases where social or environmental risks have been identified through credible sources (i.e. third-party data, government monitoring, etc). Please refer to section 11 of the BCI Assurance Manual v4.0 for more detail.
7. **Incidental category of non-conformity has been extended to Large Farms²** – previously, non-conformities for Large Farms could only be graded as systemic, which would lead to an automatic licence denial. Going forward, non-conformities raised during Large Farm assessments can also be categorised as ‘incidental’ – these need to be addressed within 6 months for the licence to remain valid.

For more information

Please refer to the [assurance page](#) on the BCI website or contact assurance@bettercotton.org

¹ Under the BCI assurance model, the term ‘new PU’ refers to a group of farmers being organised to participate in the BCI programme for the first time. Existing PUs that undergo changes to the farmer composition or management system (i.e. new PU Manager, restructured PU, or change in IP management) are not considered a new PU under this definition.

² Note this change applies only to individually licensed Large Farms (currently); it does not apply to Large Farms participating in the Group Assurance Model in the US