

Lead Verifier – Qualifications and Competencies

V1.2 July 2021

Qualifications

Essential

- University degree in agriculture, natural resources, environmental management or other relevant subject is encouraged but not required. Experience may substitute for education
- 3 years of auditing or other work experience in (cotton) farming, natural resources or environmental management
- Pass Better Cotton third party verifier online and/or face to face training course every 3 years
- Pass Better Cotton third party verifier online and/or face to face refresher training as specified by Better Cotton
- Witness at least two third party verification visits led by a qualified Lead Verifier for Large Farms / Producer Units as appropriate or where no existing qualified Lead Verifier is present in the organisation, be shadow verified by Better Cotton staff or designated external consultants for a verification visit during the first season of operating as a Third-Party Verifier
- Trained in auditing principles, procedures, techniques, and behaviours as described in ISO 19011
- Knowledge of national and local laws and regulations on the environment, labour, health and safety, land and water ownership in the country where the verification visits will take place
- Knowledge of prevailing industry and cotton farming practices. Knowledge of local social and cultural conditions to be considered in the conduct of a verification visit
- Ability to communicate clearly in English both verbally and through the writing of verification reports

Desirable

- Pass ISO 19011 auditing training course and/or ISO 9001/ISO 14001 Lead Auditor course or comparable local/ national alternative
- Experience in identifying and gathering information from knowledgeable local organisations / individuals, including human rights, labour, environment, cotton or other leading local institutions that are likely to have the trust of farmers and workers and knowledge of local conditions
- Strong social auditing competencies demonstrated through:
 - Post-secondary education and/or 1 year experience in social work or services that includes labour welfare or labour affair;
 - 2 years' experience working on a farm or plantation directly related to managing labour in an operational capacity (general farm management / human resources);

- 2 years' experience in performing a gap analysis, internal social audits or second- or third-party social assessments;
- Successfully taken and passed the accredited 5-day SA8000 basic auditing course or equivalent (equivalent courses include Amfori 5-day auditor training course or another 2-day minimum auditor course); or
- Be an APSCA Registered Audit or APSCA Certified Social Compliance Auditor

Competencies

Demonstrate a good understanding of the Better Cotton Principles & Criteria and be able to:

- Describe the intent and requirements of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria
- Demonstrate an understanding of how the Principles and Criteria apply to the local context
- Assess Producer Units' and Large Farm's compliance with the core and improvement indicators (where relevant)

Language

- The ability to read and communicate effectively in the language(s) used by workers, community organisations, Learning Groups, Producer Units or others during the verification audit. If an interpreter is needed, s/he should ideally be independent from the organisation being verified.

Information Gathering from Local Knowledge Sources to be able to:

- Use knowledge gained from local sources to help create an effective verification approach that covers key relevant issues
- Gather and report information in a way that does not compromise the independence of an organisation or its ability to conduct its work

Auditing Skills, must be able to:

- Apply appropriate audit principles, procedures and techniques to the planning and execution of the third party verification so that the checks are conducted in a consistent, systematic, impartial and objective manner;
- Conduct visual observation and surveillance in and around cotton farms and detect non-conformities with Better Cotton Principles and Criteria
- Demonstrate the understanding and implementation of interviewing and facilitation techniques including the ability to:
 - Approach and engage all those interviewed in a non-threatening and effective manner
 - Interview workers in ways that enable the interviewer to pursue lines of inquiry, while allowing those interviewed to report their experiences
 - Conduct interviews under conditions that reassure workers they can discuss sensitive issues

- Gather and report information in a way that does not subject the workers being interviewed to any negative consequences as a result of the interview
- Identify non-conformities or potential non-conformities that may not be apparent in routine observation, including practices of concealment or deception
- Maintain, where appropriate, the confidentiality of proprietary information, data, documents and records

Analysis and Reporting, must be able to:

- Perform basic operational and data analysis i.e. the ability to do necessary computations and to understand proper relations between business rules and legal requirements for pesticide usage, wage computation and reporting
- Verify the accuracy of collected information and be aware of the significance and appropriateness of the evidence collected to support the findings and conclusions of the third party verification
- Prepare well-documented third party verification reports with clear analysis and specific evidence to support conformity / non-conformity findings

Mechanisms to Assess Competency

The following mechanisms can be used Third Party Verifier Organisations to assess whether their Lead Verifiers meet the competency requirements listed above:

- Examination pass
- Certificate of passing auditor training course recognised by a reputable auditor registration organisation e.g. IRCA, RABQSA;
- Review of previous third party verifier reports produced
- Better Cotton review of sample of verification reports
- Feedback from PUs and LFs

Supporting Verifier Qualifications and Competencies

- Always carry out verification activities under the supervision of a Better Cotton qualified Lead Verifier
- University degree in agriculture, natural resources, environmental management or other relevant subject is encouraged but not required. Experience may substitute for education.
- Trained by a qualified Lead Verifier on the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria and refresher training as specified by Better Cotton
- Pass the third party verifier online exam every 3 years and pass Better Cotton third party verifier refresher training as specified by Better Cotton or demonstrate proof of training on Better Cotton Principles & Criteria

- Trained in auditing principles, procedures, techniques and behaviours as described in ISO 19011
- Describe the intent and requirements of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria
- Demonstrate an understanding of how the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria apply to the local context to the Lead Verifier's satisfaction

Third Party Verifier Company Responsibilities

- Report findings in a timely fashion, in English, using the reporting document prescribed by Better Cotton
- Commitment to maintain accountability for information gathered from the verification process and implementation of the commitment
- Ensure the competency and on-going training of their verifiers
- Ensuring a qualified Lead Verifier leads the third party verification and that other verification team members are effectively supervised by them