

Better Cotton Working Group on Crop protection

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 **Working Group on Crop Protection** (WG) which will help advise Better Cotton on the revision of crop protection and related areas in the P&C.

Focus of the Working Group

Crop protection, including pesticides, is covered under Principle 1 of the current P&C. Acknowledging the widespread use of synthetic pesticides in cotton production, and their potential adverse effects on human health and the environment, Better Cotton has adopted a two-fold approach to crop protection:

1. The adoption of Integrated Pest Management and an emphasis on the use of pest control techniques other than pesticide application, in order to reduce reliance on pesticides.
2. The use of practices that minimise the potential harmful effects of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs).

Principle 1 of the current P&C aims at minimising the harmful impact of crop protection practices. Beyond its focus on integrated pest management, Better Cotton aims to contribute to the progressive elimination of Highly Hazardous Pesticides, in order to achieve significant reduction of the risks to health and the environment associated with their use. Principle 1 also includes requirements around safe use and handling of pesticides, including training, labelling, disposal, and use of PPE.

As part of the P&C revision, the **WG will support BCI in reviewing the relevance and effectiveness of the current indicators under Principle 1 and identifying recommended improvements.**

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

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and related planning process, training, and research on alternatives
- Use and phasing-out of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHP)
- Pesticides labelling and good labelling practices
- Minimum and appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and good practices for application
- Pesticides waste management, storage, and recycling

Although the primary focus of the WG will be on crop protection, it is anticipated that recommendations are likely to cover a broader set of related elements, such as soil health, water quality, biodiversity, and health and safety. These recommendations will be taken into consideration by Better Cotton.

Activities and timeline

The WG will work closely with the Better Cotton team to support and advise on the drafting of revised crop protection 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 P1 of the P&C and related feedback from Better Cotton on their effectiveness and relevance
- Review summary outcomes of relevant research carried out by Better Cotton teams and consultants, including an overview of different options for HHPs, and surveys around PPE use and challenges in smallholder context
- Consider also other relevant standards and knowledge sources around crop protection

February – March 2022

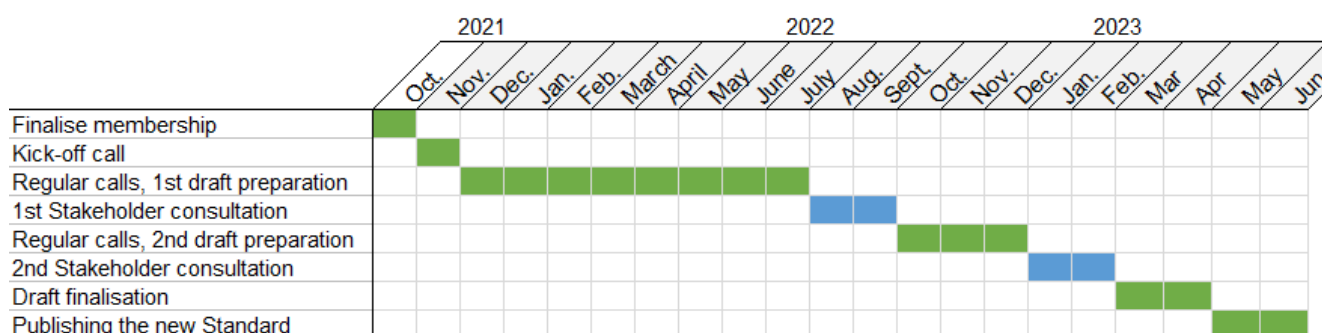
Identify initial gaps and areas for improvement; based on this review; provide initial feedback to Better Cotton team to support draft revisions to indicators

<u>April – June 2022</u> Review and feedback on draft revised indicators; highlighting areas where further work or research 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