Request for Information (RFI): Isotope and genomic testing solutions for cotton traceability

End date: Midnight (BST) 21 July 2022

Better Cotton key contact:

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Traceability
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Description

Better Cotton is the world’s largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission: to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Through our network of field-level partners we have trained over 2.5 million farmers in 23 countries in more sustainable farming practices. A quarter of the world’s cotton is now grown under the Better Cotton Standard. We have united the industry’s stakeholders behind our efforts, and by 2030 our aim is to have trained 5 million farmers and doubled global production of Better Cotton.

Traceability programme background

As Better Cotton enters its next strategic phase, to achieve our 2030 vision and drive change on the ground for farmers, Better Cotton will make it possible to trace Better Cotton through the global supply network.

By introducing traceability, we will generate additional demand for Better Cotton, supporting our core markets of apparel and textiles while contributing to systemic change in cotton producing communities. It is crucial that these communities, and the Better Cotton they produce, continue to meet customer requirements and rapidly evolving international regulatory frameworks.

To offer traceability, we expect to partner with an existing digital traceability solution provider to ‘white label’ their platform and are in the process of developing a robust integrity programme to ensure the integrity of the overall system.
We anticipate the integrity programme will comprise of a combination of:

1. Validation and logic controls on the future digital platform;
2. Traditional on-site, remote and risk-based surveillance audits;
3. The use of additive physical tracers to track physical product through global supply chains;
4. Scientific testing of inherent properties in cotton product to physically verify origin information.

To trial and develop a robust integrity programme, Better Cotton is planning/ implementing a series of pilots in a variety of environments. The purpose of this request is to gather information on the practicalities and costs associated with piloting with different isotope and genomic cotton testing solutions.

Shortlisted vendor details will be kept on a roster of service providers and sent RFPs (Request for Proposal) as and when Better Cotton seeks to test various physical verification solutions through pilots in Better Cotton supply chains or seeks to convene scientific testing providers to develop industry-wide solutions to physical traceability.

**Requested information**

The below questions are targeted at isotope and genomic scientific testing methods. Please answer the questions that are applicable to your solution (and identify which questions are not suitable for your solution).

1. **Company information**

   Please provide a summary of your company, including:
   
   - Vision and general philosophy as an organisation
   - Ownership structure
   - Number of employees
   - Office locations
   - Date founded
   - Website
   - Core customer base, highlighting any presence in the apparel/textile sectors

2. **Solution details (general)**

   - Please provide an overview of your solution and describe how it works
   - Please describe the scope of your solution and services – what are the things your solution does not do?
   - What level of traceability “resolution” can be achieved through your solution?

3. **Solution details (technical)**

   - How broad is your sample data base? What regions does it cover?
   - How frequently does your sample database need to be updated?
   - How do you collect samples? Do you have dedicated resource to do this, or do you rely on third parties trained to sampling protocols?
   - Do you intend to deepen your sample database? If so, how so?
• What percentage blend differentiation does your solution accommodate?
• Where in the supply chain do you recommend samples be taken from, and why?
• Any additional details or functionalities that make your solution a compelling proposition for the Better Cotton context?

4. Testing and verification
• What is the level of error associated with your solution?
• Is there a sampling error?
• Is there independent confirmation of the performance of your solution?
• How many samples are necessary to establish a reasonable level of confidence in results?
• What interferences associated with cotton production and manufacturing might impact results (please consider implications of processing, commingling with cotton of other origins, blending with other fibres)

5. Implementation
• What would be the key steps involved for Better Cotton to work with you to deploy your solution?
• What training / process changes are required for supply chain actors using your solution?
• How long does it take on average between taking a sample in the supply chain to receiving a test result? Please explain the breakdown of days.

6. Finances
• Please provide a summary of your costing and business model
• What are the assumptions you are making in this costing?

7. Further information
• What additional information would you need from Better Cotton to understand the feasibility of piloting in this context?

Thank you in advance for taking the time to respond to this Request for Information. We appreciate your interest in Better Cotton.

Please submit your response as a PDF by midnight (BST) 21st July 2022. Responses should be submitted to josh.taylor@bettercotton.org.