

New Country Programme Start-up Policy

Introduction

Better Cotton is the world's largest cotton sustainability programme. Our mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Along with our extensive network of partners and members, we are making cotton farming a more climate-resilient, environmentally friendly, and responsible business.

In the first 10 years of operation through our network of field-level partners, we have reached over 2.5 million farmers. As of year-end in 2021, Better Cotton is produced in 25 countries, representing almost a quarter of the world's cotton production. We achieved this through the Better Cotton Standard System (BCSS), which is a holistic approach to sustainable cotton production that covers all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic.

The BCSS comprises six components – from the Principles and Criteria to the monitoring mechanisms that demonstrate results and impact – that work together to support the Better Cotton Standard and to ensure the credibility of Better Cotton. The system is designed to promote the exchange of good practices, and to encourage the scaling up of collective action to establish Better Cotton as a sustainable mainstream commodity.

The Better Cotton Standard is not a compliance-driven standard in the traditional sense; rather, it is built on a collaborative approach that champions continuous improvement, which requires reflection, consultation and tailoring the approach to each production context. Continuous improvement underpins each component of the standard system and fosters the trust and constructive problem-solving necessary to mitigate credibility risks and ultimately advance the Better Cotton Standard.

Better Cotton's 2030 strategy prioritizes improving field-level environmental outcomes, supporting regenerative practices, increasing market access, and promoting key decent work principles to reduce inequality and drive gender empowerment. To achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Strategy, Better Cotton is deliberate and strategic in its efforts to continue to scale both production and demand of Better Cotton globally.

New Country Programme Start-up Policy

Better Cotton's New Country Programme Start-up Policy (herein "the Policy") applies to situations where there is interest to implement a Better Cotton project in countries where Better Cotton is currently not produced¹. The Policy aims to ensure that Better Cotton only operates where it can be credible and impactful. Below, the Policy defines key requisites for a successful programme and the next section outlines the baseline criteria to determine the feasibility of a new country programme.

Multi-stakeholder Approach

Distinct from traditional certification systems, the BCSS requires the continued engagement of all national cotton sector stakeholders to be successful in the production context. Strong multi-

¹ See [where Better Cotton is grown](#). Organisations that are interested in expanding Better Cotton production where there is an existing Better Cotton programme or Better Cotton-recognised (benchmarked) production standard, should contact programmes@bettercotton.org.

stakeholder participation that includes the range of actors that directly or indirectly contribute to farm-level outcomes is the foundation of Better Cotton programmes and key to sustaining Better Cotton's mission.

National Embedding

Better Cotton's long-term vision is that Better Cotton production becomes embedded in national cotton governance structures. 'National embedding' refers to the process by which an organisation or institution within a country has a formal, nation-wide responsibility to fund and uphold the Better Cotton Standard or has a benchmarked equivalent standard in place. In each country, progress towards national embedding takes different forms. Farmers could establish regional or national associations to take ownership of implementing the Better Cotton Standard, or governmental agencies may integrate the Standard into agricultural policy or extensions services, for example.

Programme Management & Resources

Better Cotton prioritises strategic partnerships with organisations or entities which can take on significant oversight, management, and budget responsibilities. Qualified partners are a strict requirement for implementation, and new programmes will require Strategic Partner(s)² and/or Programme Partner(s)³. Both Strategic Partners and Programme Partners are engaged with Better Cotton through formal agreements and must be Better Cotton Members.

Better Cotton is only able to review proposals for new programmes that have access to verifiable, long-term funding mechanisms for in-country implementation and costs of Better Cotton Secretariat administration and support.

New Country Programme Start-up Process

The New Country Programme Start-Up (NCSU) Process refers to the methodology and tools used to evaluate the fulfilment of the criteria to implement a Better Cotton programme in a new country, and to ensure country programmes are implemented credibly and successfully.

It requires extensive project scoping and well-researched and duly prepared project management documents, which may warrant an independent consultancy. The preparation and participatory processes required under the New Country Programme Start-up Process can take at least one year to complete.

Better Cotton requires that any new country programme implement the Better Cotton Standard under an inception period (at least one year) during which cotton grown would not be eligible to be licensed as better cotton.

Evaluation Criteria for New Country Programmes

When requests for new country programmes are received, Better Cotton evaluates the prospect of new programmes against the following criteria, which are integrated into the NCSU Process.

- 1. Local Multi-stakeholder Ownership:** There is strong domestic support for initiating a Better Cotton Programme from a broad range of stakeholders (this should include as a minimum, but is not limited to, Producer Organisations, Suppliers & Manufacturers, Retailers & Brands, Local and

² Strategic Partner: a National-level or international organisation responsible for the coordination and implementation of the BCSS in a particular country or region, or the owner of a Better Cotton-recognised Standard System (i.e. through benchmarking)

³ Programme Partner: Formally known as Implementing Partner, a local organisation responsible for implementing the BCSS in a given country or region.

National Government, Civil Society Organisations), and identified opportunities (or at least potential) to coordinate with existing national or regional activities.

2. **Demonstrable Need:** There is a demonstrable need for improvement, and opportunities for improvement in the environmental, social and/or economic conditions where the cotton is being produced.
3. **Demonstrable Demand:** There is demonstrable demand for Better Cotton to be sourced from the country, and identifiable linkages to Better Cotton Members within the supply-chain.
4. **Commitment to 2030 Impact Targets:** There is demonstrable commitment to [Better Cotton 2030 impact targets](#) and institutional capacity to deliver results. Better Cotton has defined impact targets for the change we are striving to realise. The key areas are pesticide use, soil health, smallholder livelihoods, women's empowerment, and climate change mitigation.
5. **Commitment to Human Rights:** There is demonstrable commitment to advancing and supporting farmers' and workers' rights, and conditions for the Better Cotton Standard to be implemented effectively and credibly. Better Cotton does not operate in situations where there is evidence, or a high risk of, state-imposed forced labour on cotton farms, or other gross human rights and transparency challenges that could interfere with the integrity and feasibility of its mission.⁴
6. **Medium & Long-Term Outreach Potential:** There is identified potential to scale-up Better Cotton production and number of farmers within a well-defined timeframe, to contribute to Better Cotton's objective of reaching 7.5 million farmers and covering 65% of global production in 2030.
7. **Financial Viability:** Better Cotton expects any proposal for a new country programme to be accompanied by robust, and clearly defined, long-term financial/funding mechanisms/budgets. This may take the form of an existing entity which is already fully funded, and/or funding sources that will be secured or accessible once a new programme is (or is being) established.
8. **Early-Stage Opportunity:** There are clearly identified opportunities to start working with a significant percentage of the total cotton farmers, and/or area of land, which is being planted with cotton, during the first years of establishing a new programme.
9. **Strategic Partner(s):** There are well-positioned organisations which can take on significant oversight, management, and funding responsibilities (example: producer or Inter-professional associations.)
10. **Established National / Industry Cotton Standard:** When a credible domestic cotton sustainability programme or standard system is already established in a country, Better Cotton will prioritise working with the existing programme to assess if, and how, cotton being produced can be recognised as equivalent⁵ to Better Cotton. If no such programme exists, local stakeholders may propose to build a direct Better Cotton programme or may choose to develop a local standard system in the perspective of being benchmarked against the BCSS.
11. **Security Risk Assessment:** Better Cotton will review real or perceived physical safety/security risks that may impact in-country operations, such as free movement, conducting independent field assessments or other relevant considerations, including those relating to the physical safety and security of its staff and partners.
12. **Other considerations:** Better Cotton will also consider practical issues, such as: access to independent verifiers or any systemic communications challenges that could hinder programme implementation.

⁴ See Declaration of Interest (DoI) guidelines for further guidance.

⁵ See Better Cotton Benchmarking Policy

Effective Date

The New Country Start-up Policy is effective as of 07 December 2022. For additional information, please contact programmes@bettercotton.org