

# Request for Proposals: First Mile Traceability Integrity Tools

RFP n#: 2023-10-FMT-INTEGRITY

Location: Remote

Start date: 15 January 2024

End date: 30 April 2024

**Better Cotton key contact:**

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&  
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All applications must be submitted via [this form](#).

You may submit questions to [tender@bettercotton.org](mailto:tender@bettercotton.org), quoting "RFP n# 2023-10-FMT-INTEGRITY".

Questions, requests and applications sent after the deadline (17 November 2023) will only be considered in exceptional circumstances.

## 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. In difficult times, we are meeting the challenge head on. Through our network of field-level partners we have provided training on more sustainable farming practices to more than 2.9 million cotton farmers in 22 countries. More than a fifth of the world's cotton is now grown under the Better Cotton Standard and our membership network includes more than 2,400 members.

More information about Better Cotton can be found on our website: [www.bettercotton.org](http://www.bettercotton.org).

## Background

We are seeking expressions of interest from skilled individuals or organisations interested in supporting Better Cotton to improve the integrity of its first mile controls, by either enhancing or replacing the AAV code system, and equipping assessors with the tools needed to verify first mile traceability.

There is a growing demand for traceability as stakeholders worldwide seek more clarity over the social and environmental challenges associated with textile supply chains, and policymakers increasingly require businesses to demonstrate greater transparency. Better Cotton's Traceability Solution is an ambitious industry-leading initiative to meet the industry demand and demonstrate the origin of Better Cotton by providing greater supply chain visibility. The solution will be launched in late-2023, providing the opportunity for our Members to source physical Better Cotton with visibility of its country of origin.

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 production. We work with a wide variety of farm types and sizes in multiple countries and cultures. It is crucial that these producers, and the Better Cotton they produce, continue to meet customer requirements and rapidly evolving international regulatory frameworks.

In tandem, Better Cotton is exploring the introduction of a credit trading CoC system, allowing licensed farmers to sell claims detached from their physical cotton (also known as book and claim). To avoid double counting, Better Cotton will require licensed farmers selling credits detached from product to sell and record an equivalent volume of their physical production as conventional.

One of the key challenges with achieving both our traceability and credit trading ambitions is ensuring the integrity of raw material traceability in the "first mile". The "first mile" refers to the way in which Better Cotton is segregated, traded, transported and traced from the farm to the gin. First mile traceability is most complex in smallholder farmer contexts given the role of informal economic actors, aggregators, transportation, and markets. Better Cotton currently tracks the movement of cotton in the first mile using a code (AAV code) that is cascaded to cotton farmer through our programme partners and field network. The code is associated with a set (licensed) volume of production, which gins may draw from when they purchase Better Cotton from producers.

The increased availability and accessibility of technology in the field, coupled with the need to strengthen traceability in the first mile means the time is right to rethink our first mile controls. With the right design, improving how cotton is tracked forward in the field (and traced back) will also enable us to deliver greater value and benefits – both in the medium term through credit trading, but in the long term through insetting and direct payments from end-buyers to reward for more sustainable production practices and outcomes.

## Scope of Work

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The purpose of this assignment is to support Better Cotton identify tools to improve the integrity of traceability in the first mile, and to develop a first mile auditing and integrity framework. The selected consultant will work with our First Mile Traceability and Supply Chain teams to develop the following outputs:

**Output 1:** Proposals on tools that would improve the integrity of traceability between farm to gin, which may include improving yield estimates, use of geospatial mapping, volume tracking and physical product tracking. The proposed tools must be sufficiently cost- and resource-effective for Better Cotton to deploy at scale. Proposals for suggested tools should include clear use cases, cost-

benefit analysis, resource requirements, implementation guidance and an indication of whether they would work in conjunction with the existing AAV code system, or replace it. Proposals should be suited to the Indian first mile context.

**Output 2:** First mile gin assessment tools, including:

- Guidance for assessors on the documents and first mile risks to review during ginner assessments (considering small, medium and large farm contexts).
- Checklist of first mile controls for assessors to complete as part of their on-site gin assessments.
- Checklist for ginner to identify risks and areas they should review and improve upon to comply with Better Cotton traceability requirements.

**Output 3:** Guidance for Better Cotton field verifiers on:

- Assessing sales and transaction records maintained by producers, in line with requirements 1.2.1 – 1.2.2 of the Better Cotton Principles and Criteria 3.0, and
- Reconciling individual farmer production volumes, to verify that farmers are not overselling / overclaiming (considering both physical sales and credit trading).

In addition to skills, competencies and expertise, we will consider value for money and demonstrable commitment to the sustainability field to evaluate applications.

## High-level Timeline

17 November 2023	Applications deadline – 17:00 GMT, 17 November 2023.  All applications must be submitted via <a href="#">this form</a> .
17 November to 15 December 2023	Applications review & shortlisting / Interviews.
By 15 December 2023	The successful applicant will be notified.  Unsuccessful <u>shortlisted</u> applicants will also be notified.
w/c 15 January 2024 (to be discussed)	<b>Start of the consultancy – kick off meeting.</b>
By 29 February 2024 (to be discussed)	Output 1 – Proposals on tools that would improve the integrity of traceability between farm to gin.  Output 2 - First mile gin assessment tools.
By 31 March 2024 (to be discussed)	Output 3 - Guidance for Better Cotton field verifiers.

By 30 April 2024 (to be discussed)	Final report and deliverables submitted.  <i>Better Cotton will review and provide feedback on initial drafts.</i>
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## Required Skills & Knowledge

Skills, Knowledge and Experience
<b>Essential</b>
Minimum of five years working in integrity and auditing contexts.
Experience developing integrity framework in the agricultural sector.
Good understanding of various Chain of Custody models and traceability in agricultural commodities.
Fluent written and verbal communication skills in English, with the ability to communicate clearly and concisely.
Good understanding of the cotton sector.
Solid knowledge and understanding of integrity risks in first mile contexts.
Proficient IT skills, including but not limited to MS Office suite (PowerPoint, Word and Excel).
Excellent attention to detail.
Demonstrated integrity and business ethics.
<b>Desirable</b>
It would be desirable for the lead consultant or another member of the named team to have:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing knowledge and understanding of the Better Cotton system.</li> </ul>

## Application Requirements

Proposals responding to this Request for Proposals should include the following:

- Overview of relevant experience of team members.
- A succinct, well-documented technical proposal (maximum of 4 pages) that includes:
  - A summary of the overall purpose and each task to be completed.
  - Proposed methodology and timeline.
  - Declaration of any potential conflicts of interest relating to this assignment.
- At least one sample of previous relevant work (the contents of which will remain confidential and will be used for the sole purpose of evaluating the submission). This sample report must be less than three years old unless particularly relevant to this assignment.
- Financial Proposal: Please provide a detailed budget in Euros including time allocated and daily rates, as well as any expenses that will be incurred.

Please note that ALL costs must be included in the detailed budget including travel expenses, translation costs and taxes.

Consultants are invited to submit their proposals before 17:00 GMT, 17 November 2023 via [this form](#).

*We thank all applicants for their interest; however only shortlisted applicants will be contacted.*

*Better Cotton is committed to good practice and transparency in the management of natural, human and financial resources. All applications will be reviewed under the principles and subject to Better Cotton's policies on equal opportunity, non-discrimination, anti-bribery & corruption and conflict of interest.*

## Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

### Technical Evaluation Criteria

- Demonstrated understanding of this RFP.
- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach and methodology.
- Feasibility of the proposed activity plan and timeline, and appropriateness of time allocated to delivering each task.
- Relevant professional experience of the proposed consultant(s).
- Quality and relevance of the sample work submitted.

### Financial Evaluation Criteria

- Quality and clarity of budget provided, and level of detail included.
- Alignment of the budget to the activity timeline detailed in the technical proposal.
- Value for money.
- Adherence to the available budget.

## Envisaged working arrangements

The position is a consultancy for the duration of the assignment.