



Decent Work: What is Better Cotton Doing to Improve Farmer Wellbeing?

At Better Cotton, our mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. Central to this mission is ensuring that all farmers and workers operate under conditions that respect and uphold their labour rights.

Better Cotton is only 'better' if it improves the wellbeing of farming communities, fostering fair income, security, social protection and equal opportunities, as well as promoting a safe and healthy working environment. Over the years, we have stood by our commitment and we have heightened the focus on labour rights within our work.

What we've done so far:

In 2022, we launched a seven-year Decent Work Strategy, focusing on three key pillars:

- Deepening our understanding of labour rights issues specific to Better Cotton-producing contexts.
- Enhancing the capacity of our teams, partners, and verifiers to identify and address labour rights risks and violations.
- Strengthening decent work risk monitoring and remediation at the farm level, alongside refining our monitoring and evaluation approach to track progress effectively.

Fostering new partnerships and raising funds to accelerate our impact were crucial to delivering this strategy.



Photo Credit: Better Cotton / Khaula Jamil

Some of our key achievements to date include:

1. **A Strengthened Standard:** Our new Standard, developed through extensive consultations with experts and practitioners, marks a significant shift in our approach. It requires proactive engagement with farming communities, continuous risk monitoring, and remediation of identified incidents.
2. **Enhanced Assurance:** We have raised the bar for our verifiers on social auditing competencies, introduced a more structured approach to worker interviews, and enhanced decent work monitoring in high-risk contexts.
3. **Comprehensive Support:** Beyond setting standards, we provide extensive implementation guidance and capacity strengthening for our producers and partners. Our country teams are stronger on social impact than ever. We foster partnerships with labour rights organisations to help them meet and exceed our standard. Notable examples include our collaborations with [SearchForJustice](#) in Pakistan and [Jan Sahas in India](#).
4. **Adopting a Risk-Based Approach:** We have conducted labour rights risk assessments in 14 Better Cotton-producing countries to better understand the organisation of cotton production and identify key risk drivers in each context. [Our Risk Analysis Tool](#) enables us to update our high-level risk mapping annually, guiding our programmatic investments. We have introduced enhanced decent work monitoring in higher risk countries. These insights are essential for our capacity-strengthening and partnership development activities.



Photo Credit (Top Right): Better Cotton / Joe Woodruff

What's next?

We are dedicated to keeping our Strategy dynamic and aligned with our organisational goals, the evolving legislative landscape, and emerging opportunities. Currently, we are devising a roadmap to 2030, which will be made public by late 2024.

We will continue to support the promotion of decent work in cotton production, aiming to improve farm-level working conditions, rights protection, agency and wages. This will be a core part of our broader strategy to support more sustainable livelihoods for farmers and workers, improved resilience and gender equality in cotton production, at large - in line with our [2030 Strategy](#). Our key focus areas will include:



Finding Solutions to Tackle Root Causes: We will continue to work with a range of stakeholders comprising supply chain actors, governments, experts, and farming communities to address the root causes of labour rights violations, delivering meaningful remediation where necessary. This approach fosters shared accountability and helps mitigate structural risks in agriculture.



Strengthening Our Farm-level Programmes: We will continue to work closely with our programme partners to help them meet our standard requirements, adopt some of the best industry practices, including on health and safety and grievance mechanisms, and share their knowledge with peers across countries.



Enhancing Our Due Diligence: We will assist our partners in aligning their organisational systems and policies with our evolving due diligence requirements on labour rights.



Strengthening Response Systems: We will enhance our systems and procedures to effectively respond to labour rights violations cases escalated to Better Cotton by our verifiers and/partners.



Advancing Wage Transparency: Greater wage transparency is the first step towards our commitment to living wages stated in our new Standard. To support this goal, we will roll out a new wage verification approach for medium and large producers. In smallholder contexts, we will conduct wage sampling to build a clear baseline on wage levels and practices. Altogether increasing wage transparency will support us in building a roadmap for wage improvement targets and strategies across Programmes, hand-in-hand with our partners and key stakeholders.

If you would like to know more about Better Cotton's approach to Decent Work, please visit the [dedicated page on our website](#) or reach out to us directly at leyla.shamchiyeva@bettercotton.org