

# Better Cotton Appeals Committee

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## Terms of Reference

Version 1.5, August 2024

### Introduction

The Better Cotton Appeals Committee was formed to provide objective, consistent, and evidence-based decisions for Producers appealing against Better Cotton licensing decisions. Licensing decisions for Producers are made by Better Cotton Assurance Managers, based on the outcomes of Licensing Assessment (including credibility checks by Better Cotton staff or third-party verifiers). Producers may appeal against a licensing decision by following Better Cotton's Appeals Procedure and submitting a written application (along with objective evidence) within 10 working days of being informed of a licensing decision.

Out of the standing pool of Appeals Committee members, the Better Cotton Assurance Manager appoints a dedicated panel of 1-3 members to resolve each Appeal received. The Better Cotton Assurance Manager also coordinates all correspondence with members of the Appeals Committee, organises meetings to discuss each Appeal received, and captures notes from these meetings.

### Membership and selection of the Committee

The Appeals Committee is composed of selected Better Cotton Team members and third-party verifiers. Selected Better Cotton staff are permanent members of the Appeals Committee. Better Cotton staff are selected based on them having sufficient and relevant experience.

External (third-party verifier) members are appointed by the Better Cotton Head of Standards and Assurance and will serve for a one-year term, subject to extension by mutual consent. External members are appointed as individuals, not representatives of their organisation or employer. They are expected to represent their individual viewpoint, not the viewpoint of their organisation during appeals decisions.

External members will be required to submit a written application and will be selected based on their demonstrated experience with the Better Cotton Standard System along with their confirmed interest and availability to participate.

### Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee

Members of the Appeals Committee are responsible for fulfilling the following duties:

1. **Commit sufficient time and resource to the work of the Committee to ensure thorough and timely decisions on each Appeal.** This includes keeping the Better Cotton Assurance Team informed of any significant periods of leave (or other non-availability) during licensing

seasons. Eligible panel members will first be contacted with a request to handle a specific appeal and will be able to confirm their availability.

- Time commitment for each Appeals Committee member is estimated to be approximately 30 hours per year (based on 4 hours per appeal and roughly 6/7 appeals per year per member of the Committee) with most appeals falling between June and December. This can vary as it is difficult to predict the number of licensing appeals in any given season.
  - For each Appeal accepted by a Committee member, the process will typically include 1-2 hours to review the application (including consulting with relevant sections of the Better Cotton P&C) and prepare for the Appeals Panel meeting; 1.5 hours to attend the meeting, and 1-1.5 hours to assist with the write-up of the final decision.
2. **Ensure fairness and objectivity in all Appeals-related discussions and decisions.** Appeals decisions must be made based on the definitive text in the Better Cotton P&C, along with the objective evidence provided by the appellant and the Better Cotton Assurance team (e.g. on behalf of third party audits or external assessment carried out). Any conflicts of interest must be transparently declared to the Better Assurance Team in advance of agreeing to accept an Appeal assignment. All decisions of the Appeals Committee are to be communicated in written English with a clear rationale outlined for the decision.
  3. **Follow agreed timelines to review each Appeal, including preparation work, participation in scheduled meetings, and finalization of the decision.** Each Appeal must be decided within 35 calendar days of receipt, and the schedules of multiple Committee members must be coordinated during this process. Therefore, it is critical that all members of the Better Appeals Committee deliver on their agreed responsibilities and deadlines (barring exceptional circumstances). Please refer to [Annex 1](#) for an illustrative timeline for processing each Appeal decision
  4. **Maintain full confidentiality for all information related to a licensing Appeal.** All information and evidence provided by the Appellant, Better Cotton, and third-party auditors or Implementing Partners to support an Appeal application or decision must be considered confidential and shall not be shared outside of the Better Cotton Assurance Team and members of the Appeals Committee (information is not to be shared even with other colleagues within a third-party verifier organisation).
  5. **Raise any concerns about the performance or impartiality of the Appeals process or Committee directly to the Better Cotton Assurance team** as soon as possible. Any potential questions around the independence or functioning of the Appeals Committee, or the legitimacy of appeal applications, should be referred to the Better Cotton Assurance team directly.

## Reimbursement

External members will be reimbursed for their time at a fixed hourly rate which will be set by country level and agreed before confirming participation in the Appeals Committee. External members are required to track their hours spent and if they exceed the estimated time commitment (4 hours/ appeal assigned and accepted) should let the Better Cotton Assurance Managers know in advance of exceeding this estimate.

Better Cotton should be invoiced by external members within 30 calendar days of completing an appeal decision.

# Annex 1: Example timeline for Appeals Process



Better Cotton Appeals Process		Calendar Days after Appeal Submitted																																										
Process step	Who	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35								
Appeal received and checked for eligibility	Assurance Coordinator (PO if not in English)	█																																										
Country Manager/ Program team informed	Assurance Coordinator				█																																							
Collect additional information	Assurance Coordinator				█																																							
Coordinate translation (if applicable)	Program Officer/ Coord				█																																							
Appeals Panel formed and meeting scheduled	Assurance Coordinator				█																																							
Review and send documents to Appeals Panel	Assurance Coordinator																																											
Appeals Panel review documents - 1 week	Appeals Panel																																											
Appeals meeting/ discussion	Appeals Panel																																											
Final outcome written up	Appeals Panel/ Assur. Crd																																											
Final decision sent to appellant	Assurance Manager																																											
Information updated in Salesforce	Assurance Coordinator																																											