

From Obligation to Opportunity: Reclaiming Trust in a New Era of Green Claims

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To: Executive & Sustainability Leadership Teams in the cotton supply chain.

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About This Brief

This brief captures the collective intelligence of 50 professionals across the cotton supply chain retailers, suppliers, cotton experts, certifiers, and sustainability leaders who participated in a hands-on workshop at the Better Cotton Initiative Conference in June 2025.

Together, we explored one urgent question:

How can the cotton industry respond to rising scrutiny on green claims—turning pressure into progress and obligation into opportunity?

What follows are the core themes and ideas that emerged across working groups. These are not policy positions, they are a directional pulse check from the people shaping this space daily.

1. Why This Moment Matters & What We Heard

1.1. *The Microscope Is Real*

- 1.1.1. Enforcement is spiking (EU Green Claims & Empowering Consumers Directives, Consumer Protection law updates, e.g. CMA “Green Claims Code”).
- 1.1.2. Regardless of the status of the GCD, consumer protection law requires us to get this conversation right.
- 1.1.3. Fewer than 5 % of UK/US consumers trust brand sustainability claims (YouGov, 2024).
- 1.1.4. Investors, litigators, and next-gen talent are moving capital and careers toward proof, not promises.

Implication: Saying “we’re sustainable” is officially worthless unless we can *show the receipts*.

1.2. *The Business Case Is Stronger Than Ever*

- 1.2.1. Workshop groups mapped >20 commercial upsides. Five rise to the top:

Value Lever	Evidence & Notes
Revenue & Conversion	Verified claims lift on-page sales \approx 1 %. Higher price-elasticity for trusted products.
Market Access	Retailer line-reviews and public tenders now rank traceability & credibility. "Supplier of choice" status underpins long-term contracts.
Reputation & Brand Equity	60 % of consumers rate <i>trust & transparency</i> as the #1 brand trait (Statista, 2025).
Capital Advantage	Credible data shortens ESG-linked loan diligence and unlocks lower rates.
Talent & Culture	Younger employees and farmers stay and innovate when purpose feels real, not performative.

1.3. *Three Themes Repeated Across Tables*

1.3.1. Credibility = Competitive Edge

- 1.3.1.1. Move from glossy language to field-level metrics that are specific:
E.g. % verified volume, worker-health KPIs.
- 1.3.1.2. Use digital passports / QR codes, let customers self-interrogate the data. More testing is needed to get consumers to engage with this format.

1.3.2. Regulation Is the Floor, Not the Ceiling

- 1.3.2.1. Treat new laws as a baseline playbook, then go beyond with voluntary disclosure (e.g., product-level LCAs, farm-gate dashboards).
- 1.3.2.2. “Policy hubs” & one-stop guides demanded by suppliers who juggle multiple schemes.

1.3.3. Collaboration Multiplies Trust

- 1.3.3.1. Cross-commodity alliances could fund a single lobbyist or shared data backbone (10 % budget contribution suggested).
- 1.3.3.2. Certification owners must clarify *how* claims should be communicated and who owns each datapoint.

2. Recommendations & Next Steps for Organisations

2.1. Going Beyond Compliance

2.1.1. Adopt a Single Claims Framework

- 2.1.1.1. Base wording on ISO 14021 & forthcoming EU [rules](#). Be specific and clear about the claim.
- 2.1.1.2. Deliver plain-language *Claims Playbook* to all internal teams & functions by Q3 2025.

2.1.2. Create a Policy & Data Hub

- 2.1.2.1. One portal that merges regulations, voluntary standards, and the organisation's own thresholds.

2.1.3. Automate alerts when any input changes ≥ 10 %.

2.2. Partnership & Systems Agenda

Gap Spotted	Proposed Move	Who We Need	Pay-off
Fragmented lobbying	Pool cotton-sector voices; co-fund one Brussels representation.	Cross-commodity council	Faster, clearer regs; less duplication.
Siloed traceability data	Plug farm & gin data into retailer POS via open API.	Tech vendor + cert schemes	Real-time sourcing proof; cuts audit cost 20 %.
Low farmer visibility	Story-led micro-grants: farmers share water-saving practice videos.	Brands + OCA/BCI	Human-scale proof resonates with consumers.

3. Three Actions to Take This Month

Turn insight into impact. Here are three practical moves you can make, starting now.

3.1. *Join the Green Claims Global Briefing*

What: Monthly session hosted by Compare Ethics

Why: Get ahead of policy shifts, share challenges, and connect with peers across sectors.

Next session: 2pm BST 25th September 2025

How: Look out for registration details coming soon

3.2. *Audit One Live Claim*

What: Choose a green claim currently used by your business on a website, product page, or ad.

Why: Pressure-test it. Is it clear? Specific? Verifiable? Do you have the data to back it up?

Is that data proportional to the claim you are making?

How: Block 30 minutes with legal, marketing or ESG team this month.

3.3. *Reflection Prompt*

Pick one action you didn't do before—but you'll commit to doing now.

Write it down. Share it with a colleague. Make it real.

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