bci™
better cotton initiative

Principles and Criteria

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Better Cotton Initiative / Khaula Jamil. Punjab, Pakistan. 2019.

Title

Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.3.2

Standard Effective Date

Approved by the Better Cotton Initiative Council in December 2025
Effective as of 1 April 2026

Translation Accuracy

The official language of this document is English. In case of any inconsistency between versions due to translation, please refer to the English version. While translations to other languages will be provided, the Better Cotton Initiative assumes no liability for errors or misunderstandings due to translation.

Next Review

The Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria are reviewed at least every five years. The next review is expected in 2028.

Any Questions or Inputs?

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Introduction

About Better Cotton Initiative

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is the world's leading sustainability programme for cotton. Our mission is to help cotton communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. As a multi-stakeholder platform, we bring partners together across the supply chain to create a world where all cotton production is sustainable. The BCI 2030 Strategy sets the direction for our ten-year plan to make cotton better for the environment, for the farming communities who produce it and for all those who have a stake in the future of the sector. To get us there, the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System (BCISS) is our holistic approach and guide, which covers all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic.

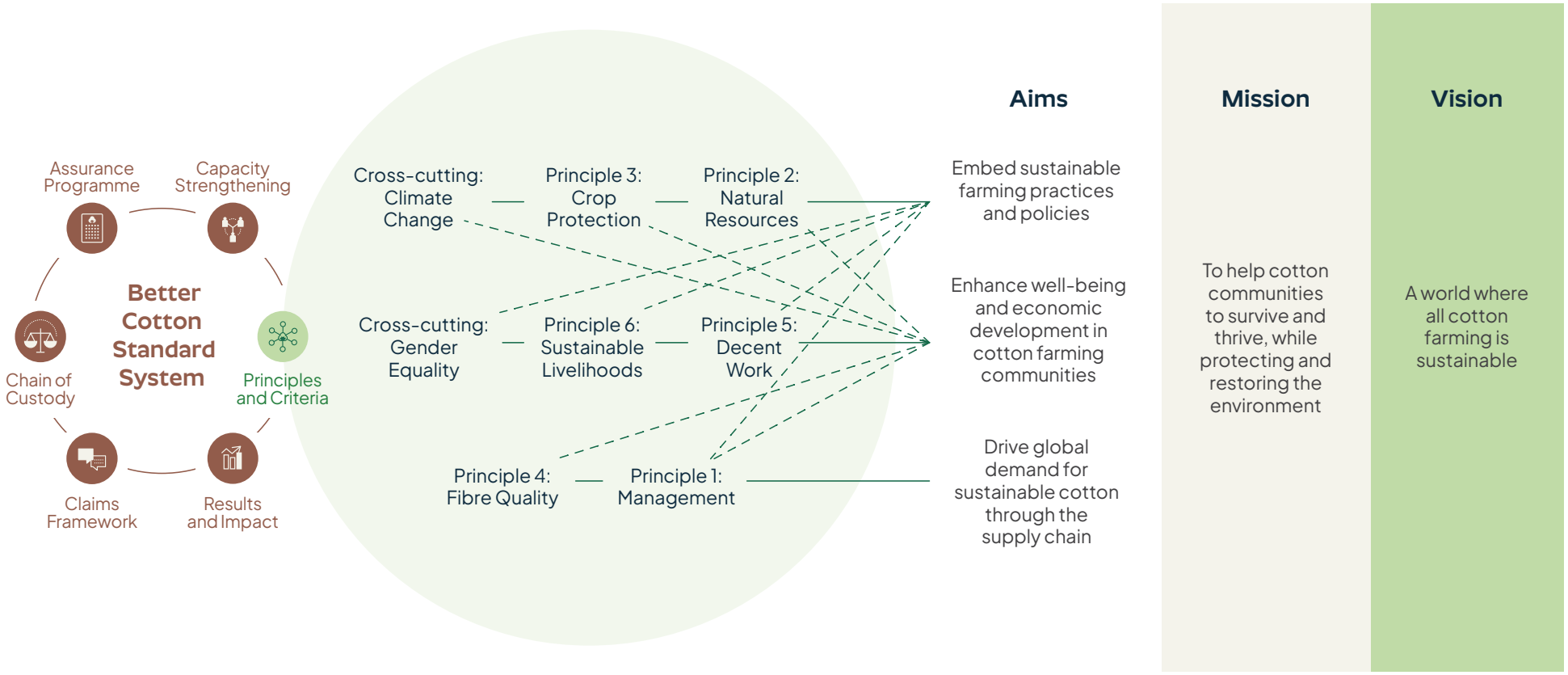
The BCI Principles and Criteria (P&C) is a critical component of the BCISS, as they set out the global requirements that all Producers are required to meet to be certified to sell BCI Cotton. These requirements are designed to help focus efforts on areas that deliver clear sustainability improvements at the field level.

Driving Impact: About Our Theory of Change

The BCI Theory of Change (ToC) maps out what we do and why. The ToC provides the basis to measure the results of our work and progress towards our intended impacts in cotton producing communities and in the wider fashion, apparel and textile sector. It illustrates how BCI works at both the farm and market level to advance its vision of a world where all cotton farming is sustainable. The P&C sets a holistic and inclusive standard that contributes to achieving sustainability outcomes and defines a pathway for continuous improvement at farm level (see Figure 1).

The effects of the P&C are amplified by complementary activities, including capacity strengthening, partnership, providing farming communities with tools and services with an emphasis on equitable access, gathering data and evidence about the effectiveness and impact of our work and conducting policy advocacy. BCI also operates credible assurance at scale to link the cotton grown by Producers who meet the P&C with value chain actors who are investing in the sector's sustainability performance. This drives demand for BCI Cotton and keeps the cycle of change in motion. For more information on the BCI Strategy and ToC, please consult the BCI website at www.bettercotton.org.

Figure 1: Contribution of the P&C to Sustainability Outcomes



Understanding the Principles and Criteria

Principles, Criteria and Indicators

The P&C works with Principles, Criteria and Indicators. Principles are the overarching sustainability areas, Criteria are the outcomes that shall be aimed for within a Principle, and Indicators are specific normative requirements under each Criteria against which Producers are assessed for compliance before they can be certified to sell BCI Cotton.

The P&C focuses on the following six Principles: Management, Natural Resources, Crop Protection, Fibre Quality, Decent Work and Sustainable Livelihoods. In addition, the P&C emphasises the relevance of both gender equality and climate change for all Principles and includes them as crosscutting priorities which shall be respected throughout.

Scope and Applicability

The P&C is a farm-level sustainability standard for the cotton production sector. It defines clear environmental, economic and social requirements that all Producers are required to meet to be certified to sell their cotton as BCI Cotton. While they are globally applicable, the P&C v.3.2 has several ways to address the significant differences between cotton Producers worldwide. First, it recognises differences in production methods and scale, with requirements differentiated by three categories of farm sizes. Second, the Better Cotton Initiative's (BCI) approach to Continuous Improvement considers that Producers start at very different baselines. Finally, localised guidance and implementation support (for example, on locally relevant good practices) help ensure relevance across different farming contexts.

The scope of the P&C v.3.2 focuses on cotton production activities within the farm or Producer Unit (PU). However, while this is not relevant for compliance, many requirements and/or associated guidance can apply more broadly, and Producers are encouraged to consider these across other crops and beyond the farm gate.

Note: Between 2025 and 2029, BCI will phase out its current assurance model and transition to a certification scheme. During this period, licensing under the former assurance model and certification under the new model will run concurrently. The P&C v.3.2 will apply to both license and certification holders throughout this transition. For clarity, the term 'certification' and its derivatives (such as 'Certificate Holders', 'certified', etc.) will be used to also refer to 'licensing' and its derivatives (such as 'licensees', 'licensed', etc.) until the phase-out process is complete.

In line with our continuous improvement approach, all Indicators in the P&C v.3.2 are mandatory for certification purposes. This means that Producers shall meet all Indicators relevant to their farm category before they are certified to sell BCI Cotton. The Better Cotton Initiative Assurance Programme provides more information on audits, certification and how to address and resolve any non-conformities.

Certificate Holders: Defining Producers Under the P&C v.3.2

The overall responsibility for ensuring compliance with the BCI P&C v.3.2 sits with the applicant for certification and the Producer[1]. Depending on the farm category, the term 'Producer' refers to the following:

- In a Smallholder or Medium Farm context: a Producer Unit which groups numerous Smallholder or Medium Farms together into one licensing unit;
- In a Large Farm context: an individual farm.

1 Note that in Large Farm Contexts, the Producer might also be the applicant.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement is a fundamental part of the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) ToC. Producers are encouraged to improve their sustainability performance over time, regardless of the level they start at. Continuous improvement is reflected in the P&C v.3.2 in two main ways:

- In the Management Principle, under Criterion 1.3, all Producers are expected to show progress in individually defined focus areas for continuous improvement. The focus areas need to cover locally relevant sustainability priorities, including regenerative agriculture areas as defined under Criterion 1.3 and be based on consultations with individuals involved in farm-level cotton production.
- Continuous improvement is also integrated as a key element within several Indicators, with a focus on Producers taking steps to improve over time (as opposed to looking at an outcome alone). Indicators remain mandatory for compliance but acknowledge that different Producers begin at different levels.

Commitment to Social Inclusion

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships and social factors, which combined, create different forms of privilege and oppression, depending on a person's context and existing power structures (referred to as intersectionality).[2] Whenever farmers or workers are mentioned across the P&C v.3.2, this includes all persons regardless of gender identity, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, age, nationality, ethnicity, language, race, class, caste, social origin, religion, belief, abilities and disabilities, health, political affiliation, political views, memberships in associations or organisations, marital or any other status. BCI Producers are expected to particularly consider and pro-actively encourage participation and inclusion of all people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion. Discrimination is not tolerated.

Commitment to Human Rights and Mitigating Risks of Adverse Impacts

Underpinning the P&C v.3.2 is the premise that producing BCI Cotton mitigates any adverse impacts for people or the environment. BCI Cotton production aims to respect, promote and strengthen human rights and mitigate harm through appropriate due diligence and monitoring measures and adequate access to remedy, in line with the United Nations (UN) Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

2 Hankivsky, Olena. 'Intersectionality 101.' Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy, Simon Fraser University, (2014).

Gender Equality and Women Inclusion in the P&C v.3.2

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) recognises the role of women in achieving impact in sustainable cotton production. BCI, through its work across the BCISS, has a significant opportunity to tackle systemic gender inequalities and promote women's rights by supporting their participation and inclusion. The P&C v.3.2 adds gender equality as a cross-cutting priority to support these efforts in two ways. First, it includes requirements in Principle 1 on Management for a Gender Lead or Gender Committee to identify and effectively address local barriers to women's inclusion. Second, it ensures a mainstreaming approach, whereby Producer compliance will be assessed in specific Indicators according to their efforts to promote women's inclusion and tackle gender inequalities (see Annex 1).

In order not to discriminate any identity, the P&C v.3.2 consciously refrains from further defining 'farmers and workers' using binary wording (i.e., 'women and men farmers and workers'). However, in line with our Commitment to Social Inclusion, 'farmers and workers' always refers to people of all gender identity and sex characteristics and so it always refers to the inclusion of women.

Climate Change in the P&C v.3.2

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) acknowledges the pressing need to address the climate crisis. Climate change is already impacting farming communities and families around the world as extreme weather events caused by rising temperatures put crops and livelihoods at risk. The climate crisis also impacts women and girls disproportionately and amplifies gender inequality. At the same time, the agricultural sector contributes to climate change through unsustainable farming practices that increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and reduce the environment's capacity to store carbon. Building resilience of cotton communities to climate change and helping them reduce the climate impact of their practices should guide all decision-making of BCI Producers. Therefore, the P&C v.3.2 includes climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation as cross-cutting priorities. As such, it includes a Criterion on climate action in Principle 1 on Management and ensures that climate-relevant requirements are included across all Principles. Those Indicators relevant for climate change are visibly marked and collated in Annex 2.

Better Cotton Initiative's Approach to Regenerative Agriculture

Over the past several years, regenerative agriculture has become increasingly integral to Better Cotton Initiative's (BCI) mission of helping cotton farming communities survive and thrive, while protecting and restoring the environment. BCI embraces the core idea of regenerative agriculture that farming can give back to, rather than take from, nature and society, and we recognise the need to shift towards improved farming practices that contribute to solving global issues such as soil degradation, biodiversity loss, water source pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and vulnerable livelihoods. Aligned with knowledge and practices that have been known for centuries, our approach to regenerative agriculture puts a strong emphasis on the connections between people and nature, highlighting the two-way dependency between regenerative farming practices and sustainable livelihoods.

With this holistic approach, we see regenerative agriculture as a key contributor to achieving our 2030 Strategy and its ambitious target areas, including climate change mitigation. Closely linked is BCI's focus on ensuring a just transition. This means that we also pay close attention to social and economic measures that enable farming households to shift their agricultural practices without putting their livelihoods at risk.

The Better Cotton Initiative Programme focuses on the outcomes of regenerative agricultural practices, such as improved soil health, increased biodiversity, enhanced water resources, reduced pesticide and fertiliser use, improved carbon sequestration and the improved social and economic well-being of those involved in farm-level activities.

As a holistic approach, regenerative practices are embedded across multiple principles within the P&C. In v.3.2, we maintain the key tenets of regenerative agriculture that are relevant across all cotton-growing countries, such as maximising crop diversity (including agroforestry), minimising soil disturbance and maximising soil cover. Maintaining living roots is seen as an inherent part of these requirements, and livestock integration is promoted in contexts where it is relevant. The P&C v.3.2 update strengthens the requirement for continuous improvement and the adoption of regenerative practices over time. A holistic approach to continuous improvement in the following areas will contribute to a resilient cotton farming system: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers and/or livestock.

In addition to farming practices, the social dimensions inherent to regenerative agriculture are integrated throughout the P&C. This includes an explicit requirement for regular and inclusive consultation with different groups of people involved in farm-level activities to inform learning and decision-making. The P&C v.3.2 also includes stringent requirements around Decent Work and a Sustainable Livelihoods Principle. Finally, it details several requirements aimed at strengthening the role, participation and recognition of women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion, who are often key knowledge holders and cornerstones of farming communities.

Document Structure

The document is organised around the six Principles and the two cross-cutting priorities. In each Principle, Criteria, Indicators and Indicator guidance are clarified and presented as follows.

1 Criterion

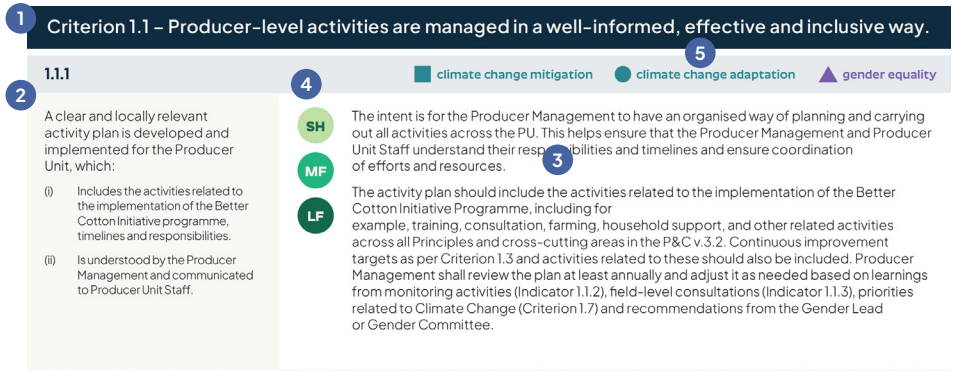
Criteria are the outcomes that shall be aimed for within a Principle

2 Indicator Number and Text

Indicators are the normative part of the standard that specify the requirements that shall be followed to demonstrate compliance with the standard.

3 Indicator Guidance

Indicator guidance is an informative part of the standard that aims to provide more information to help Producers and auditors understand what the Indicators mean in practice. Presented in the column next to the Indicator, they clarify the intent and relevance of the Indicator and provide examples of good practices.



4 Farm Categories

Farm categories clarify to whom the Indicator applies.
Note: Where applicable, additional applicability requirements are identified by an asterisk (*) in the Indicator Number and Text.

SH Smallholders (SH)

Farms with a farm size typically not exceeding 20 hectares of cotton which are not structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. Smallholders are grouped into Producer Units for licensing purposes.

MF Medium Farms (MF)

Farms with a farm size typically between 20 to 200 hectares of cotton which usually are structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. Medium Farms are grouped into Producer Units for licensing purposes.

LF Large Farms (LF)

Farms with a farm size typically above 200 hectares of cotton which either have mechanised production or are structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. Large Farms participate with Better Cotton Initiative on an individual basis or, in some contexts, through a Large Farm group assurance model.

5 Cross-cutting Priorities

The issues of gender equality and climate change are relevant to many Indicators in the P&C v.3.2. Indicators for which particular attention needs to be given to climate change or gender equality considerations are marked as follows on the top right corner:

- climate change mitigation
- climate change adaptation
- gender equality

Key Terms

Farmer

The concept of farmers as used in the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) P&C v.3.2 includes persons of any gender, background and identity (see Commitment to Social Inclusion) and any member of the household or family who share farming duties. Landowners or tenants who lease land for cultivation at a fixed rate may also be considered farmers.

Individuals Involved in Farm-Level Cotton Production

Includes all members of farming households, workers, tenants, sharecroppers and anyone else involved in the farm-level production of BCI Cotton, regardless of their productive role, gender, background and identity (see Commitment to Social Inclusion).

Producer

The licence holder of Better Cotton Initiative. See Certificate Holders: Defining Producers Under the P&C v.3.2.

Producer Management

- In a Large Farm context, this refers to the people accountable for the management of the farm and also accountable for the implementation of the standard, often the farmers themselves.
- In a Smallholder and Medium Farm (Producer Unit) context, this relates to anyone accountable for the implementation of the standard, particularly PU Managers and their deputies as well as project leads.

Producer Unit Staff

In a PU context, Producer Unit (PU) Staff includes everyone involved with the implementation of the standard, including the Producer Unit Manager, Field Facilitators, Gender Leads or Gender Committee Members, Lead Farmers (in some contexts) and other PU Staff.

Workers

Better Cotton Initiative defines workers as individuals carrying out field-level production work on cotton farms, regardless of gender, background and identity. Workers can be temporary, seasonal, or permanent and recruited directly by the farmer or sub-contracted, e.g., through a labour broker. Workers are normally paid for their work but can also be non-wage-earning such as family members or community exchanged labour.

Further definitions of terms are found in the Glossary in Annex 3.

Drafting Rules

The P&C v.3.2 follows the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement Annex 3 Code of Good Practice for the preparation, adoption and application of standards and the guidance of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) recommended practices for standardization by national bodies.[3]

Following these guidelines, in this document, the following verbal forms are used:

- "shall" indicates a requirement;
- "should" indicates a recommendation;
- "may" indicates a permission;
- "can" indicates a possibility or a capability.

Relevant External Documents

- Global reference documents that provide global implementation guidance and/or procedures can be found on the Better Cotton Initiative website at www.bettercotton.org
- Better Cotton Initiative Assurance Programme
- The Better Cotton Initiative Standard Setting and Revision Procedure v.2.2, July 2025
- International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems, Public Version 1.1, September 2025

Note that unless otherwise stated, all external documents linked in this version of the P&C v.3.2 were accessed on November 28, 2025.

3 ISO/IEC. 'ISO/IEC Guide 59, ISO and IEC Recommended Practices for Standardization by National Bodies.' (2019).

Revision and Version History

The P&C v.3.2 is based on a Partial Substantive (Regular) revision of the previous standard in consultation with multiple stakeholders and in compliance with the ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems[4] and with guidance from ISO and IEC recommended practices for standardization by national bodies.[5]

P&C Version	Date	Comment
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.1.0	2010	The first version of the Better Cotton Initiative P&C is launched
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.2.0	September 2015 – November 2017	Substantive Revision process, including two public stakeholder consultations
	November 2017	Approval of the P&C v.2.0 by the Better Cotton Initiative Council
	March 2018 – February 2019	Formal launch of the P&C v.2.0 (March 2018); transition period
	1 March 2019	Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.2.0 effective
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.2.1	17 April 2019	Update with non-substantive changes; Better Cotton P&C v.2.1 effective
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.3.0	October 2021	Launch of Substantive Revision process
	October 2021 – February 2023	Revision process, including 60 days of public stakeholder consultation (August – September 2022)
	February 2023	Approval by the Better Cotton Initiative Council
	June 2023	Formal launch of the Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.3.0
	April 2023 – March 2024	Transition period
	March 2024	Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.3.0 effective (Better Cotton BCI Season 2024 – 2025)[6]
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.3.1	October 2024 – February 2025	Non-substantive changes, including clarifications in non-normative Indicator Guidance and copy edits.
	April 2025	Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.3.1 effective
Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria v.3.2	June – October 2025	Partial Substantive Revision - Regular
	December 2025	Approval by the Better Cotton Initiative Council
	April 2026	Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.3.2 effective

4 ISEAL Alliance. 'ISEAL Code of Good Practice for Sustainability Systems Version 1.1.' (2025).
5 SO/IEC. 'ISO/IEC Guide 59, ISO and IEC Recommended Practices for Standardization by National Bodies.' (2019).
6 Better Cotton Initiative seasons align with the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) seasons.

Abbreviations

BCISS: Better Cotton Initiative Standard System

CMR: Carcinogenic, Mutagenic or Reprotoxic (substances)

DW: Decent Work

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GHG: Greenhouse Gas

GHS: Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals

HCV: High Conservation Value

HHPs: Highly Hazardous Pesticides

ILO: International Labour Organization

IPM: Integrated Pest Management

LF: Large Farms

MF: Medium Farms

OSH: Occupational Safety and Health

PAN: Pesticide Action Network International

P&C: Principles and Criteria

PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

PU: Producer Unit

SH: Smallholders

WHO: World Health Organization

Principle 1:
Management

Summary:

A well-informed, effective and inclusive management system is not only a precondition for successfully meeting all the Criteria in the P&C v.3.2, but also a key ingredient to strengthening transparency and traceability, building consumer trust and driving continuous improvement towards sustainability outcomes.

The Management Principle covers requirements around planning and monitoring activities, data management and continuous improvement to this end. It also recognises and emphasises the importance of taking a collaborative and inclusive approach that centres the farming community to achieve long-term sustainability goals. As such, it includes requirements on collaborative action, inclusive consultations with farming communities and effective and inclusive capacity strengthening activities. The two cross-cutting priorities — Gender Equality and Climate Change — are also nested in this Principle. Including them upfront aims to highlight that any activities undertaken in producing BCI Cotton should consider the context-specific dynamics of these two areas.

Cotton Australia / Damian Edwards.
Australia, 2018.

Criterion 1.1 – Producer-level activities are managed in a well-informed, effective and inclusive way.

1.1.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

A clear and locally relevant activity plan is developed and implemented for the Producer Unit, which:

(i) Includes the activities related to the implementation of the Better Cotton Initiative Programme, timelines and responsibilities;

(ii) Is understood by the Producer Management and communicated to Producer Unit Staff;

(iii) Is reviewed and adjusted at least annually, taking into consideration the learnings from monitoring activities (Indicator 1.1.1), field-level consultations (Indicator 1.1.3), priorities related to Climate Change (Criterion 1.7) and recommendations from the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5).

SH

The intent is for Producer Management to have an organised way of planning and carrying out all activities across the Producer Unit (PU). This helps ensure that Producer Management and Producer Unit (PU) Staff understand their responsibilities and timelines and ensure coordination of efforts and resources.

MF

The activity plan should include the activities related to the implementation of the BCI Programme, including for example, training, consultation, farming, household support and other related activities across all Principles and cross-cutting areas in the P&C v.3.2. Continuous improvement targets, as per Criterion 1.3 and activities related to these should also be included. Producer Management shall review the plan at least annually and adjust it as needed based on learnings from monitoring activities (Indicator 1.1.2), field-level consultations (Indicator 1.1.3), priorities related to Climate Change (Criterion 1.7) and recommendations from the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5). The activity plan should be a working document that guides day-to-day farm operations, and hence, be accessible and understood by Producer Management and communicated to Producer Unit Staff.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

1.1.2

gender equality

A monitoring plan is developed and implemented that defines the data and methods used to identify risks of non-conformities, measure progress and understand the effectiveness of Producer Unit activities.

Data and information are recorded, and learnings shall be used to inform the activity plan in Indicator 1.1.1.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have strong feedback structures to monitor the effectiveness of their activities and field-level progress regularly.

MF

Regular monitoring of activities and progress is a key part of a well-functioning management system. It helps Producer Management understand where its activities and approaches are successful in delivering improvements at the field level and where they are not. This information should help the PU review and adjust their activities to be more effective.

The monitoring plan should clarify which data is collected and by which methods. Monitoring methods need to ensure that data is both representative and inclusive (especially of women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion) and can include surveys, focus group meetings, farmer field books, (women-only) consultation events, information from community groups on local risks, data from project evaluations and more. Monitoring should include both quantitative and qualitative data. Monitoring data should be kept at least for the previous two seasons.

The PU should not only develop and ensure the quality and clarity of the plan but also implement the monitoring activities as per the plan. As stated in the Indicator, key findings from monitoring activities shall be used to inform PU activities, with a particular focus on addressing risks of non-conformities and improving progress and effectiveness of PU activities. Any unintended effects identified should also be addressed, as well as the closing of any corrective actions from previous assessments or audits.

PU Staff should be familiar with the plan and able to explain key findings from monitoring and how those were used to inform PU level activities as in Indicator 1.1.1.

1.1.3

gender equality

A representative and inclusive sample of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production is consulted on their priorities and needs at least once a year. Key findings from this consultation are documented and considered in activity planning across all Principles and in setting priorities for continuous improvement.

SH

The intent is to ensure that the Producer considers the interests of all involved and affected people at the field-level in planning and decision-making. People involved in farming activities are at the centre of making cotton more sustainable. Hence, the consideration of their experiences, needs and interests is vital to enabling long-lasting sustainability impact.

MF

A particular focus needs to be given to women farmers and workers, youth and people in vulnerable situations and/ or facing exclusion. Consultation methods, timing and location should be adapted to the local context and groups of participants in order to create safe spaces for everyone to share their thoughts, experiences and opinions.

Those carrying out the consultations should be sensitive about language and literacy, gender as well as potential power dynamics amongst participants and between facilitators and participants (for example, women leading conversations with other women versus men leading conversations with women). Any adverse effects of consultation activities (such as loss of income due to absence from work or safety issues due to travel) should be mitigated.

Consultation can include discussions on challenges and opportunities related to programme implementation, preferences for training and other support or on any other needs or priorities. Participants should be informed of the purpose of the discussions and how their feedback is used.

Consultations should cover at minimum 10% (more is recommended) of farming households and include discussions with all relevant household members who undertake farming duties in the field, particularly women.

Additionally, Producers should be able to demonstrate that they have consulted workers, involved household members and other relevant community stakeholders — especially people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion.

Producers should be able to explain how consultation findings have been included in activity planning in Indicator 1.1.1 and priority setting for continuous improvement in Indicator 1.3.1. Consultations in this Indicator can overlap with activities undertaken by the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (see Criterion 1.5) and can also be used to inform livelihoods work (see Principle 6).

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

1.1.4

An effective management system is in place to plan and implement farming activities. The system enables monitoring of progress against Better Cotton Initiative Indicators and continuous improvement targets, including the identification of non-conformities against standard requirements.

LF

The intent is for the Producer to have an organised system of planning and managing activities, monitoring progress and identifying risk of non-conformities against all areas covered by the P&C v.3.2.

The system should cover planning and management of farming activities, as well as targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities, as covered under Criterion 1.3. There is no need to set up specific systems for Better Cotton Initiative if the Producer already has an effective management system in place that meets these requirements.

1.1.5

The Producer complies with all applicable laws and regulations.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is that legal compliance is a minimum expectation for all Better Cotton Initiative Producers.

Applicable laws include local, county, province, state and national laws and regulations, including those which have been integrated into or legally deemed to be superior to national law by a state's signing of an international treaty. The Indicator also includes any applicable collective bargaining agreements.

If applicable laws and regulations or collective bargaining agreements do not align with requirements in the P&C v.3.2, the stricter set of requirements applies.

1.1.6

The Producer takes measures to identify and mitigate any social and/or environmental risks that the farm operation poses to surrounding communities and land.

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to be aware of and mitigate any adverse impacts of farming activities on the people or ecosystem beyond farm boundaries.

All farming operations will likely have impacts outside farm boundaries. Producers are expected to help identify and take steps to mitigate risks of negative impacts (for example, pesticide runoff or spray drift affecting local residents or wildlife). Producers can use tools such as social and environmental impact assessments, community grievance mechanisms or consultations with affected people and communities to identify and document these risks. The HCV risk-based approach that shall be undertaken in the case of any proposed land conversion as per Indicator 2.4.2 can also be one, but not the only, tool to identify risks and respective mitigation measures. Where risks are identified, appropriate measures should be taken and activities adjusted to address and mitigate those risks. The risks and respective mitigation measures should be included in the overall management plans to ensure their continued monitoring.

Note that prior to any activity that might affect the surrounding local communities in terms of their rights, lands, resources, territories, livelihoods or food security, Producers should inform and consult with concerned and affected stakeholders to obtain free, prior and informed consent.

Producers should be able to demonstrate how concerns raised have been considered and addressed.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 1.2 – Effective and relevant data management supports improved decision-making.

1.2.1

gender equality

In line with the Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document, accurate and complete Producer-level data is collected, validated and reported.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure that accurate and complete Producer-level data is collected, validated and reported, as outlined in the Farm Data Requirements Document. In a SH and MF context, this Indicator covers all relevant data collected and reported on at the PU-level. For LFs, this Indicator covers all data requirements.

Producers should collect relevant, accurate and good quality Producer-level data. Complete and up-to-date data helps Producers track sustainability progress and identify what works well and where new or adjusted approaches are needed. Accurate and complete data is also key to inform and demonstrate outcomes to other stakeholders.

1.2.2

gender equality

In line with the Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document, the Producer has a system in place to collect, validate and record accurate farm-level data. The Producer ensures that the roles and responsibilities for collection, validation and recording are clearly defined.

SH

MF

The intent is for the Producer to have a system in place to collect, validate and record accurate farm-level data and that the roles and responsibilities for collection, validation and recording are clearly defined amongst PU Staff and farmers. For LFs, this Indicator does not apply as all relevant data is covered in Indicator 1.2.1.

Complete and up-to-date farm-level data enables Producer Management to track field-level progress against sustainability objectives. Information can also be helpful for farming households to learn and keep track of practices implemented and for the PU to assess and adjust training and other relevant activities.

The specific data to be collected by farmers in a PU are set out in the Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document. The data collected should be representative and inclusive of all individuals involved in farm-level cotton production, in particular women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion. Producer Management should ensure that the data collected is shared for learning purposes with farming households.

Further reference:
Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 1.3 – Continuous improvement is demonstrated in locally relevant sustainability areas.

1.3.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified.

(i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers, and/or livestock;

(ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should be identified through results from monitoring activities (see Indicator 1.1.2), input from field-level consultations (see Indicator 1.1.3) and from the work conducted by the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5);

(iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.

SH

MF

The intent is for the Producer to develop a strategy for continuous improvement in regenerative agriculture and locally relevant sustainability areas that prioritise field-level activities. Continuous improvement targets should go beyond the P&C v.3.2 and should aim to increase awareness and good practices adoption over time.

Continuous improvement in regenerative agriculture and locally relevant sustainability areas can not only produce environmental benefits but can also help farmers reduce input costs and improve resilience. Soil health is recognised as a key area for resilience in regenerative agriculture and climate change and is strongly encouraged as a focus.

Targets identified to improve regenerative agriculture areas can be based on, but not limited to, the following Criteria and Indicators: soil health (e.g., 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.3.3), biodiversity and natural habitats (e.g., 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.4.1), water (e.g., 2.2.1, 2.2.2), pesticides (e.g., Criteria 3.1, 3.3), fertilisers (e.g., 2.1.4, 2.1.5) and livestock (e.g., 2.1.5).

Annual activities are identified to support the achievement of each four-year target, for example, through raising awareness, capacity strengthening initiatives, demo plots and the implementation of locally relevant good practices. The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented. The Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness of these activities.

Continuous improvement targets, respective annual activities and monitoring may be integrated in the PU's overall planning and monitoring systems in Indicators 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. They should be clearly identified as part of the continuous improvement plan. The targets and their respective annual activities may be reviewed and adapted, if relevant, with appropriate justification.

PUs have the flexibility to select issues that are the most urgent and meaningful in their local context, using results from monitoring activities, local sustainability hotspots or priorities as well as input from field-level consultations (see Indicator 1.1.3), including on gender equality and climate change issues. Consideration should also be given to: P&C Indicators that incorporate a continuous improvement element; non-compliances and respective corrective actions from past assessments or audits and conditions related to granted exceptional use of HHPs. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee as well as the individual(s) responsible for DW monitoring should be included in decision-making for continuous improvement areas.

For PUs that never had any Better Cotton Initiative license or certification before, this Indicator will not be audited during their first audit of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria. The PUs should use their first certification cycle to identify the key areas and targets, which then will be audited during the recertification audit. Note that for PUs that already have a license or certification, and/or that had one in the past, this Indicator is applicable without exceptions.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

1.3.2

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified.

(i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers and/or livestock;

(ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should consider input from workers and/or community stakeholders, corrective actions from past assessments or audits and learnings from self-assessments;

(iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.

LF

The intent is for the Producer to develop a strategy for continuous improvement in regenerative agriculture and locally relevant sustainability areas that prioritises field-level activities. Continuous improvement targets should go beyond the P&C v.3.2 and should aim to increase good practices adoption over time.

Continuous improvement in regenerative agriculture and locally relevant sustainability areas can not only produce environmental benefits but also help farmers reduce input costs and improve resilience. Soil health is recognised as a key area for resilience in regenerative agriculture and climate change and is strongly encouraged as a focus.

Targets identified to improve regenerative agriculture areas can be based on, but not limited to, the following Criteria and Indicators: soil health (e.g., 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.3.3), biodiversity and natural habitats (e.g., 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.3, 2.4.1), water (e.g., 2.2.1, 2.2.2), pesticides (e.g., Criteria 3.1, 3.3), fertilisers (e.g., 2.1.4, 2.1.5) and livestock (e.g., 2.1.5).

Annual activities are identified to support the achievement of each four-year target, for example, through baseline assessment, research initiative, capacity-strengthening, demo plots and the implementation of locally relevant good practices. The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year target shall be implemented. The Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness of these activities as part of the overall management system in Indicator 1.1.4. The targets and their respective annual activities may be reviewed and adapted, if relevant, with appropriate justification.

The targets for continuous improvement can be defined by the Producers themselves, giving flexibility to the most urgent and meaningful issues in their local context. The targets for continuous improvement should consider local sustainability hotspots or priorities, including topics related to gender equality and climate change issues, conditions related to granted exceptional use of HHPs, input from workers and/or community stakeholders, corrective actions from past assessments or audits and learnings from self-assessments.

Farmers should be able to explain how they identified these focus areas, the specific activities planned and completed and how they are monitoring progress.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 1.4 – Capacities are strengthened through an inclusive and effective approach.

1.4.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

An effective programme is implemented to strengthen capacities of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production. Training and related activities:

(i) Focus on locally relevant practices and innovations;

(ii) Are informed by inclusive field-level consultations as per Indicator 1.1.3 as well as feedback from previous trainings;

(iii) Use approaches and tools that are effective to drive field-level impact.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to plan and coordinate, and PU Staff to implement, training and other capacity strengthening activities that are relevant, inclusive and effective in driving field-level change.

MF

Changing practices and behaviour is complex and challenging, as it always directly and indirectly affects the work and life of those involved in farm-level activities.

For capacity strengthening to be effective, the approach should be sensitive to the risks that required changes might imply for the concerned people. It not only requires strong technical expertise but also key functional skills of those delivering the activities (such as communication, moderation and training skills, sensitivity to gender equality and social inclusion and knowledge of adult learning, behaviour change, participatory approaches and innovative extension methods).

In terms of content, capacity strengthening activities should focus on addressing locally relevant sustainability challenges, consider the participants' learning needs and requests and promote practices that have been proven effective in the local context. As appropriate, topics can and should go beyond agronomic issues to cover areas such as regenerative agriculture, gender equality, climate change mitigation and adaptation, entrepreneurship, finance and farm-accounting, business and entrepreneurship, rights at work and health and safety.

The approaches and tools used should be engaging and available to participants (see also Indicator 1.4.2). They should go beyond classical trainer–farmer training sessions and tap into a wider range of methods, including, for example, farmer-to-farmer learning, demonstration plots, the use of information communications technology or participatory community-level activities. Producer Management should be innovative and seek feedback through a variety of different tools to improve the relevance, inclusiveness and effectiveness of the programme.

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved in the design and implementation of capacity strengthening activities to ensure inclusion and to integrate gender awareness raising activities.

1.4.2

gender equality

Training and other related activities are designed to be inclusive and equally accessible to everyone who may benefit.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure that opportunities to develop and improve skills and knowledge are provided to everyone involved in farm-level cotton production.

MF

To achieve inclusion in all Better Cotton Initiative activities and to reach field-level impact, it is crucial to focus particularly on women, young people as well as people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion when designing and implementing training or related activities. Evidence should be available that the content, approaches and tools are adapted to the local context and the respective groups of people. They should consider elements such as language and literacy challenges, the participants' gender and role in cotton production and power dynamics, both amongst potential participants as well as between the facilitator and the participants, for example, by using women-only learning groups. Any adverse effects of training attendance (such as loss of income due to absence from work or safety issues due to travel) should be mitigated. Activities should also consider participants' requests for new skills and knowledge that could enable them to assume other productive roles (such as training women workers to do more mechanised work if they wish, skills for women to support the household income and others).

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee and those responsible for DW monitoring should be consulted and included in decision-making.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

1.4.3

gender equality

The Producer shall ensure and monitor that activities to strengthen capacities are effective at enhancing the knowledge, skills and practice adoption of the participants.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure that activities to strengthen capacities are effective at enhancing the knowledge, skills and practice adoption of the participants.

MF

In line with Indicator 1.1.2, Producer Management should monitor changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices directly and ensure that lessons learned are used to inform adjustments in content, approaches and tools for training and related activities. A particular focus in monitoring improvements should be given to women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee and those responsible for DW monitoring should therefore be involved.

1.4.4

gender equality

An effective programme is implemented to strengthen capacities of workers.

Training and related activities:

(i) Focus on locally relevant practices and innovations;

(ii) Are informed by consultation with workers, as well as by feedback loops from previous training;

(iii) Use effective approaches and tools;

(iv) Are designed to be inclusive and equally accessible to all workers who may benefit.

*Applicable to LF with over 15 workers

LF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure that workers have equal and inclusive access to relevant training and other related activities to strengthen their capacities.

Capacity strengthening activities should be aligned with the participants' needs, requests and productive roles. They should go above and beyond basic job skills and include, for example, workers' rights, health and safety, gender equality and sustainable agricultural practices.

To achieve inclusion in all Better Cotton Initiative activities and to reach field-level impact, it is crucial to focus particularly on women, young people as well as people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion when designing and implementing training or related activities. The content, approaches and tools should be adapted to the local context and respective groups of people. They should consider elements such as language and literacy challenges, the participants' gender and role in cotton production and power dynamics, both amongst potential participants as well as between the facilitator and the participants. Any adverse effects of training attendance (such as loss of income due to absence from work or safety issues due to travel) should be mitigated. Activities should also consider participants' requests for new skills and knowledge that could enable them to assume other productive roles (such as training women workers to do more mechanised work if they wish, skills for women to support the household income and others).

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee and the individual(s) responsible for DW Monitoring should be consulted and included in decision-making.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 1.5 – There is equal participation and recognition of women.

1.5.1

gender equality

An individual Gender Lead or Gender Committee is designated to support equal participation and recognition of women.
Key tasks include:

(i) Consulting with women involved in farm-level cotton production, as well as other relevant community-level actors (including men), to identify local gender equality challenges and opportunities for improvement;

(ii) Raising awareness with Producer Management and farming communities of locally specific gender dynamics, including those linked to different agricultural practices and productive roles;

(iii) Working with Producer Management to develop measures to respond to the identified challenges and opportunities.

*Applicable to LF with over 10 women workers

SH MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to identify key challenges and opportunities as well as related measures to strengthen the visibility, participation and recognition of women in Better Cotton Initiative activities and beyond.

See Guidance for Criterion 1.5 for further reference.

1.5.2

gender equality

In close collaboration with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee, the Producer implements recommended measures to enhance gender equality and inclusion as part of the activity and monitoring plans.

*Applicable to LF with over 10 women workers

SH MF LF

The intent is for Producer Management to ensure implementation and monitoring of the measures identified in Indicator 1.5.1.

See Guidance for Criterion 1.5 for further reference.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Guidance for Criterion 1.5: Gender Lead or Gender Committee

Women play a fundamental role in cotton production and have significant potential to help make the sector more sustainable. Yet they often lack access to critical resources, knowledge, power and choice to make a tangible contribution (for example, due to limited access to land rights, decision-making positions or even training). Producer Units and Large Farms can play an active role in addressing the barriers that prevent women from being fully recognised and integrated into cotton farming.

Producers are expected to designate a Gender Lead — a person or committee that is explicitly responsible for identifying and addressing gender-related issues and raising awareness. This person/group should collaborate closely with Producer Management and, where relevant, seek the support of relevant partners and allies in civil society and beyond. For example, female community members that are already known and trusted by farmers and workers are ideal candidates for Gender Lead/Committee roles, and existing gender committees or structures can be used as starting points to build off.

How the Gender Lead or Gender Committee is appointed and constituted is the responsibility of the Producer. However, they should:

- Have knowledge and experience of local gender dynamics;
- Have the time and resources to fulfil the role;
- Be recognised and supported by Producer Management to implement actions.

It is recommended that, in case of a committee, at least 50% of members are women – ideally representatives of farmers or workers – and that a member of Producer Management is included. Ensuring this balance within the committee can help create a more inclusive environment where women feel confident to actively participate and influence decisions. This also can support more equitable power dynamics within the committee structure.

The role of the Gender Lead or Gender Committee represents ongoing, long-term work and not a one-off activity. Activities should be adapted to the local context, and include the following elements:

- **Assessing and prioritising local gender-related challenges and opportunities**: Particular attention should be given to identifying existing barriers to women's inclusion and participation in the cotton sector and Better Cotton Initiative Programme efforts, as well as in leadership and decision-making capacities. Intersectionality, i.e., the fact that different characteristics of a person overlap and create different patterns of potential oppression, needs to be considered in order to develop effective solutions. In addition to field-level consultations, baseline assessments can be a useful tool to identify key areas and measure progress. When identifying priority challenges, it is recommended to start with impacts that cause the most harm in the short-term and longtermlong-term. The Producer or Gender Lead/Gender Committee should demonstrate how the challenges and opportunities were identified and prioritised.
- **Awareness raising**: This should be a continuous activity and the Gender Lead or Gender Committee and Producer should collaborate to identify how to raise awareness of gender equality and women's inclusion through other activities, including capacity strengthening activities at all levels (including for the PU Manager, Field Facilitators, and and other PU Staff), annual planning and monitoring and continuous improvement efforts.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

- **Develop measures**: The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should work with Producer Management, the community and, where relevant, the individual(s) responsible for DW Monitoring to design measures to address the identified challenges and opportunities. It is important that measures involve men, as they are instrumental to achieving improved gender equality.
- **Implementation**: Depending on the type of activities, those responsible for implementing the measures should be equipped with relevant information and knowledge of local gender issues as well as relevant practical tools for implementation. For MF or LF contexts, the development and implementation of relevant policies such as Codes of Conduct might be relevant as part of the recommended activities. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should support management in implementing, monitoring and improving the measures.

In addition to the targeted activities, the Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved in the implementation of several requirements across all Principles.

For a full list of those areas see Annex 1.

Criterion 1.6 – Locally relevant sustainability issues are addressed through collaborative action.

1.6.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

The Producer demonstrates collaboration or engagement with other relevant stakeholders on locally relevant sustainability issues.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for Producers to collaborate with other stakeholders to address sustainability challenges through collaborative action.

Most environmental, social and economic challenges related to cotton farming extend beyond the bounds of a specific crop, farm or PU (for example, lack of sufficient water, poor working conditions, gender-related issues or pest pressures). Joining forces with other stakeholders makes it possible to tackle issues in a more effective manner, leading to more meaningful and long-term solutions.

Other actors can include other Producers in the area, local institutions (for example, health centres, schools, etc.), locally present extension services, women's groups or other civil society organisations, research organisations and private actors (for example, pesticide suppliers).

The Producer can identify which area(s) to prioritise for collaboration based on local challenges and opportunities and/or based on existing industry-level engagement in which they are already involved. Producer Management should be able to justify the specific areas chosen for collaboration and explain the activities undertaken, how progress is monitored and any results.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 1.7 – Measures are taken to improve climate change adaptation and mitigation.

1.7.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change risks and adaptation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.

SH

The intent is for Producers to have systems in place to enhance awareness of how climate change is likely to impact their cotton production and to implement practices that help them adapt and build resilience.

MF

While the exact impacts of climate change are context-specific, almost all cotton producing regions are, or will be, significantly affected by climate change. Understanding the risks that climate change poses to farming operations and livelihoods of farming communities is a key step for Producers to prepare and take adaptive actions. Producers should conduct a climate impact assessment at the farm or PU level. They can also use credible tools or information sources to understand localised climate change risks and different groups' vulnerability to them.

LF

Climate change adaptation measures include all activities farming households implement to increase resilience and be better prepared for climate events. They can include, amongst others, efficient water management (both for droughts and heavy rainfall events) and practices that help avoid erosion or runoff, promote locally adapted seeds or encourage income diversification both on-farm and off-farm.

Women and girls are more vulnerable to climate change impacts and are also often the ones implementing and feeling the effects of mitigation and adaptation measures. That's why their inclusion in these activities and decision-making is particularly important. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be consulted by Producer Management in defining those measures.

Many practices might overlap with other practices promoted across the P&C v.3.2. Whenever possible, practices that support both climate change adaptation as well as climate change mitigation should be promoted.

1.7.2

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change mitigation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to enhance awareness of how cotton production contributes to climate change and to implement activities that help mitigate this contribution.

MF

Cotton production, and agriculture in general, is a key contributor to GHG emissions. Key drivers of emissions for cotton farming include soil preparation, burning of crop residue, fertiliser production and application, irrigation and the application of pesticides, although these vary by local context. Adequate practices (for example, reduced tillage, use of organic matter or rotation with leguminous crops) can also increase carbon removals and decrease GHG emissions. Producers should take steps to better understand their main GHG emission/removal sources related to their farm or PU. For that purpose, they can undertake a carbon footprint analysis, baseline assessments or make use of publicly available information and tools.

LF

Climate change mitigation measures can include practices to maintain and enhance soil health (including the ability of soils to function as carbon sinks); use of effective irrigation methods; the phasing out of fossil fuels and use of more sustainable energy sources and technologies for mechanised farming practices; avoiding land clearance and enhancing biodiversity and preventing the burning of residues or slash and burn practices. Producers can also engage in local or regional carbon projects. Given that many of these measures also affect women, their inclusion in these activities is fundamental. As such, the Gender Committee or Lead should be consulted.

Many practices might overlap with other practices promoted across the P&C v.3.2. Whenever possible, practices that support both climate change adaptation and mitigation should be promoted.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Principle 2:
Natural Resources

Summary:

The sustainable use of natural resources is fundamental to support life on earth and safeguard human well-being. In an agricultural context, it also increases resilience of farming communities to climate change and can help mitigate negative effects of farming on our climate.

This Principle focuses on farming practices that protect and enhance soil health, water quantity and quality and biodiversity. It covers the core tenets of regenerative farming practices, aims for optimising and reducing use of fertilisers and seeks to ensure efficient use of water both in rainfed and irrigated farms. At the same time, it highlights the importance of conserving and enhancing biodiversity and natural ecosystems, including a Criterion around the non-conversion of natural ecosystems and High Conservation Value areas. Together, these practices work to protect and improve the most vital resources to cotton farming and farming communities.

Better Cotton Initiative / Florian Lang.
Gujarat, India, 2018.

Criterion 2.1 – Soil health is improved.

2.1.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Locally relevant practices that maximise crop diversity are implemented.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to encourage greater adoption of practices that maximise plant diversity on the farmland over time.

MF

Practices to diversify crops planted on a plot of land can include complex crop rotation, intercropping, cover cropping and keeping a living roots system, for example, through perennial cropping or agroforestry. These practices can lead to improved nutrient cycling capacities, increased biodiversity and soil organic matter as well as better water retention or drainage capacities, including limited soil erosion and runoff. This will also allow for optimising and reducing fertiliser and pesticide application and increasing the capacities of the soil to store and retain CO2.

LF

The exact practices chosen should consider the prevailing local context in terms of soil type, topography, climate, available crops, labour force, cultural and social dynamics and yields. Results from monitoring activities (see Criterion 1.1), local knowledge, evidence from trials and/or consultations with qualified experts can help improve understanding of the benefits and challenges of various practices and support decision-making. Practices promoted in Indicators 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 and those in line with a rigorous Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach (see Criterion 3.1) might be overlapping and can be mixed and matched to produce the best results.

Producers should show improvements over time in testing and uptake of these practices or demonstrate that they are already implementing them to the maximum level, which, combined with other sustainable agricultural practices, delivers soil health benefits.

2.1.2

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Locally relevant farming practices that maximise soil cover are implemented.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to encourage greater adoption of practices that keep the soil covered and not left bare.

MF

Practices that help maximise soil cover include cover cropping, agroforestry, perennial cropping, intercropping or mulching. They contribute to overall soil health by strengthening its water retention capacities, lowering runoff and erosion (both through water and wind), preventing the leaching of nutrients and enhancing biodiversity (both below and on ground – for example, by providing habitats for birds and insects).

LF

The exact practices chosen should consider the prevailing local context in terms of soil type, topography, climate, available crops, labour force, cultural and social dynamics and yields. Results from monitoring activities (see Criterion 1.1), local knowledge, evidence from trials and/or consultations with qualified experts can help improve understanding of the benefits and challenges of various practices and support decision making. Practices promoted in Indicators 2.1.2 and 2.1.3 and those in line with a rigorous IPM approach (see Criterion 3.1) might be overlapping and can be mixed and matched to produce the best results.

Producers should show improvements over time in testing and uptake of these practices or demonstrate that they are already implementing them to the maximum level, which, combined with other sustainable agricultural practices, delivers soil health benefits.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

2.1.3

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Locally relevant farming practices that minimise soil disturbance are implemented.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to encourage greater adoption of practices that minimise soil disturbance.

MF

Practices that minimise soil disturbance include reduced tillage, no-tillage, zone tillage or mulch tillage and crop residue management such as residue integration or composting. These practices help conserve the soil structure and improve water dynamics, preserve soil organic matter and improve nutrient cycling.

LF

The exact practices chosen should consider the prevailing local context in terms of soil type, topography, climate, available crops, labour force, cultural and social dynamics and yields. Results from monitoring activities (see Criterion 1.1), local knowledge, evidence from trials and/or consultations with qualified experts can help improve understanding of the benefits and challenges of various practices and support decision making. Practices promoted in Indicators 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 and those in line with a rigorous IPM approach (see Criterion 3.1) might be overlapping and can be mixed and matched to produce the best results.

Producers should show improvements over time in testing and uptake of these practices or demonstrate that they are already implementing them to the maximum level, which, combined with other sustainable agricultural practices, delivers soil health benefits.

2.1.4

climate change mitigation

Based on soil and plant needs, optimum application of fertilisers aims to maximise

benefits and minimise negative impacts, considering and selecting the:

(i) Right source of nutrient;

(ii) Right rate;

(iii) Right timing;

(iv) Right place of application.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to encourage greater adoption of practices that ensure the application of organic or inorganic fertilisers is based on well-informed decisions that consider soil and plant nutritional needs.

MF

Fertilisers can impact soil health, water and biodiversity (for example, through runoff and leaching into the soil profile) and are a key source of GHG emissions. They also are expensive and can have negative impacts on human health. While the overall long-term aim is to create a sustainable farming system that minimises the need for fertiliser application altogether (see also Indicator 2.1.5), decision-making and the implementation of fertiliser application should be well informed. Fertiliser application should always be based on monitoring soil and plant nutritional needs through regular soil or plant testing and analysis, and ideally, also be based on a fertiliser application plan. Decisions should consider the following elements, using the '4R' approach:

LF

- Right source of nutrients: the right components (avoiding excessive nitrogen application) and the right type of fertiliser (prioritising organic fertilisers and potentially considering emission factors of the different fertilisers);
- Right rate: the amount of fertiliser to match the crop nutrient uptake capacity;
- Right timing: consider seasonal conditions, the crop growing stage and weather;
- Right place of application: the fertiliser should be applied where it can be most effective depending on the fertiliser type (for example, close to the root or the leaf). Right place of application should not only consider the right place on the plant, but also proximity to natural habitats and water bodies.

Note that this Indicator only applies to contexts where fertilisers are available and accessible to farming households.

Further reference:
FAO, The International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilisers (2019)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

2.1.5

climate change mitigation

Alternative methods (beyond synthetic fertilisers) are used to address nutritional needs of plants and soils. Steps are taken to minimise the use of synthetic fertiliser over time.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure the implementation of practices that reduce the need and actual application of synthetic fertilisers over time.

MF

Farming practices that conserve and improve soil fertility should be implemented and promoted (see also Indicators 2.1.1 - 2.1.3). If nutritional needs exist, organic fertilisers or soil amendments should be considered, with the aim to use synthetic fertilisers only as a last resort and/or when they are the most sensitive option to deal with pressing fertility issues. When a shift in practices is not feasible in the short-term, Producers should seek evidence and information to inform a long-term plan to reduce synthetic fertilisers.

LF

Relevant alternative methods can include sustainable agricultural practices, such as integrating legumes or other nitrogen fixers into rotation, use of fungi, bacteria or other biofertilisers, livestock rotation, leaving more biomass in the field, enhancing vermiculture, making use of biochar and/or composting or manuring.

Note: This Indicator only applies to contexts where fertilisers are available and accessible to farming households.

Criterion 2.2 – Quality and availability of water is optimised.

2.2.1

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

Irrigation methods, technologies and timing are planned and implemented to improve irrigation efficiency and maximise water productivity.

*Applicable to irrigated farms

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that the selection of irrigation practices is adapted to local conditions, maximises benefits for crops and minimises negative impacts on the environment and climate.

MF

Irrigation is a key tool to improve crop productivity and yields. It is also a key climate change adaptation measure to address increasing water scarcity and improve resilience in times of less reliable rainfall as well as extreme weather events. However, irrigation also has a big impact on freshwater in watersheds — often limiting or reducing availability — which is why implementing effective irrigation systems is vital. Effective irrigation systems help ensure water is used efficiently and applied at the right time. They also contribute to climate change mitigation through lower energy and/or other resources they require to operate (for example, solar-powered irrigation as opposed to diesel-powered).

LF

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

2.2.2

climate change adaptation

Practices are implemented to effectively manage changing rainfall amount, intensity and timing.

*Applicable to rainfed farms

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure implementation of effective practices that help manage changing rainfall patterns, including water availability, changing temporal distribution patterns and changing intensity levels of rainfall.

MF

While water is already a major limiting factor in cotton production, the effects of climate change pose additional challenges to farmers in terms of rainfall water (for example, droughts), timing (for example, shifting monsoon or rainy seasons) and intensity (for example, extreme weather events). Being knowledgeable about and prepared to manage those changes not only contributes to higher productivity and yields but also helps build resilience to climate change.

LF

To successfully implement this Indicator, farmers should be aware of changing rainfall amounts, intensity and timing, as well as infiltration impacts. They should also understand how outcomes of practices to enhance water efficiency are beneficial to their livelihoods. Depending on the context, water efficiency practices can include activities to ensure effective drainage, runoff and erosion control, methods to harvest and store rainfall water for irrigation purposes and activities to enhance the capacities of the soil for water infiltration and uptake. Nature-based solutions should be prioritised where feasible and relevant (for example, agroforestry instead of cement for erosion control). Rainfed water management practices should complement soil management practices that support infiltration, soil moisture management, water retention and less exposure to sunlight.

Criterion 2.3 – Biodiversity and natural habitats are conserved and enhanced.

2.3.1

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

Measures are implemented to protect the quality, availability, and related biodiversity of water bodies.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure understanding of the importance of water bodies and to implement practices to protect their quality, availability and related biodiversity from the adverse impacts of farming activities.

MF

Freshwater bodies include seasonal and permanent rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, drains, canals and reservoirs. They are biologically rich, vital ecosystems that play many important roles for other ecosystems and livelihoods. Healthy water bodies help manage water flow, reduce erosion and protect from flooding, as well as provide habitats to a wide variety of plants and animals. At the same time, water bodies are susceptible to degradation, pollution and contamination, which, in turn, have adverse impacts on the ecosystem – including farming areas – of whole watersheds.

LF

Measures should be taken to identify water bodies and protect their quality, availability and biodiversity. Natural vegetation alongside water courses (i.e., riparian buffers) plays a critical role in stabilising waterways and streams, avoiding erosion and filtering pollutants to protect water quality. The width of buffer zones should be determined by the function of the buffer (for example, biodiversity conservation or filtration of chemical runoff), the slope of the buffer area and the size of the river or stream. In some countries, buffer sizes are defined by national, regional or local regulations. Additional practices to protect water courses and wetlands include 'non-application' zones for pesticides and fertilisers, safe use and storage of pesticides and fertilisers (see also Principle 3) and drainage water filtration.

Good soil and water management practices remain critical to complement these measures.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

2.3.2

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Natural habitats and biodiversity are conserved, and steps are taken to enhance them over time in line with local or regional priorities.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure the implementation of locally relevant and effective measures to conserve and enhance key ecosystems, including natural habitats and biodiversity, on and around the farm.

MF

Biodiversity – animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms – is central to regulating healthy ecosystems, sustaining long lasting ecosystem services and increasing ecosystem resilience.

LF

Producers should have access to an effective system for identifying and measuring the state of natural habitats and biodiversity. This can be done through community-level engagement, mapping and/or partnering with local knowledge partners.

Producers and farmers should be knowledgeable about the ecosystem functions of the identified biodiversity and natural habitats for their farming practices and livelihoods. In turn, they should also show awareness of how their farming practices can positively or negatively affect them (both on-farm and off-farm, for example, through the pollution of water courses). Based on this knowledge, they should take relevant measures to conserve and enhance natural habitats and biodiversity over time. These practices can include adding dedicated areas for pollinators, measures to prevent the spread of invasive species (as referenced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)/Species Survival Commission Invasive Species Specialist Group), converting unproductive agricultural land to a use suitable for promoting biodiversity, measures to avoid cross-contamination of diseases, rewilding barren lands with local and endemic species or preserving and connecting treelines, hedgerows and wildlife corridors. Special consideration should be given to High Conservation Value (HCV) areas as well as focal species which are of conservation concern (for example, protected species), sensitive to threats (for example, from farming practices) or are indicators of ecosystem health and habitat conditions.

The activities chosen should align with local or regional priorities and projects and should ideally be implemented in a collaborative approach with other relevant local actors.

Good soil and water management practices remain critical to complement these measures.

Further reference:
UN, Convention on Biological Diversity (1992).
IUCN website, resources on biodiversity.

2.3.3

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Degraded areas on croplands are identified, and steps are taken to restore them over time in line with local or regional priorities.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure degraded croplands are identified and that measures are taken to avoid further degradation and restore them over time.

MF

Degraded area/land is land which has lost some of its natural productivity or other environmental values due to processes directly or indirectly caused by humans. Degraded areas on cotton farms include land with elevated levels of erosion, compaction or salinity and can have far reaching negative impacts, including reduced crop growth (due to reduced soil health) and diminished community health (due to poor water quality).

LF

Degraded areas should be identified, further degradation should be prevented and measures implemented to restore them over time. Restoration in this case includes both measures to make the land productive for agriculture as well as measures to restore natural ecosystems. When relevant, restoration plans should complement local or regional priorities and projects.

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For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 2.4 – Natural ecosystems and High Conservation Value areas are conserved.

2.4.1

climate change mitigation

The Producer ensures that no cotton is grown on land converted from natural ecosystems after 31 December 2020, in line with the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Reference Documents.

SH The intent is for Producers to ensure that cotton is not grown on land converted from natural ecosystems after the cutoff date of 31 December 2020.

MF For the implementation of this Indicator, Producers should refer to the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Reference Documents.

LF Further reference:
Accountability Framework Initiative, online resources
Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Reference Documents

2.4.2

climate change mitigation

Prior to any land conversion, the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Assessment shall be undertaken to ensure that natural ecosystems and High Conservation Values (HCVs) are conserved. Resulting measures are fully implemented as part of the activity and monitoring plans in Principle 1.

SH The intent is for Producers to ensure that natural ecosystems and areas of High Conservation Value (HCV) are identified and not negatively affected by the conversion, conversion-related activities or future farming practices on the converted land.

MF Producers shall use the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Assessment prior to any proposed land conversion. The Assessment involves a simplified approach to reveal the presence of HCVs and natural ecosystems to determine whether the land can be converted at all and to identify potential mitigation measures that need to be implemented in case the land is converted.

LF The Assessment requires the Producer to document any data and decisions on land conversion. Required mitigation measures resulting from the Assessment need to be fully implemented and monitored as part of the activity and monitoring plans.

Further reference:
Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Reference Documents

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For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Principle 3:
Crop Protection

Summary:

Closely linked to the sustainable use of natural resources as covered in Principle 2, and hence also climate action, this Principle details crop protection practices that are both economically viable and minimise the risk of harmful impacts to human health and the environment. Using crop protection practices beyond the sole and simple use of synthetic pesticides has a range of positive impacts. Not only does it contribute to the protection and enhancement of natural resources but it also improves the livelihoods of farming communities through increased yields, reduced input costs and reduced risks of health issues.

With this in mind, this Principle focuses on the adoption of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy which promotes a combination of biological, cultural and mechanical or physical practices to reduce the need for synthetic pesticides. It also provides a framework to assess which pesticides are allowed to be used and under which conditions, including requirements to ensure a safe handling of pesticides and application materials, so that risks to human health and the environment are mitigated.

Cotton Australia / Damian Edwards.
Australia, 2018.

Criterion 3.1 – An Integrated Pest Management strategy is implemented.

3.1.1

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

A written Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy is developed and implemented which:

(i) Covers Indicators 3.1.2 - 3.1.6;

(ii) Supports improved awareness and implementation of IPM practices over time;

(iii) Informs the activity and monitoring plans under Principle 1.

SH

The intent is for Producers to develop a written strategy for pest management that is aligned with IPM principles (see Guidance for Criterion 3.1 for further reference) and which prioritises field-level activities. The result should be that farmers demonstrate increased awareness and implementation of IPM-based crop protection practices over time.

MF

Closely linked to sustainable natural resources management (see Principle 2), IPM emphasises the growth of a healthy crop with the least possible disruption to agroecosystems and encourages natural pest control mechanisms. Adopting an IPM-based approach not only produces environmental benefits but can also help farmers reduce input costs and increase profits.

The IPM strategy should explain the PU's overall approach for improving IPM understanding and adoption across farmers. The specific activities, including locally recognised good practices which support this strategy (for example, training, demo plots, awareness raising, etc.), should be implemented as part of the overall activity and monitoring plans (as in Indicators 1.1.1 and 1.1.2).

Producer Management should be able to explain how the IPM strategy was developed, including sources of technical advice. They should also be able to explain how field-level activities relate to the overall strategy and how they exchange with farmers to ensure implementation.

It is recommended for the PU to review and update the IPM strategy as needed and at least annually.

Further reference:
FAO website, resources on IPM
PAN UK website, resources on IPM

3.1.2

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

Methods are implemented that help grow a healthy crop, discourage the build-up of pest populations and diseases and preserve and enhance populations of beneficial organisms.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure farming households understand and implement practices that prevent or minimise pest incidents in the first place.

MF

From an IPM perspective, preventative measures should always be prioritised as they reduce the need for interventions. Healthy crops are more resilient and less susceptible to damage from pests and diseases.

Methods to promote healthy crops include crop choice, appropriate seed selection (also covered in Indicator 3.1.3) and the sustainable management of soil, water and biodiversity, including soil preparation and sowing practices, irrigation, nutrient management and weed management (as covered in Principle 2). Good field hygiene, including removing crop residue, can help discourage the build-up of pest populations. Protecting native habitats around farmland, increasing varied vegetation on field borders and careful selection and application of pesticides can also help enhance populations of beneficial organisms.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.1.3

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Farmers are informed of appropriate seed varieties, based on consideration of suitability for local growing conditions and reducing susceptibility to key pests and/or diseases.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure farming households understand the importance of good seed selection for growing a healthy and resilient crop.

MF

Appropriate seed varieties are more likely to produce good yields, be more resilient to damage from local pests and diseases and can help with climate change adaptation. Seed selection is therefore a fundamental component of an IPM approach. Seed varieties ideally should be selected with consideration of genetic resistance and tolerance to pests and diseases. Seedling vigour and other physiological features, such as hard seed coats, will help prevent damage from pests.

Better Cotton Initiative acknowledges that, in some contexts, farmers might have challenges accessing appropriate seeds due to market structures, costs or other barriers. Where possible, they should buy seeds from trusted sources or produce their own seeds. If they harvest their own seeds, only healthy plants should be used. While seeds may be treated to reduce potential for disease, treatment should avoid using prohibited pesticides.

The PU Manager, and PU Staff should be able to explain the importance of seed selection as a part of their overall IPM approach and the considerations of different seed varieties available locally. Farmers, at a minimum, should be able to explain the importance of appropriate seed varieties and considerations they make in selecting seeds.

3.1.4

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Regular monitoring is conducted on crop health and levels of pests and beneficial organisms. Field observation and decision-making tools are used to determine when and how to control pests.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure farming households are using effective monitoring and observation to ensure control measures for pests are only used when absolutely necessary. A key concept of an IPM approach is that the presence of pests should not automatically lead to control measures being applied.

MF

Close surveillance of crop development, including the level of pests and beneficial organisms, is necessary to inform decisions on if, when and what type of interventions are required to control pest populations and prevent economic loss. Farmers should have the capacity — on an individual basis or with expert support — to make pest management decisions based on a minimum level of field observations and analysis. They should apply concepts such as predator to pest ratios and use economic thresholds (explained in Indicator 3.1.6) for pest control measures.

3.1.5

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation

Farmers are aware of nonchemical methods (for example, biological, physical and cultural) for managing key pests, and their use is prioritised as part of the IPM strategy.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure farming households understand the benefits of non-chemical methods to prevent and control pests and use these as a first step before resorting to pesticides. These methods are not only better for the environment and human health but also often come at a lower cost compared to chemical applications.

MF

Non-chemical methods of pest control should be adapted to local contexts and can include a combination of biological, physical and cultural practices (see Guidance for Criterion 3.1 for further reference).

PU Staff and farmers should be able to identify key pest pressures, give examples of how non-chemical methods can be used and explain their benefits compared to pesticide application. Non-chemical methods should be implemented as a core part of the IPM approach.

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For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.1.6

climate change mitigation

Pesticides are only used when a defined pest threshold, such as an Economic Threshold Level (ETL) where these are available and applicable, is reached. If pesticides are used:

(i) Low toxicity active ingredients are preferred;

(ii) They are selected and applied in a way to mitigate resistance.

SH

MF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure farmers use pesticides only when a defined pest threshold is reached, in line with the principles of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and after prioritising non-chemical methods, as in Indicator 3.1.5. Such thresholds determine the point at which pest damage is likely to cause economic loss and chemical control can be justified. The ETL is the preferred reference, as it represents a core IPM concept linking pest population levels to potential economic damage (see Guidance for Criterion 3.1.)

However, where ETLs are not available or practical to calculate, farmers may rely on other defined pest thresholds, such as action thresholds, agronomic thresholds or Economic Injury Levels. These shall be developed and validated by credible sources, including agricultural extension services, research institutions or relevant local authorities. These thresholds provide practical guidance for decision-making while maintaining IPM principles.

Under an IPM strategy, farmers should not apply pesticides at the first sign of pests. Cotton, like most crops, can tolerate some degree of pest damage without yields being affected. Therefore, based on monitoring data (Indicator 3.1.4), the farmer should only apply pesticides when pests reach a level high enough that their damage to the crop is greater than the monetary cost of treatment (economic threshold level or other applicable defined pest threshold).

Farmers should select and apply pesticides based on guidance and advice on defined pest thresholds, such as economic thresholds, received from a competent technician and/or during training. If pesticides are used, low-toxicity active ingredients shall be prioritised, and pesticides shall be selected and applied in ways that mitigate pest resistance and reduce risks to human health and the environment, for example, through precise application and rotating active ingredients. Toxicity levels of pesticides can be evaluated based on labels, information from credible extension services or research bodies and Toxic Load Indicator calculations.

The application of pesticides on pre-determined dates, without observation, would not meet the intent of this Indicator. In very exceptional circumstances, where an isolated application of pesticides on a pre-determined schedule is based on strong advice from a credible research body, this may be considered acceptable. However, this kind of 'calendar spraying' needs to be documented and justified.

Further reference:
FAO, International Code of Conduct – Guidelines on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (2016)
FAO, International Code of Conduct – Guidelines on Prevention and Management of Pesticide Resistance (2012)
Higley, Pedigo. Economic injury level concepts and their use in sustaining environmental quality (1993)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.1.7

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

An Integrated Pest Management strategy is implemented which:

(i) Discourages the buildup of pest populations and crop diseases and supports beneficial organisms;

(ii) Includes regular monitoring of crop health, pests, diseases and beneficial organisms;

(iii) Prioritises non-chemical methods;

(iv) Ensures pesticides are used only when defined pest thresholds are reached;

(v) Prioritises low toxicity active ingredients and manages plant resistance if pesticides are used.

LF

The intent is to ensure the Producer aligns its pest management approach and crop protection practices used in the field with IPM principles (see Guidance for Criterion 3.1 for further reference).

The Producer should prevent pest incidents by growing a healthy crop, which discourages the build-up of pest populations and crop diseases and supports beneficial organisms. Producers should be familiar with biological, cultural and physical methods of managing pests and be able to explain how these are used as a priority over chemical control measures in the IPM strategy.

Where pesticides are used, Producers should provide evidence that these are applied based on regular monitoring and economic thresholds and that lowest toxicity options are preferred. Farmers should also be able to explain how they manage plant resistance, for example, through rotation of active ingredients and precise application techniques.

Over time, the implementation of an IPM approach should improve crop health and resilience and reduce dependency on chemical control measures.

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Guidance for Criterion 3.1: Better Cotton Initiative's Approach Towards Integrated Pest Management

The Better Cotton Initiative promotes the long-term prevention of pests or the damage they cause through a combination of techniques such as biological control, changing habitats, cultural practices and the use of resistant crop varieties. Pesticides should only be used in line with established guidelines and when pests reach economic thresholds (i.e., when pests reach a level high enough that their damage to the crop is greater than the monetary cost of treatment). Economic thresholds are determined through a combination of monitoring and assessment of pest populations and damage levels. The selection and application of pesticides should target only the relevant organism and minimise risk to humans, the environment and any other organisms naturally present in the field (particularly beneficial organisms).

Key IPM Principles

- **Focus on the long-term prevention of pests and pest damage by managing the ecosystem**
  With an IPM approach, before any control methods are applied, actions are first taken to keep pests from becoming a problem. Actions can include growing a healthy cotton crop that can withstand pest attacks, using disease-resistant plants or using repellents to keep insects or rodents away from crops. Rather than simply eliminating the pests observed, following an IPM approach means addressing and managing environmental factors that affect the pest and its ability to thrive.
- **Use monitoring for decision-making**
  Monitoring includes identifying which pests are present in a field, their numbers and what damage they cause. Correctly identifying the pest is central to establishing whether a pest is likely to become a problem and determining the best management strategy. After monitoring the situation and considering the pest's biology and related environmental factors, it can be decided whether the pest can be tolerated or whether it exceeds an economic threshold that requires control (i.e., if the cost of managing the pest exceeds the economic loss of a reduced yield). If control is needed, the information gathered in monitoring should be used to inform pest management methods and timing.
- **Use a combination of management approaches for greater effectiveness**
  The most effective, long-term way to manage pests is by using a combination of methods that work better together than separately. These methods will work closely, and may even overlap, with sustainable natural resource management practices (see Principle 2). Approaches for managing pests are often grouped into the following categories:
  - **Biological control**
    The use of natural enemies — predators, parasites, pathogens and competitors — to control pests and their damage. Invertebrates, plant pathogens, nematodes, weeds and vertebrates have many natural enemies.
  - **Cultural controls**
    Practices that reduce pest establishment, reproduction, dispersal and survival. For example, changing irrigation practices can lower fungal and weed issues.
  - **Mechanical and physical controls**
    Practices to eliminate a pest directly, block pests or create an environment unsuitable for the pest to thrive. Mechanical controls include rodent traps, while physical controls could be mulches for weed management, steaming the soil to prevent disease or screens to exclude birds or insects.
  - **Chemical control**
    The use of pesticides. Within an IPM strategy, pesticides are only used when needed, and in combination with other approaches for effective, long-term control. The pesticides applied should be selected for efficiency and pose the least risk to humans, other organisms and the environment.

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For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 3.2 – Pesticides are registered and appropriately labelled.

3.2.1

All pesticides used are:

(i) Correctly labelled in at least one national or regional language;

(ii) Registered nationally for use on cotton.

Pesticide mixtures may be used only if:

(i) The mixture itself is registered; or

(ii) On site mixtures of individually registered pesticides are permitted under local regulations.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to minimise the harmful effects of pesticides by ensuring pesticides are nationally registered, clearly labelled and any mixtures are approved for use. Where there is no process in a country to register mixtures nor are there any regulations for mixtures, then these are not allowed as the Producer may only use those registered as per the Indicator.

Registered pesticides are those for which a relevant regulatory authority has assessed the risks of use for specific crop(s) and has developed crop-specific directions for use. The labels provided with legally registered pesticides contain important information regarding the properties of the product, directions for use and specific precautions or measures to be followed.

Pesticide labels should be in at least one de facto or de jure official national or regional applicable language. Farmers should be able to understand label directions and confirm that all pesticides are applied in line with label instructions.

Pesticide mixtures include commercial products containing multiple active ingredients as well as cases where farmers combine pesticides on the farm (for example, pesticide cocktails or tank mixes). Using pesticide mixtures can increase risks to human health, reduce efficacy of individual ingredients in some cases or lead to other adverse effects, since the combined ingredients are not subject to testing as they are through a registration process. When pesticides are mixed on site, appropriate safeguarding measures and use of PPE should be in place.

A record of natural substances used for pest and disease control should be maintained, especially in countries where there is no registration process.

Further reference:
European Union, Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 - classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures (CLP)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 3.3 - Highly Hazardous Pesticides are actively phased out.

3.3.1

climate change mitigation

Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) shall not be used if they are listed in the Better Cotton Initiative Prohibited Pesticides List.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure pesticides that are considered as most hazardous to human health or the environment shall not be used on cotton sold under this standard.

MF

Pesticides considered prohibited under this Indicator include those in Annex A and B of the Stockholm Convention, Annexes of the Montreal Protocol or Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention. These are all international, multilateral agreements that aim to eliminate or restrict use of the most dangerous pesticides and compounds. Prohibited pesticides also include those defined as 'acute toxic' category 1 or 2 of the EU Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) or under 1a and 1b of the WHO classification.

LF

Producer Management should make sure that those buying and applying pesticides are aware of the pesticides that are prohibited or targeted for phase-out under the P&C v.3.2. Activities to ensure this can include training on how to read pesticide labels, providing hazardous pesticide lists in local languages, using pictograms on pesticide labels and more.

Where prohibited pesticides do not yet have viable alternatives, their exceptional use may be permitted by Better Cotton Initiative through the established exceptional use process. The exceptional use process provides a rigorous and transparent evaluation of requests, including evaluation of viable alternatives, use of mitigation measures and steps taken to reduce or phase out use over time. If exceptional use of pesticides is permitted in specific cases, any agreed conditions shall be strictly followed and reported.

Further reference:
Better Cotton Initiative Highly Hazardous Pesticides Exceptional Use Procedure
Better Cotton Initiative Prohibited Pesticides List

3.3.2

climate change mitigation

A plan is implemented to phase out pesticides defined as carcinogenic (category 1a or 1b), mutagenic (category 1a or 1b) or reprotoxic (category 1a or 1b) by the EU Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) by 2028 or earlier.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to implement a plan to ensure the phase out of carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic (CMR) substances by 2028 or earlier.

MF

Pesticides classified as CMR substances can pose significant long-term risks to human health. Exposure to known or potential carcinogens can induce cancer or increase its incidence. Mutagens can induce inherited genetic defects or increase their incidence. Exposure to reprotoxic chemicals can negatively affect the reproductive system and lead to defects in offspring. Although use of protective equipment (such as PPE and closed cabin spraying) can reduce these risks, the best option is to avoid use of these chemicals altogether.

LF

The phase-out plan should be realistic and include tangible measures that prepare for a phase-out. Depending on the context and the pesticides, such measures can include, amongst others, ensuring access to research and involvement with research bodies, testing and validating alternatives, work with CMR suppliers to prioritise safer alternatives, supporting access to financial incentives or subsidies for adoption of non-CMR alternatives, engaging with national authorities to support bans on CMR pesticides and providing adequate support and training for farming households to transition successfully. The measures should be included in the activity and monitoring plans in Criterion 1.

Further reference:
UN, Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS Rev. 9, 2021)
ILO, resources on male and female reproductive health hazards in the workplace
Better Cotton Initiative CMR Pesticides List

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 3.4 - Environmental hazards of Highly Hazardous Pesticides are mitigated.

3.4.1

climate change mitigation climate change adaptation

If pesticides included in the Better Cotton Initiative High Environmental Hazard List are used, measures are implemented to mitigate environmental risks.

SH MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure that steps are taken to identify and mitigate the risks that pesticides pose to the environment.

The Better Cotton Initiative High Environmental Hazard list is based on Group 3 of the Pesticide Action Network's International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs). Group 3 pesticides are those that pose a high risk to pollinators and aquatic ecosystems and have very persistent properties (they persist for a long time in soil, water or sediment) or very bioaccumulative properties (they build up in organisms faster than they can be eliminated and are thus more dangerous).

This Indicator is only applicable to pesticides whose use is not prohibited as per Indicator 3.3.1.

Further reference:
PAN International, List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (2024)
PAN UK, 'Impacts of pesticides on the environment' web page
PAN UK, 'Conserving biodiversity' web page
Better Cotton Initiative High Environmental Hazard list

Better Cotton Initiative's Approach to Highly Hazardous Pesticides

All pesticides pose risks to human health and the environment. These risks can be reduced to some degree through environmental mitigation measures and the use of PPE. However, mitigation measures are imperfect, and some pesticides pose such serious risks to humans and the environment that their use should be avoided completely.

Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) are pesticides that are associated with significant health and environmental risks. Reducing the total toxicity of pesticides applied to crops and ultimately eliminating the use of HHPs is integral to protecting the health of farmers, workers and farming communities, while also conserving the environment. One method to achieve this is to prohibit or restrict access to certain types of pesticides based on their toxicity to human health and the environment in the context of an IPM strategy. The Better Cotton Initiative's approach also recognises and addresses the trade-offs involved with phasing out pesticides, particularly if no viable alternatives are available.

How HHPs Are Defined

Generally, HHPs are defined based on the following criteria:

- **Acute toxicity**: This refers to the ability of a substance to cause harmful effects on an organism after a single or short-term exposure.
- **Chronic toxicity**: This refers to the ability of a substance to cause harmful effects on an organism after repeated or long-term exposure. These include long-term health effects, such as cancer, reproductive or developmental problems and neurological disorders.
- **Persistence**: This refers to the ability of a substance to resist degradation or breakdown in the environment and hence to persist for a long time in soil, water and other natural resources.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

- **Bioaccumulation and biomagnification**: Bioaccumulation refers to the ability of a substance to accumulate in the tissues of organisms over time, while biomagnification refers to the process by which the concentration of a substance increases as it moves up the food chain.
- **Hazardous properties**: HHPs can have additional hazardous properties, such as being flammable or explosive or reacting with other chemicals to produce dangerous by-products.

While HHPs are subject to strict regulations and control measures in many countries, the criteria used to define HHPs vary depending on the regulatory framework and the specific country or region. The P&C v.3.2 uses the following frameworks. Note that often pesticides are covered in several of the lists below. As a voluntary standard, in some areas, Better Cotton Initiative might set higher sustainability standards than local or national regulations.

- **Stockholm Convention**: The Stockholm Convention is a legally binding treaty that seeks to eliminate or restrict the production, use and release of **persistent organic pollutants (POPs)**. POPs are chemicals that persist in the environment, bioaccumulate and biomagnify and pose a risk of harm to human health and the environment. The use of the pesticides listed in Annex A and B are prohibited under the P&C v.3.2.
- **Rotterdam Convention**: The Rotterdam Convention is a legally binding international treaty that outlines procedures for the **international trade** of certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides. It focuses on chemicals and pesticides that have been identified as hazardous and are banned or severely restricted by Parties to the Convention. The use of the pesticides listed in Annex III are prohibited under the P&C v.3.2.
- **Montreal Protocol**: The Montreal Protocol is a legally binding international treaty ratified by 198 countries and the European Union that specifically targets the phase-out of **ozone-depleting substances** and their alternatives. The use of the pesticides listed in its Annexes are prohibited under the P&C v.3.2.
- **WHO Class 1a and 1b**: The WHO identifies and evaluates the health risks of chemicals for human beings. Pesticides listed in 1a and 1b refer to substances or mixtures that can cause **acute toxicity**, such as death or severe damage to health, through oral, dermal or inhalation exposure. Their use is prohibited under the P&C v.3.2.
- **GHS Categories 1 and 2 of pesticides classified as 'acute toxicity' and categories 1a and 1b each of 'carcinogenic', 'mutagenic' and 'reprotoxic' pesticides**: The EU Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) provides a standardised global system for classifying and communicating the hazards associated with a wide range of hazardous chemicals. Similar to the WHO class 1a and 1b, chemicals showing the most severe risks related to **acute toxicity (category 1 and 2 of class 'acute toxicity')** are prohibited under the P&C v.3.2. Those under category 1a or 1b of 'carcinogenic', 'mutagenic' or 'reprotoxic' pesticides are targeted for phase out by 2028.
- **The Pesticide Action Network's (PAN) International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides Group 3**: PAN identifies and provides guidance on reducing the hazards of pesticides. PAN Group 3 contains active ingredients that meet PAN's **environmental toxicity criteria** (considering their persistence, bioaccumulation and biomagnification, their toxicity to aquatic organisms and their toxicity to bees). This list is used to define the pesticides that require appropriate mitigation measures under Criterion 3.4.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity. For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 3.5 - Pesticides are handled and stored responsibly.

3.5.1

gender equality

It is ensured that any person who prepares and applies pesticides is:

(i) Healthy;

(ii) Skilled and trained in the application of pesticides;

(iii) 18 or older;

(iv) Not pregnant or nursing.

SH The intent is for the Producer to ensure that harm to human health is minimised by ensuring that those handling pesticides are healthy adults with sufficient training.

MF Nursing or pregnant women should not handle pesticides, as even with protective measures, there is a risk to the foetus or child. Individuals who are sick or fatigued are more likely to have an accident than those who are healthy. Individuals suffering from certain diseases, or with injuries or wounds, are also more susceptible to harm from pesticide exposure.

LF In countries where specific training and/or certification is required for those applying pesticides, evidence should be provided that all individuals handling pesticides are appropriately qualified. In all cases, the Producer should be able to explain who handles pesticides, how training is provided and how they ensure that the requirements in the Indicator are met. Records of training or certification should be kept.

Further reference:
FAO, The International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (2014)
CropLife International, 'Stewardship' web page

3.5.2

gender equality

Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is correctly used while using and handling pesticides.

MF The intent is for the Producer to ensure that harm to human health of those using and handling pesticides is minimised through careful and consistent use of appropriate (PPE).

LF The best option to protect humans from pesticide exposure is to avoid pesticides altogether, then to minimise their use and choose fewer toxic options. When there is no alternative to pesticide use, good quality appropriate PPE can help reduce risks to human health, but only if worn and maintained properly. Pesticide exposure can occur via the mouth (oral exposure), skin (dermal) or breathing (inhalation).

Using pesticides, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities conducted during field application (e.g., spraying, seed treatment, granule/powder application, fumigation and others). Handling, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities related to the storage, preparation, maintenance and disposal of pesticides and their related equipment and material, including activities such as storing, mixing, diluting, measuring, transferring pesticides, preparing, washing and maintaining equipment and materials as well as the disposal of waste and materials.

All individuals handling pesticides should have access to appropriate PPE, and it should be used in line with the label instructions of the pesticides in use. Labels should be checked regularly (at least every spray season), and all individuals should receive training on the importance of PPE and proper use and maintenance. PPE should be checked regularly for wear and tear and replaced if required. Where relevant, the Producer Management should consult and collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee to implement this Indicator.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.5.3

gender equality

Minimum Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is correctly used while using and handling pesticides, which includes protection of the following body parts from dermal absorption, ingestion and inhalation:

(i) Face and airways (eyes, ear canal, nose and scalp);

(ii) Limbs (arms, forearms, palms, legs and feet);

(iii) Abdomen and genital area.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure a minimum level of protection of individuals using and handling pesticides in contexts where appropriate PPE is not accessible for farmers and workers.

The long-term goal is to increase access and use of appropriate PPE to address the risks of pesticides to human health, if and when they are used (see also Indicator 3.5.4). However, in cases where appropriate PPE is not yet accessible, affordable or available, the aim is to build awareness of the risks of pesticide exposure and ensure farmers and workers protect exposed body parts to the best degree possible. PPE should be suitable for the task carried out and appropriate to the prevailing climatic conditions. Using pesticides, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities conducted during field application (e.g., spraying, seed treatment, granule/powder application, fumigation and others). Handling, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities related to the storage, preparation, maintenance and disposal of pesticides and their related equipment and material, including activities such as storing, mixing, diluting, measuring, transferring pesticides, preparing, washing and maintaining equipment and materials as well as the disposal of waste and materials.

Farmers and workers handling pesticides are expected to cover all required body parts to avoid dermal absorption, ingestion and inhalation risks as well as damage to eyes. The materials should be impermeable to water, typically non-woven (to prevent passage of pesticides), chemical resistant and washable so that the toxic elements can be removed after each use. The type of PPE should be effective and minimise the risk of adverse impacts (such as heat stress or increased rashes). PPE should be used at all stages of handling pesticides, including opening containers, transferring pesticides, mixing pesticides, loading equipment, spraying and washing equipment.

PPE should be washed or disposed of between uses to prevent pesticide exposure from garments, and wash water should be disposed of appropriately. Care should be taken to provide all the necessary information, education and support to the people at home or on the farm who undertake washing so that their health is not at risk or compromised in any way.

PU Staff should support farmers and workers in understanding the risks of pesticide use and the importance of PPE, promoting meaningful use of PPE for different tasks as well as monitoring its use at the farm level (including specific body parts that cannot be consistently covered, for example, due to heat or discomfort). Pesticides whose handling and application require the use of PPE that is uncomfortable, expensive or not readily available should be avoided, especially in hot climates. Producer Management should consult and collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee to implement this Indicator.

Further reference:
FAO/WHO Guidelines for personal protection when handling and applying pesticides – International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management (2020)
ILO/IUF, Health, Safety and Environment: A Series of Trade Union Education Manuals for Agricultural Workers (2006)
CropLife International, online resources on PPE (video)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.5.4

▲ gender equality

Steps are taken to increase the use of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) amongst individuals using and handling pesticides.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that the health of individuals using and handling pesticides are better protected by increasing access to and use of appropriate PPE over time.

Using pesticides, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities conducted during field application (e.g., spraying, seed treatment, granule/powder application, fumigation and others). Handling, in the context of this Indicator, includes all activities related to the storage, preparation, maintenance and disposal of pesticides and their related equipment and material, including activities such as storing, mixing, diluting, measuring, transferring pesticides, preparing, washing and maintaining equipment and materials as well as the disposal of waste and materials.

The use of minimum PPE (as in Indicator 3.5.3) provides significantly less protection against the harmful effects of pesticides when compared to appropriate PPE, which is designed and manufactured specifically for that purpose. However, in many smallholder contexts, the use of appropriate PPE is limited by challenges related to cost, access, discomfort and lack of awareness. This Indicator aims to support continual improvement in the access and use of appropriate PPE, regardless of where the current baseline is.

Producer Management should identify challenges to the adoption of appropriate PPE, measures to improve access and usage and have a system to monitor improvements over time (for example, by tracking practice adoption for a representative sample of farmers). Producer Management should consult and collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee in these activities.

3.5.5

Dedicated areas shall be available on the farm for using and handling pesticides and for storing and handling application equipment. The areas shall fully comply with relevant legislation for the storage of pesticides. Within these areas, all rinsate and runoff shall be completely captured so that it poses no contamination risk.

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure the reduction of the risks to humans and the environment by ensuring responsible procedures are in place for using and handling pesticides and their equipment.

If pesticides are stored, they should be stored separately from all other substances. Storage should protect the containers from the weather to minimise the risks of them corroding or the pesticide degrading. Storage should also be in a secure and well-ventilated area so that it is protected from unauthorised access and so that fumes do not pose a risk. Pesticides should never be stored in drink or food containers. If it is necessary to store a pesticide in a container other than its original container, then the container should be clearly and appropriately marked.

The mixing and cleaning of pesticide containers and application equipment should be undertaken only while wearing appropriate PPE and away from housing and populated areas as well as sensitive environmental areas, particularly bodies of water and water courses, so that any runoff does not enter the water system. Those applying pesticides should have access to appropriate facilities for washing hands and changing clothes after handling pesticides or application equipment.

Further reference:
CropLife International, 'Stewardship' web page

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.5.6

Disposal of pesticide containers minimises risks to human health and the environment. Farmers participate in recycling or return to supplier programmes where they exist.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure empty pesticide containers are stored and disposed of in such a way that minimises harm to people and the environment.

MF

LF

Improper disposal of used containers can contaminate air, soil, water and local ecosystems. Recycling or supplier take-back programmes or any other approved methods for agrochemical container disposals are the best option to safely dispose of containers. If no such programmes are available, containers should be rinsed (triple rinsing recommended), punctured to prevent reuse and stored securely to avoid leakage or exposure to humans, animals and the environment.

The following practices can pose a high risk to human health and the environment and should be avoided: burning, as this can release toxic fumes harmful to human health and the environment; burying, as this can contaminate soil and groundwater; discarding pesticide containers in water bodies or irrigation channels, as this poses serious risks to aquatic ecosystems and downstream users; crushing or shredding as this can release toxic dust or residue, exposing workers and the environment.

Even when washed, containers should never be reused for any purpose, as this can lead to contamination or poisoning.

Further reference:
FAO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management – Guidelines on Highly Hazardous Pesticides (2016)
CropLife International, 'Container Management' web page

3.5.7

Farmers are aware of and adopt appropriate and less hazardous pesticide application techniques.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place that help maximise the effectiveness of pesticide application and minimise the risks to human health and the environment by using correct equipment and practices.

Farmers should monitor weather conditions before spraying, including wind speed and direction, temperature, humidity and atmospheric stability. For example, pesticides should not be applied right before rain since this can reduce effectiveness and increase risks of runoff and contamination. The risks of pesticide drift should also be considered. Wind and higher temperatures can increase drift (as evaporation of water-based substances is faster in higher temperatures, leading to smaller droplets that drift more easily).

Application equipment is designed to be operated under certain parameters and should be appropriate for the specific pesticides used. The equipment should also be in good condition, with no leaks or worn components. Equipment should be cleaned after each use to reduce the risk of contamination and to keep it in good working order.

In the handling of pesticides and application equipment, particular consideration should be given to avoid adverse effects to humans and the environment (for example, mitigating the risk that children can get a hold of the materials, the risk of spills to wells used for drinking water, etc.).

Further reference:
FAO, 'Pesticide application guidelines' web page
FAO, Guidelines on Good Practices for Ground Application of Pesticides (2001)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

3.5.8

Pesticide application minimises negative impacts by ensuring:

(i) Label requirements are followed;

(ii) Appropriate application equipment is used and calibrated correctly;

(iii) Appropriate weather conditions are taken into account;

(iv) Contamination (for example, through spray drift) is minimised and appropriate measures are in place to prevent harm to people and the environment;

(v) Restricted entry intervals are enforced after applying pesticides.

MF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place that help maximise the effectiveness of pesticide application and address the risks of pesticides to human health and the environment through the use of correct equipment and practices.

LF

Pesticides should always be applied in line with full label instructions or the Material Safety Data Sheet included upon purchase.

Where there are risks of contamination (for example, through spray drift) measures should be taken to minimise this drift and to protect local communities and ecosystems from any adverse effects. The risks of contamination can be especially high with aerial application of pesticides via aeroplanes or drones. In these cases, adequate buffer and 'no application zones' should be established to prevent harmful effects on local communities or ecosystems.

Further reference:
FAO, 'Pesticide application guidelines' web page

Principle 4:
Fibre Quality

Summary:

Fibre quality is fundamental to the marketability and value of cotton. As such, it not only positively impacts livelihoods of farming communities but also contributes to market trust, recognition and, ultimately, demand.

This Principle focuses on locally relevant good practices before planting, during crop growth and for the harvest and post-harvest periods to both produce a healthy and high-quality crop as well as to reduce contamination and trash.

Better Cotton Initiative / Morgan Ferrar.
Nampula Province, Mozambique, 2019.

Criterion 4.1 – Fibre quality is protected and enhanced.

4.1.1

climate change adaptation

Locally relevant good practices for seed selection (where possible), planting date, planting rate, row spacing, crop growth and weed management are implemented to increase the probability of producing high quality fibre.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure the consideration and selection of practices that help improve the quality of the inherent characteristics of the fibre.

MF

As cotton is produced primarily for its fibre, the quality of the fibre is fundamental to its marketability and value. The value of cotton lint relates to both the quality of yarn that can be produced from it as well as the efficiency with which the yarn can be produced – which are both heavily influenced by fibre quality. Three broad characteristics of the cotton fibres are important: the inherent characteristics of the fibre (strength, length, finesse and uniformity), the level of trash (cotton leaf remaining in the lint) and the level of contamination (anything found in the cotton lint that is not cotton fibre or cotton leaf). This Indicator focuses on improving the inherent characteristics of the fibre.

LF

While quality of the fibre starts with seed selection, farming practices can also impact fibre quality. The Better Cotton Initiative recognises that the quality of fibre also depends on the local context (climate, soil, availability of seeds, etc.) and encourages farmers to make the best choices possible within their circumstances. Training should be provided to those undertaking this work – often women workers and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion.

The Producer should consult and collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee in these activities.

4.1.2

Locally relevant good picking, storing and transportation practices are implemented to avoid contamination.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to ensure the consideration and selection of practices that minimise trash, contamination and damage to the cotton fibre.

MF

Many of the characteristics of the fibre, such as length and strength, are already set by the time the crop is ready to harvest. However, good harvest and post-harvest management practices are essential to maintaining the quality of the fibre and ensuring that the cotton is not contaminated or damaged. Harvest timing and management will affect the level of trash, as will the materials and methods used for wrapping and storing cotton. Where polypropylene, polyethylene or other synthetic bags are used, alternatives should be promoted, and Producers should phase out synthetic materials over time. The choice of location for storing cotton is also critical to minimising the risk of damage (either from high moisture or potential fires if the location is too dry). Training should be provided directly to those undertaking the respective work and the Producer should consult and collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee in these activities.

LF

The Better Cotton Initiative recognises the limits of Producers to influence fibre quality, and issues such as defoliation or transportation practices will only be assessed if it is within the remit of the Producer's responsibility.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Principle 5:
Decent work

Summary:

Ensuring fair and safe working conditions is central for Better Cotton Initiative to improve the well-being and livelihoods of cotton farming communities. It's also a key component of promoting responsible supply chains and building market trust to help Better Cotton Initiative Members progress towards their sustainability goals.

At its core, Principle 5 works towards cotton production where everyone enjoys decent working conditions, free from child labour, forced or compulsory labour, workplace harassment, violence, and discrimination. To achieve this, it goes beyond a prohibition-only approach, making Producers accountable to set-up a Decent Work monitoring system, that tracks risks and incidents of labour rights violations and ensures that those risks are addressed appropriately.

Better Cotton Initiative / Vibhor Yadav.
Gujarat, India, 2019.

Better Cotton Initiative / Vibhor Yadav.
Gujarat, India, 2019.

This Principle also seeks to create working environments that ensure the freedom to organise and negotiate dignified conditions of employment and provide access to grievance mechanisms and remediation. By introducing an Indicator to pay minimum wages and/or ensure transparency and continuous improvement towards this, this Principle also takes a first step towards Better Cotton Initiative's long-term goal of supporting workers to receive a living wage.

Finally, the Principle covers requirements to address occupational health and safety issues, including heat stress and sanitation. An overarching theme of this Principle is the recognition that implementation of the indicators requires a particular focus on women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion.

Better Cotton Initiative acknowledges that creating decent working conditions and improved livelihoods and well-being of workers is a structural and complex topic that goes beyond the sole responsibility of the Producers. In line with its 2030 strategy, Better Cotton Initiative is committed to continue working on areas such as decent work monitoring, freedom of association and collective bargaining, living wages and improved access to sanitation above and beyond the P&C v3.2.

Guidance for Decent Work Principle:

Decent work (DW) expectations apply to all workers including family members, seasonal, temporary or migrant workers and any workers hired through subcontractors, labour brokers or other third parties (see also the definition of workers). Aligned with our Commitment to Social Inclusion, this always includes women workers, young workers and workers of people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion.

In line with Indicator 1.1.5, all Producers are expected to comply with relevant labour law and regulations. Where these laws and regulations do not align with requirements in the P&C v.3.2, the stricter set of requirements applies.

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work:

The Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) is committed to promoting DW and ensuring that the rights of all farmers and workers are protected. DW is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as 'productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity'. BCI's approach to DW aligns with the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which was first adopted in 1998 and amended most recently in 2022. This declaration is a key benchmark agreement widely referenced in international labour standards. It sets out five fundamental labour principles: freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation and a safe and healthy working environment. The Declaration commits all 187 ILO Member States to respect and promote principles and rights in these five areas, whether or not they have ratified the relevant Conventions.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.1 – An effective system identifies and addresses risks and incidents of labour rights violations.

5.1.1

gender equality

An effective system is in place to regularly monitor risks and incidents of labour rights violations. In that system:

(i) Individual(s) responsible for the monitoring system are clearly identified and farmers and workers are represented in the operation of the monitoring system;

(ii) Where risks are identified, prompt actions are taken to address these and prevent their escalation.

*Applicable to LF with over 25 workers

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to establish and maintain an effective system to proactively identify, monitor and mitigate risks of labour rights violations and remediate them when they occur (see Indicator 5.1.3). An effective system is structured, inclusive and documented, with clear assignment of responsibilities, meaningful involvement of workers and follow-up to verify the effectiveness of actions taken. By addressing risks before they escalate into actual violations, such systems help safeguard workers' rights and will support the Producer in meeting all requirements under this Principle.

The Better Cotton Initiative recognises the challenges of ensuring Decent Work in agriculture, where labour rights violations are often hidden and difficult to detect. This Indicator promotes an 'assess and address' approach, shifting the focus from detecting violations after they occur to anticipating and mitigating risks and remediating incidents in a structured and proactive manner.

The Indicator emphasises the importance of:

1. **Understanding Risks**: Engaging with farming communities to understand their workforce's characteristics and identify context-specific labour rights risks.
2. **Designing Monitoring Systems**: Establishing or strengthening monitoring systems, including community-based approaches where relevant.
3. **Mitigating Risks**: Implementing practical measures to mitigate risks and improve working conditions. Note that part of risk mitigation might overlap with remediation measures, as covered in 5.1.3.

Effective labour monitoring and remediation systems can incorporate worker profiles; surveys and focus groups with farmers and workers; farm visits and worker interviews during labour-intensive periods of cotton production and consultations with community stakeholders (e.g., schools, local government or women groups).

The system should cover labour rights under Principle 5: Decent Work, including the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (freedom of association and collective bargaining, forced labour, child labour, discrimination and safety and health).

By fostering community involvement, the monitoring system is better equipped to identify nuanced risks and implement practical, contextually relevant and sustainable solutions. While Producer Management remains accountable for effective implementation of the system, the responsibility to ensure effective oversight and implementation can be assigned to either an individual or a group (e.g., a committee). Whenever formally selected worker representatives are in place, they should be included as members of this committee.

The system should account for differing risks for diverse groups of people, especially women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion. The individual or committee should regularly consult and cooperate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.1.2

gender equality

All workers have access to impartial, effective and secure channels to raise concerns about rights violations and have these addressed. These mechanisms should use existing, credible grievance mechanisms or other systems where available.

SH

MF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure all workers carrying out field-level production work on cotton farms have access to impartial, effective and secure channels to raise concerns about labour rights violations and to have these concerns reviewed, responded to and addressed.

A grievance mechanism in this context enables any worker to raise concerns related to their labour rights under this Principle. This includes, but is not limited to, issues such as child labour, forced labour, discrimination, workplace violence and harassment, interference with freedom of association, poor working conditions and health and safety issues, abusive recruitment practices or any other potential labour rights violations.

Workers need a safe and reliable way to voice concerns without fear of retaliation. Impartiality means grievances are raised and considered without bias or undue influence. Effectiveness means that workers can report concerns and enrsuring follow-up and remediation. Security means workers can use the mechanism without fear of retaliation, intimidation or harm, with adequate protections for confidentiality.

A channel to raise concerns may be referred to as a grievance mechanism, though the specific terminology may vary. Producers are not required to create a new channel exclusively for workers if a credible, existing mechanism is already in place. However, they should demonstrate that steps are taken to ensure all workers are aware of the mechanism and can access it without barriers. If existing mechanisms are not fully impartial, effective, secure or inclusive of all workers, measures should be taken to strengthen or adapt them.

Producers should consult workers, including those in vulnerable and/or marginalised situations, when designing or adapting grievance mechanisms. Mechanisms should be legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent, rights-compatible and culturally appropriate as per the UN Guiding Principles referenced below.

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved for gender-related grievances and to ensure inclusive access and a to grievance mechanisms and a gender-sensitive resolution process.

Further reference:
UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Guiding Principle 31 (2011)
OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.1.3

gender equality

In cases of labour rights violations, the Producer ensures the following:

(i) Affected workers shall have access to protection and remediation when labour rights violations occur;

(ii) Their confidentiality and safety shall be safeguarded throughout the process.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to establish policies and procedures that ensure that any worker affected by labour rights violations has access to appropriate protection and remediation and that their confidentiality and safety are safeguarded throughout the process.

MF

Labour rights violations under this Principle include child labour, forced labour, discrimination, workplace violence and harassment, interference with freedom of association and collective bargaining, poor working conditions (i.e., poor health and safety practices) and abusive recruitment practices.

Protection refers to safeguarding affected workers from further harm, intimidation or retaliation. This includes maintaining confidentiality, taking measures to prevent further harm and facilitating access to relevant services where available.

Remediation refers to correcting the harm caused and taking steps to resolve the issue as far as possible. It includes both corrective actions to address actual cases and preventative measures to reduce the risk of future violations. These actions may include clarifying facts, offering apologies or support, providing compensation or taking disciplinary action. They may also involve structural improvements, revising policies and delivering training. Where appropriate, Producers should engage with workers and their representatives, including trade unions or civil society organisations, where they exist, as part of the remediation process.

To ensure that remediation is appropriate, effective and trusted, Producers should seek input from affected workers. Where possible, workers' representative bodies, such as trade unions or civil society organisations, should be involved in the design and delivery of remediation.

Remediation should be proportionate to the nature of the violation and carried out in a timely manner. 'Timely' means without undue delay, taking into account the urgency and severity of the case, with immediate action expected where safety is at risk. Where Producers cannot deliver all aspects of remediation directly, they should ensure referral to credible organisations or authorities.

Where a violation constitutes a criminal offence, the Producer should respect the complainant's wishes and, wherever possible, support access to legal remedy, including by facilitating contact with relevant authorities or legal services.

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved for gender-related cases to ensure inclusive access and a gender-sensitive resolution process.

Further reference:
Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework (2011)
OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.1.4

gender equality

Workers have access to an impartial, effective and secure complaints hotline or other grievance mechanism. Any victims of labour rights violations shall be able to access support and remedy.

LF

The intent is for the Producer to ensure all workers carrying out field-level production work on cotton farms have access to impartial, effective and secure channels to raise concerns about labour rights violations and to have these concerns reviewed, responded to and addressed. This includes protection and remediation in cases where labour rights violations occur.

A grievance mechanism in the context of this Indicator should allow all workers to make a complaint on any issue or concern about their labour rights as covered in this Principle, including cases of child labour, forced labour, discrimination, workplace violence and harassment, interference in the freedom to associate, substandard working conditions, abusive recruitment practices and other potential labour rights violations.

Impartial channels ensure that workers can raise concerns without bias or undue influence. Effectiveness in this context means that the channel achieves its intended purpose, enabling workers to report violations and have them addressed. Security ensures that workers can use the channel without fear of retaliation, intimidation or harm, with measures in place to protect their confidentiality.

This Indicator focuses on grievances raised by Better Cotton Initiative farm workers related to labour rights violations. The grievance mechanism may be in-house, external or follow a hybrid approach. Regardless of the model used, the design, implementation and review of the mechanism should involve input from workers and, where possible, civil society organisations. This is particularly important where mechanisms are operated internally, to help build trust and support accessibility and effectiveness.

Remediation under this Indicator encompasses both corrective and preventative actions. These actions should address the immediate impacts of confirmed violations and reduce the risk of recurrence. They may include strengthening management systems, revising policies and practices and carrying out targeted interventions to address the root causes of the issue. Where relevant, remediation should be informed by collaboration with stakeholders such as farmers, workers and their representative organisations (e.g., trade unions), programme partners, government actors and other civil society organisations.

In some cases, labour rights violations amount to a criminal offence and should be dealt with in accordance with the complainant's wishes and within the framework of local criminal law. If requested and whenever possible, the Producer should support the complainant in accessing legal remedy.

The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved for gender-related grievances and to ensure inclusive access to grievance mechanisms and a gender-sensitive resolution process.

Further reference:
UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, Guiding Principle 31 (2011)
OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.2 - Farmers and workers understand their labour rights.

5.2.1

gender equality

Producers have systems in place to ensure that all farmers and workers understand their fundamental principles and rights at work. These include their rights to:

(i) Freedom of association and collective bargaining;

(ii) A safe and healthy working environment;

(iii) Protection from discrimination, forced or compulsory labour and child labour.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that all farmers and workers understand their fundamental rights at work. Awareness of these rights is an essential first step towards their protection and respect in practice, which can help prevent violations from occurring.

The Producer shall ensure that farmers and workers across worker categories, gender or migrant status receive clear and accessible information on their fundamental rights at work. These rights include:

- The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining;
- The right to a safe and healthy working environment;
- Protection from discrimination, child labour, and forced or compulsory labour.

Information should be shared through training, awareness-raising, or other communication activities. These should be tailored to the local context, using appropriate formats, local languages, and delivery methods that take into account varying literacy levels and the timing of recruitment.

The Producer shall periodically review and adapt how information is communicated to ensure that all relevant individuals receive and understand the messages. This includes taking steps to verify understanding, such as training evaluations, follow-up discussions, worker interviews, informal assessments, or feedback from workers. Where gaps are identified, the Producer should take steps to reinforce key messages and improve understanding.

The Producer should collaborate with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee to ensure that both the content and delivery methods are inclusive and gender-sensitive. The Producer should work with local civil society organisations, labour rights groups, or other expert organisations that support farm workers and have experience delivering rights-based training. Such collaborations can help improve trust, relevance, and the overall effectiveness of communication.

Further reference:
ILO, Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (adopted in 1998 and amended in 2022)
OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.3 - There is no child labour, and the rights of children and young workers are protected.

5.3.1

▲ gender equality

Children and young workers carry out only safe and age-appropriate tasks, in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and as set out in Table 1.

SH MF LF

Table 1

Age Range	Acceptable Nature of Work	Prohibited (for all children under 18)
15–17 (14–17 in specified countries[7]) If the national minimum age for employment is higher, the national minimum age applies.	• Work does not exceed 48 hours/week as a maximum; • Work is safe, age-appropriate and adequate supervision and training is provided.	• Any type of hazardous work (work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of persons under the age of 18[8]); • The worst forms of child labour (including all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour).
13–14 (12–13) in specified countries[9]	Where national laws or regulations permit, light work may be carried out, which shall: • Not exceed 14 hours/week, or the maximum hours of work per day or week as defined by law (whichever is lower); • Not harm the health or development of the child (for example, adequate rest is ensured); • Not interfere with education; • Ensure adult supervision for all tasks.	
Below 13 (12 in specific countries)		Any engagement in farm work.

7 In some countries, the minimum age may be set at 14 (rather than 15) for minimum age for employment and at 12 (rather than 13) for light work.
8 Where local or national regulation provides specific conditions around hazardous work (or conditions for workers under 18), these are to be followed.
9 In some countries, the minimum age may be set at 14 (rather than 15) for minimum age for employment and at 12 (rather than 13) for light work.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Guidance for Criterion 5.3: Child Labour

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that children and young workers carry out only safe, age-appropriate tasks that do not harm their health, safety, education or development, in line with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.

Better Cotton Initiative Farmers and partners are committed to the elimination of child labour and to ensuring that children have the greatest opportunity possible to develop their personalities, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. This approach is aligned with the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Child labour is defined by the ILO as work that 'deprives children of their childhood, their potential, their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or which interferes with their schooling'. Children can be exposed to child labour through work in the household as well as on the farm or at other work sites. As in many sectors, the root causes of child labour in agriculture are often linked to poverty and insufficient access to education. Efforts in this area should work alongside activities to improve livelihoods of farming communities and require collaboration with governments, local community leaders and grassroots organisations.

Not all work that children do on cotton farms is considered child labour, and in many cases, children provide important support to their families and can learn farming skills. However, it is important that farmers and workers understand the distinction, so that children carry out only safe and age-appropriate tasks under supervision which do not interfere with their health or education.

Producers should ensure that all staff, farmers, labour contractors and/or brokers and workers (including young workers) are trained to identify and comply with age-appropriate work requirements, including the difference between child labour and child work. They should also demonstrate how they monitor and address risks of child labour in line with Criterion 5.1.

Child labour for girls can be harder to detect because their labour is often inside the home or family farm. In many agricultural communities, girls are withdrawn from secondary school earlier than boys to work at home and marry, which impacts their literacy and skills development. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved in tackling this issue.

Hazardous work: Hazardous work includes, but is not limited to, the application of agricultural chemicals, pesticides and fertilisers, the use of dangerous equipment (such as sharp tools), lifting or moving of heavy materials or goods or working long hours or in extreme temperatures. Every activity performed by a young worker should be supervised by an adult. ILO Convention No. 182 is universally ratified, hence all ILO Member States must determine a list of hazardous tasks that children cannot perform.

Worst forms of child labour: The worst forms of child labour as defined by the ILO comprise:

- All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- Work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

Further reference:
ILO, Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) (1973)
ILO, Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) (1999)
ILO, NATLEX Database of labour, social security and related human rights legislation

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.4 - There is no forced labour, and workers are freely employed.

5.4.1

Workers understand and freely agree to:

(i) The terms and conditions of work prior to starting (via verbal or written agreements);

(ii) Any changes in conditions or nature of work (for example, overtime).

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are freely and fairly employed, with their terms and conditions of work agreed upon voluntarily and without deception.

MF

Deception relates to false promises, where an employer fails to deliver what was initially agreed upon or changes expectations without the agreement of the worker. Deceptive recruitment practices or changes in working hours, payment terms, nature of work, tasks or other conditions without agreement of the worker is considered one of the ILO 11 indicators of forced labour.

LF

As part of this Indicator, all workers should be provided with clear and understandable information about the terms and conditions of their work before starting employment. This applies to all workers, including any substitutes, such as those replacing a family member. As a result, all workers should have a clear understanding of the terms and conditions of work before starting and be given the opportunity to freely agree to the terms without coercion or fraud.

Changes to the terms and conditions of work, such as overtime, working hours, tasks or payment terms, should be clearly communicated to workers in a language they understand and agreed to before implementation.

Ideally these terms should be defined through a written (or picture-based) agreement or contract (see also Criterion 5.10). Where this is not feasible, they can be explained via verbal agreement. Whether written or verbal, the agreement should be in a language the worker understands. Any subsequent changes, such as to work hours or payment schedules, also need to be communicated — and agreed to — by workers.

Further reference:
ILO, Indicators of Forced Labour: Deception, Abuse of vulnerability (2012)

5.4.2

Recruitment fees or related costs are not collected directly or indirectly (such as through deductions from wages and benefits) from workers by an employer or other third party.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are freely and fairly employed by eliminating the financial burden associated with paying recruitment fees or other related costs to employers or third parties. Such financial burden can trap workers in their job and increase the risks of forced or bonded labour.

MF

Recruitment fees refer to any fees or costs incurred during the recruitment process that workers are required to pay to secure employment or placement, regardless of when, where or how they are imposed or collected. Related costs can include, but are not limited to, travel, lodging, equipment or administrative expenses.

LF

Further reference:
ILO, Indicators of Forced Labour: Abuse of vulnerability (2012)
ILO, General principles and operational guidelines for fair recruitment and Definition of recruitment fees and related costs (2019)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.4.3

▲ gender equality

Workers do not face threats or menace of penalty at any point during the whole work cycle, beginning from recruitment through to termination. These include, amongst others, withholding of wages or documents, restrictions of movement or threats of violence.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are freely and fairly employed and do not face threats or penalties that might pressure them to remain in their jobs involuntarily.

MF

Threats and menace of penalty can take many forms, including physical violence, sexual violence, economic dependency and psychological intimidation. The resulting fear can prevent workers from reporting grievances, demanding better conditions or leaving their jobs. Such intimidation tactics are a strong indicator of forced labour. Women, migrant workers and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion are at greater risk of such coercion.

LF

Withholding identity documents or work permits is a common tactic of control that can restrict workers' freedom of movement. Penalties, such as confiscating personal belongings or withholding wages, further deepen dependency.

Workers should be free to leave the farm or work premises at any time without physical, financial or psychological restrictions.

As this Indicator sits within the Criterion on forced labour, it specifically addresses threats or menace of penalty in the context of unfree work. Please note that the presence of threat and menace of penalty might not always signal an incident of forced labour but can amount to harassment (covered in Indicator 5.9.1).

Further reference:
ILO, Indicators of Forced Labour: Restriction of movement, Retention of identity documents, Withholding of wages, Physical and sexual violence, Intimidation and threats, Abusive working and living conditions (2012)

5.4.4

Workers are free to leave their job, in line with verbal or written agreements.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are freely and fairly employed and that they are free to leave their jobs in line with their verbal or written agreements (i.e., notice period) and without unlawful restrictions imposed by the employer.

MF

This Indicator focuses on any other barriers to leaving not covered by the previous Indicators in this criterion. One example is debt bondage, a common form of forced labour in agriculture, where workers are bound to a job as a condition of repaying a debt to the employer or a third party (including due to excessive wage deductions or loans and especially where manipulated or inflated by the employer).

LF

Further reference:
ILO, Indicators of Forced Labour: Restriction of movement, Isolation, Debt bondage

Guidance for Criterion 5.4: Forced Labour

Under Article 2.1 of the ILO Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), forced labour is defined as 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself [or herself] voluntarily'. These two key dimensions – the menace of penalty and the involuntary nature of the work – are reflected in the four Indicators under this Criterion. These align with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Indicators of Forced Labour but focus on the most prevalent risk factors in the cotton farming context. Each Indicator under Criterion 5.4 is mapped against the relevant ILO 11 indicators of forced labour.

Where potential risks of forced labour are identified, these risks are to be addressed promptly and corrective actions put in place to prevent their recurrence. In cases where incidents of forced labour are identified, the Producer shall provide secure access to remedy (as per Criterion 5.1).

Further reference:
ILO, Indicators of Forced Labour

Criterion 5.5 - Farmers and workers have the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

5.5.1

Farmers and workers are informed about their right to form or join an organisation of their own choosing and to collectively negotiate without interference or threat.

All terms agreed upon through an effective collective bargaining process are respected by both parties.

SH MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure all farmers and workers are free to form or join an organisation for the purpose of furthering and defending their rights and are informed about their right to do so. Such organisations need to be allowed to operate free from external undue pressure. The term 'collective bargaining' refers to all negotiations which take place between a group of farmers or workers (or farmers' or workers' organisations) and one or more employer/concession/cluster of their organisation. There can be multiple aims to such negotiations, as outlined below.

For workers, this means they should be able to form or join trade unions or alternative representative structures of their choosing. These structures can aim to collectively negotiate working conditions, including, but not limited to, wages, equal treatment, training and occupational health and safety.

For farmers in a PU context, this means they should be able to organise in producer associations, cooperatives or other structures of their choosing. These structures can aim to collectively negotiate prices and production conditions, engage with buyers, suppliers or other entities that influence their livelihoods.

Additionally, negotiations can govern interactions between both parties, including agreeing on rules and procedures for the settlement of disputes.

Further reference:
ILO, Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) ILO, Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)

5.5.2

There is no interference, discrimination or retaliation against workers related to the establishment or participation in organisations or collective bargaining.

SH MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that workers can freely and safely participate in workers' organisation activities and/ or collective bargaining, without interference, discrimination or retaliation. The Producer should not engage in any activity, open or hidden, perceived by workers as hindering their freedoms to organise and/or bargain collectively.

Activities of workers' organisations can include drawing up their constitutions and rules, freely electing their representatives, organising their administration and formulating their programmes, including meetings and campaigns. Interference in such activities can refer to incentives/ bribes offered to workers to not join an organisation, coercion of workers to leave or not join a workers' organisation and surveillance of workers' organisation meetings or elections. Discrimination and retaliation against workers related to their participation in a workers' organisation refer to excessive sanctions, such as termination of contracts, forced transfers or other acts of coercion, threats of penalty and actual penalties (i.e., reduced wages or excessive overtime).

The right of workers' organisations to join national or international federations and confederations and respect for collectively agreed upon terms and conditions negotiated through these should be upheld and recognised.

In countries where local law prohibits the operation of workers' organisations, Producers are responsible for ensuring that workers can seek alternative means of worker representation without fear of interference, discrimination or retaliation. While respecting the local law, these alternative means of worker representation should allow workers to have an effective dialogue mechanism with their employer.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.6 - There is no discrimination in labour practices.

5.6.1

▲ gender equality

There is no discrimination in labour practices, including, but not limited to, hiring, tasks, compensation, access to training, promotion, termination or retirement.

SH

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure all workers are treated equally without discrimination of any form.

This refers to discrimination based on any characteristics that are not related to merit or the inherent requirements of the job. It includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on gender identity or sex characteristics, sexual orientation, age, nationality, ethnicity, language, race, class, caste, social status, religion, belief, abilities and disabilities, health, political affiliation, political views, membership of a trade union or other workers' organisation, marital status or pregnancy-related discrimination (including mandatory pregnancy tests). Discrimination can be observed in lower wages for the same work (i.e., work of equal value) and in payment customs — for example, payment through male counterparts (husbands, fathers, etc.) or other third parties — in working conditions and benefits, access to training, access to workplace facilities and more.

All workers should understand that potential cases of discrimination can be raised through the grievance mechanism as under Criterion 5.1. Producers are encouraged to share a verbal or written code of conduct on non-discrimination with all workers.

This Indicator also covers the provision of equal pay for equal work, irrespective of any characteristic that is not related to merit or the inherent requirements of the job.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.7 - Workers are paid at least the minimum wage.

5.7.1

▲ gender equality

Workers are paid at least minimum wages as per the statutory national or regional minimum applicable to agriculture or the collectively agreed upon wage. Wages

are paid in a fair and timely manner.

MF

LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure all workers are fairly compensated in alignment with established wage benchmarks, without undue delays or unauthorised deductions.

The wage benchmark here refers to either the statutory national or regional minimum wage applicable to agriculture or the collectively agreed upon wage; whichever is higher. Where none of these exist, the local prevailing wage for similar work in comparable sectors will be considered the benchmark.

Fair payment in the context of this Indicator means that wages should align with the agreed terms, whether verbal or written, and that workers are fully informed about the wage rate, payment schedule and permissible deductions. No recruitment fees or related costs, such as service charges, should be deducted from wages. As per Indicator 5.6.1, workers should also receive equal pay for equal work.

Timely payment in the context of this Indicator means that workers should receive wages as scheduled without undue delay. Payment should occur within the agreed intervals, whether daily, weekly or monthly. Delays should be considered acceptable only if justified, communicated and resolved promptly.

Where workers are paid piece rate, earnings should be sufficient to meet at least the minimum wage during regular working hours and under normal operating conditions (for example, with sufficient work breaks to protect a worker's health). Workers should not be required to work overtime to earn at least the equivalent of the minimum wage under normal operating conditions.

Wages may consist of cash and in-kind payments. 'Cash' refers to monetary compensation, while 'in-kind' includes goods or services such as housing, transport or food, provided they are lawful, mutually agreed upon and supplement, rather than replace, cash wages.

It is recognised that the minimum wage, in many cases, is still not sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living. The long-term goal is to support workers to receive a living wage (for more on Better Cotton Initiative's approach to living incomes, living wages and livelihoods, see www.bettercotton.org).

5.7.2

▲ gender equality

Workers are paid at least minimum wages, or where local prevailing wages are below the minimum wage, the Producer implements a system to record average wages and takes steps to improve wages over time.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure all workers are fairly compensated in alignment with established wage benchmarks, without undue delays or unauthorised deductions.

However, this Indicator recognises that in smallholder contexts, farmers might face constraints in meeting the minimum wage requirements, as they themselves need to have decent livelihoods before they can increase wages for workers. In these cases, Producer Management is responsible for implementing a system to record average wages across a representative sample of workers and for taking measures to improve wages over time.

The sample should include women and men workers engaged in the most common tasks and types of work (e.g., irrigation, hoeing or picking) and be inclusive of people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion. Where wages include non-cash remuneration (e.g., in-kind payments such as food, housing or transport), it is important that this distinction is clearly reflected in the wage sampling.

Taking steps to improve wages can include strengthening knowledge and awareness of workers' rights and minimum wages, supporting income generating and livelihood projects (as per Principle 6) and/or collaborations with government or other actors in the value chain to deliver more income to both farmers and workers.

As per Indicator 5.6.1, workers should receive equal pay for equal work.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 5.8 - Workers' health and safety are protected.

5.8.1

gender equality

Workers are given adequate time and privacy for personal sanitation near the worksite.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers have access to sanitation while at work, which is important for health, dignity and productivity.

MF

Workers should be able to take necessary sanitation breaks during working hours, including during peak work periods. Where facilities exist, they should offer privacy and be safe, with separate provisions for women and men.

LF

This Indicator recognises the challenges in rural agricultural settings to provide basic clean water, toilet and handwashing facilities. Where no permanent facilities are available, Producers should identify practical alternatives that maintain workers' privacy and sanitation.

In all cases, workers shall be given sufficient time and privacy to take care of bodily needs, without compromising their health, comfort or safety. In general, access to sanitation should be available within a reasonable travel distance, for example, 100 metres from the worksite by foot.

Specific consideration should be given to the personal sanitation needs of women, particularly during menstruation, pregnancy or while nursing. Women should have access to a clean, functional and gender-segregated space (ideally, lockable) to ensure privacy and reduce risks of harassment or assault.

Producers are encouraged to collaborate with local governments, communities and partners to develop sustainable sanitation solutions.

5.8.2

climate change adaptation gender equality

Workers have regular rest breaks with access to potable water. Where there is a risk of dehydration, heat stroke and related illnesses, access to shade is provided and other measures are implemented to prevent and address these issues.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to protect the health of workers and to ensure measures are in place to prevent and address the risks of dehydration, heat stroke and related illnesses.

MF

Farm workers are often exposed to hard work and high temperatures, which can negatively impact their health and productivity. Regular breaks and hydration are essential to minimise health risks. Particular attention should be given to workers who experience a higher risk of severe effects, such as those wearing PPE, young or elderly workers and pregnant or nursing women. Breaks should be especially encouraged for piece-rate workers, who might be reluctant to take time away from tasks due to the potential impact on income.

LF

As per the ILO Code of Practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture, daily and weekly working hours should include:

(a) Short breaks during working hours, particularly when the work is strenuous, dangerous or monotonous, in order to enable workers to recover their vigilance and physical fitness;

(b) Sufficient breaks for meals.

Heat stress or heat-related illness can include symptoms such as tiredness, dizziness, headaches, nausea, excessive sweating, paleness, rapid breathing or heart rate, high temperatures or extreme thirst. Producers should ensure that workers understand these symptoms and are aware that heat stress can pose long-term health risks. Protecting workers from heat stress can include simple measures such as earlier working times, more frequent rest breaks, protection from the sun and improved hydration.

Further reference:
ILO, Code of practice on Safety and Health in Agriculture (2011)

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.8.3

climate change adaptation | gender equality

Safety and health risks are identified, and measures are implemented to minimise these risks (including training for farmers, workers and relevant supervisors).

If accidents or injuries occur, medical attention is provided, and steps are taken to prevent recurrence.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are provided with a safe and healthy environment for work by proactively identifying and addressing potential health and safety risks and providing proper attention in case of any injuries.

MF

Occupational safety and health (OSH) is one of the fundamental principles and rights at work, as defined by the ILO. Employers should promote a safe and healthy working environment to prevent occupational injuries, diseases and deaths.

LF

As a first step, Producers should assess OSH risks or hazards and take measures to eliminate or prevent them where possible. On cotton farms, these risks commonly include exposure to hazardous pesticides, sharp tools, heavy machinery, high temperatures and physically demanding work. If risks or hazards cannot be eliminated, their impacts should be minimised – for example, through information and training and implementation of protective measures (such as the use of PPE, as per Criterion 3.5).

To identify and address systemic safety and health risks, Producers are encouraged to keep a record of occupational accidents and injuries.

Special attention should be paid to addressing risks or hazards related to workers in vulnerable situations and facing exclusion, including, amongst others, pregnant and nursing women, workers with disabilities, young or older workers, migrant workers or those from ethnic minorities.

Workers or worker representatives should be aware of their OSH rights and should be consulted on all aspects of OSH.

Further reference:
ILO, Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)

Criterion 5.9 – Workers have the right to a fair workplace, free of violence or harassment.

5.9.1

gender equality

Workers have the right to a workplace free of violence and harassment during the whole work cycle, beginning from recruitment through to termination.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure workers are treated with respect and dignity and do not suffer from violence or harassment at work.

MF

All farmers and employers are expected to have a culture of respect for workers. The term 'violence and harassment' in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours, practices or threats that aim to or can result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm. This includes gender-based violence and harassment, which specifically refers to violence or harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately (including sexual harassment).

LF

Women are more vulnerable to violence and harassment in the workplace. Producers should ensure that farms with women workers take specific measures to prevent, monitor and address such issues. This links to effective labour monitoring and remediation systems (as per Criterion 5.1) as well as the gender-specific consultation and implementation measures as covered under Criterion 1.5.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.9.2

Any disciplinary actions are proportionate to the conduct in question, and the system in place includes fair warning principles.

SH MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that fair disciplinary procedures are established and maintained by employers and followed by workers. The system should allow for fair warning principles, ensuring that workers are informed of any issues and given an opportunity to respond or adjust conduct before disciplinary action is taken. Disciplinary measures should be proportionate to the behaviour in question and well understood by workers. They should not include salary deductions, especially for lower paid workers, for whom these deductions can have a disproportionate impact on their livelihoods.

Criterion 5.10 - Workers have clear work-related agreements and expectations.

5.10.1

Permanent and seasonal workers are informed of their right to have a written contract. If requested by the worker (or if contracts are required by law), appropriate written contracts are provided.

*Applicable to LF with more than 30 workers

MF LF

The intent is for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that workers are informed of their rights to a written contract and that appropriate contracts are provided if requested by workers or required by law.

Written contracts help clarify expectations for both the employer and worker and protect against changes which were not agreed upon, as well as risks of deception and coercion. They can also serve as a tool to help workers access remediation in the case of labour violations.

In many agricultural settings, written contracts remain uncommon. Barriers include low literacy levels, the temporary and seasonal nature of work and lack of awareness around the benefits of written agreements. This Indicator aims to give workers more choice in being able to request a written contract. Combined with strengthened knowledge and awareness of workers' rights and DW, the intent is that, over time, more workers will understand the protections and benefits of a written contract and request and receive a contract.

Where provided, written contracts should be in accordance with local legal requirements and should appropriately reflect the nature and duration of work carried out. Civil or temporary contracts should not be used to give employers more flexibility where longer-term contracts would be more appropriate.

Where literacy levels are low, alternative methods such as pictures, images, thumbprints and other methods can be used to increase understanding and comprehension. Where possible, contracts should include job responsibilities, working hours, pay rate or calculations (including for overtime), frequency and method of payment, any benefits or deductions, leave (including paid leave, medical leave, etc.), disciplinary requirements and a notice period for contract termination. Contracts should be written and explained in a language that the worker can understand (for example, by directly reading it or having it read to them) and signed or stamped by both parties.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

5.10.2

If workers are employed through a third party, farmers are responsible for communicating the requirements under Criteria 5.1 - 5.9 to the third party and ensuring they are met.

MF

The intent for the Producer to have systems in place to ensure that all requirements in this Principle apply to all workers on Better Cotton Initiative Farms, whether employed directly (for example, by the farmer) or employed by third parties (for example, through a subcontractor).

LF

This Indicator applies in cases where the employment relationship is between the worker and a third party, rather than with the farmer or farm organisation directly. This might be the case when the farmer works with a subcontractor (for example, to carry out specific weeding or spraying services) and that subcontractor recruits, hires and pays the workers.

Even if the farmer does not have a direct employment relationship with these workers, they are still responsible for ensuring – via the subcontractor – that workers comply with and benefit from all requirements under this Principle.

Where written agreements exist with the subcontractor or other third party, requirements can be included in the agreement and should be fully understood by the third party.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity.
For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Principle 6:
Sustainable Livelihoods

Summary:

Farmers, workers and farming communities are the foundation of the whole cotton sector — without them there is no cotton and certainly no Better Cotton. That means their livelihoods are inherently interconnected with sustainable cotton production.

As such, it is critical to work with farmers, workers and their families, particularly women and youth, to identify their main needs and challenges of making a decent living and leading a happy life - and find feasible and sustainable strategies to address those.

This is not only key to achieve better working and living conditions and improved social inclusion but also a precondition to ensure a sustainable cotton value chain.

Better Cotton Initiative / Seun Adatsi.
Kolondieba, Mali, 2019.

What are sustainable livelihoods?

Livelihood is best defined as the methods and means of making a decent living in the world. The concept revolves around material resources (such as land and property, crops, food, infrastructure and money) and non-material resources (such as health, knowledge, skills and social relationships). It considers how these resources can be used and combined by farmers, workers and their households based on access, power and choice within their political, economic and sociocultural context.

Sustainable livelihoods are achieved when farmers, farm workers and farming communities can access and make use of their resources to make a decent living and sustain or improve their well-being — even in times of shock and without harming the current or future well-being of others or the environment. As livelihoods concern whole households and communities, the inclusion of women, youth and individuals in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion is critical (see also Commitment to Social Inclusion).

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity. For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Criterion 6.1 - Workers' health and safety are protected.

6.1.1

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

The Producer identifies, monitors and confirms key livelihoods focus areas based on engagement with individuals involved in farm-level cotton production and other relevant community-level stakeholders.

SH

The intent is to ensure that the Producer understands the broader local livelihoods dynamics so that they can prioritise and take well-informed measures to improve sustainable livelihoods and resilience of farming communities.

MF

Information that helps identify, monitor and confirm key livelihood focus areas and respective measures (as per Indicator 6.1.2) can be gathered through engagement with community-level actors involved in farm-level cotton production and be completed with available information from other sources (such as other local actors working on livelihood issues, assessments undertaken by Programme Partners or Better Cotton Initiative Country Teams, etc.). To ensure accurate information and understanding, the consultations should include women and people in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion.

Part of the consultation with the farming community can overlap in practice with the field-level consultation required in Indicator 1.1.3. The Gender Lead or Gender Committee should be involved in the implementation and further decision-making of this Indicator.

See Guidance for Criterion 6.1 for further reference.

6.1.2

climate change mitigation | climate change adaptation | gender equality

Based on Indicator 6.1.1, locally relevant measures are taken that deliver improvements against the defined key livelihoods focus areas over time.

SH

The intent is for the Producer to take measures and work towards the improvement of sustainable livelihoods and resilience of farming communities.

MF

Given the complexity and context-specific nature of livelihood measures, a flexible approach is taken that ensures that any measures adopted to improve sustainable livelihoods and resilience are informed by the information gathered under Indicator 6.1.1. This aims to leave space to maximise opportunities and encourage Producer Management to innovate where possible. While there is a lot of flexibility in the approach, Producer Management should monitor progress and be able to explain how the activities carried out over time contribute to improvements on what and for whom. Special consideration should be given to the role of women and youth in improving livelihoods and the resilience of farming communities.

It is recommended that Producer Management considers partnerships or collaborations wherever possible. For any pathways explored and activities undertaken, adverse effects should be mitigated.

See Guidance for Criterion 6.1 for further reference.

Whenever the P&C v.3.2 refers to farmers and/or workers, it includes all individuals regardless of gender, background or identity. For more information, see our Commitment to Social Inclusion and definitions of farmers and workers.

Annex 1: Cross-Cutting Priority: **Gender Equality**

Gender equality is critical to advancing progress across all sustainability outcomes. This is especially true in the cotton sector where women play a significant role in production. Increasing gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also has proven economic and environmental benefits.

As such, gender equality is included as a cross-cutting element in the P&C v.3.2 to ensure it is not addressed as a standalone element, but rather, seen as an inherent factor to progress across all Principles and Indicators. Indicators that are particularly gender-sensitive and might require the involvement of the Gender Lead or Gender Committee in their implementation (see Criterion 1.5) are flagged throughout the P&C v.3.2 and collated in the table below.

Better Cotton Initiative / Seun Adatsi.
Kolondieba, Mali, 2019.

The table below lists all indicators of the P&C v.3.1 that call for a specific gender focus.

1.1.1	SH MF	A clear and locally relevant activity plan is developed and implemented for the Producer Unit, which: (i) Includes the activities related to the implementation of the Better Cotton Initiative Programme, timelines and responsibilities. (ii) Is understood by Producer Management and communicated to the Producer Unit Staff. (iii) Is reviewed and adjusted at least annually, taking into consideration the learnings from monitoring activities (Indicator 1.1.2), field-level consultations (Indicator 1.1.3), priorities related to climate change (Criterion 1.7) and recommendations from the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5).	√
1.1.2	SH MF	A monitoring plan is developed and implemented that defines the data and methods used to identify risks of nonconformities, measure progress and understand the effectiveness of Producer Unit activities. Data and information are recorded, and learnings shall be used to inform the activity plan in Indicator 1.1.1.	√
1.1.3	SH MF	A representative and inclusive sample of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production is consulted on their priorities and needs at least once a year. Key findings from this consultation are documented and considered in activity planning across all Principles and in setting priorities for continuous improvement.	√
1.2.1	SH MF LF	In line with the Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document, accurate and complete Producer-level data is collected, validated and reported.	√
1.2.2	SH MF	In line with the Better Cotton Initiative Farm Data Requirements Document, the Producer has a system in place to collect, validate and record accurate farm-level data. The Producer ensures that the roles and responsibilities for collection, validation and recording are clearly defined.	√
1.3.1	SH MF	At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified. (i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers, and/or livestock. (ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should be identified through results from monitoring activities (see Indicator 1.1.2), input from field-level consultations (see Indicator 1.1.3) and from the work conducted by the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5). (iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.	√

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1.3.2	LF	At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified. (i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers, and/or livestock. (ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should consider input from workers and/or community stakeholders, corrective actions from past assessments or audits and learnings from self-assessments. (iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.	√
1.4.1	SH MF	An effective programme is implemented to strengthen capacities of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production. Training and related activities: (i) Focus on locally relevant practices and innovations; (ii) Are informed by inclusive field-level consultations as per Indicator 1.1.3 as well as feedback from previous trainings; (iii) Use approaches and tools that are effective to drive field-level impact.	√
1.4.2	SH MF	Training and other related activities are designed to be inclusive and equally accessible to everyone who may benefit.	√
1.4.3	SH MF	The Producer shall ensure and monitor that activities to strengthen capacities are effective at enhancing the knowledge, skills, and practice adoption of the participants.	√
1.4.4	LF	An effective programme is implemented to strengthen capacities of workers. Training and related activities: (i) Focus on locally relevant practices and innovations; (ii) Are informed by inclusive field-level consultations as per Indicator 1.1.3 as well as by feedback from previous trainings; (iii) Use effective approaches and tools; (iii) Are designed to be inclusive and equally accessible to all workers who may benefit. *Applicable to LF with over 15 workers	√

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1.5.1	SH MF LF	An individual Gender Lead or Gender Committee is designated to support equal participation and recognition of women. Key tasks include: (i) Consulting with women involved in farm-level cotton production as well as other relevant community-level actors (including men), to identify local gender equality challenges and opportunities for improvement; (ii) Raising awareness with the Producer Management and with farming communities of locally-specific gender dynamics, including those linked to different agricultural practices and productive roles; (iii) Work with Producer Management to develop measures to respond to the identified challenges and opportunities. *Applicable to LF with over 10 women workers	√
1.5.2	SH MF LF	In close collaboration with the Gender Lead or Gender Committee, the Producer implements recommended measures to enhance gender equality and inclusion as part of the activity and monitoring plans. *Applicable to LF with over 10 women workers	√
1.6.1	SH MF LF	The Producer demonstrates collaboration or engagement with other relevant stakeholders on locally relevant sustainability issues.	√
1.7.1	SH MF LF	The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change risks and adaptation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.	√
1.7.2	SH MF LF	The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change mitigation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.	√
3.5.1	SH MF LF	It is ensured that any person who prepares and applies pesticides is: (i) Healthy; (ii) Skilled and trained in the application of pesticides; (iii) 18 or older; (iv) Not pregnant or nursing.	√
3.5.2	MF LF	Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is correctly used when handling pesticides.	√

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3.5.3	SH	Minimum Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is correctly used while using and handling pesticides, which includes protection of the following body parts from dermal absorption, ingestion and inhalation: (i) Face and airways (eyes, ear canal, nose and scalp); (ii) Limbs (arms, forearms, palms, legs and feet); (iii) Abdomen and genital area.	√
3.5.4	SH	Steps are taken to increase the use of appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) amongst individuals using and handling pesticides.	√
5.1.1	SH MF LF	An effective system is in place to regularly monitor risks and incidents of labour rights violations. In that system: (i) Individual(s) responsible for the monitoring system are clearly identified and farmers and workers are represented in the operation of the monitoring system; (ii) Where risks are identified, prompt actions are taken to address these and prevent their escalation. *Applicable to LF with more than 25 workers	√
5.1.2	SH MF	All workers have access to impartial, effective and secure channels to raise concerns about rights violations and have these addressed.	√
5.1.3	SH MF	In cases of labour rights violations, the Producer ensures the following: (i) Affected workers shall have access to protection and remediation when labour rights violations occur. (ii) Their confidentiality and safety shall be safeguarded throughout the process.	√
5.1.4	LF	Workers have access to an impartial, effective and secure complaints hotline or other grievance mechanism. Any victims of labour rights violations shall be able to access support and remedy.	√
5.2.1	SH MF LF	Producers have systems in place to ensure that all farmers and workers understand their fundamental principles and rights at work. These include their rights to: (i) Freedom of association and collective bargaining; (ii) A safe and healthy working environment; (iii) Protection from discrimination, forced or compulsory labour and child labour.	√

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5.3.1	SH MF LF	Children and young workers carry out only safe and age-appropriate tasks in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182 and as set out in Table 1.	√
5.4.3	SH MF LF	Workers do not face threats or menace of penalty at any point during the whole work cycle, beginning from recruitment through to termination. These include, amongst others, withholding of wages or documents, restrictions of movement or threats of violence.	√
5.6.1	SH MF LF	There is no discrimination in labour practices, including, but not limited to, hiring, tasks, compensation, access to training, promotion, termination or retirement.	√
5.7.1	MF LF	Workers are paid at least minimum wages as per the statutory national or regional minimum applicable to agriculture or the collectively agreed upon wage. Wages are paid in a fair and timely manner.	√
5.7.2	SH	Workers are paid at least minimum wages, or where local prevailing wages are below the minimum wage, the Producer implements a system to record average wages and takes steps to improve wages over time.	√
5.8.1	SH MF LF	Workers are given adequate time and privacy for personal sanitation near the worksite.	√
5.8.2	SH MF LF	Workers have regular rest breaks with access to potable water. Where there is a risk of dehydration, heat stroke and related illnesses, access to shade is provided and other measures are implemented to prevent and address these issues.	√
5.8.3	SH MF LF	Safety and health risks are identified, and measures are implemented to minimise these risks (including training for farmers, workers and relevant supervisors). If accidents or injuries occur, medical attention is provided, and steps are taken to prevent recurrence.	√
5.9.1	SH MF LF	Workers have the right to a workplace free of violence and harassment during the whole work cycle, beginning from recruitment through to termination.	√
6.1.1	SH MF	The Producer identifies, monitors and confirms key livelihoods focus areas based on engagement with individuals involved in farm-level cotton production and other relevant community-level stakeholders.	√
6.1.2	SH MF	Based on Indicator 6.1.1, locally relevant measures are taken that deliver improvements against the defined key livelihoods focus areas over time.	√

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Annex 2: Cross-Cutting Priority:
Climate Change

Climate change increasingly affects all areas of cotton production, and climate action is essential to achieving sustainable cotton production that supports natural resource conservation and improves the livelihoods and resilience of farming communities. Acknowledging the responsibility and opportunity Better Cotton Initiative has to help make the cotton sector part of the climate solution, climate change adaptation and mitigation is prioritised as a cross-cutting element across the P&C.

While implementing the various Principles, Producers are encouraged to select locally relevant practices and activities which help farming communities adapt to climate change and/or mitigate its effects. Indicators that are particularly climate-sensitive are flagged throughout the P&C and collated in the table below.

Better Cotton Initiative / Khaula Jamil.
Vehari District, Punjab, Pakistan, 2018.

The table below lists all Indicators of the P&C v.3.2 that are relevant to climate change mitigation and/or adaptation.

			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
1.1.1	SH MF	A clear and locally relevant activity plan is developed and implemented for the Producer Unit, which: (i) Includes the activities related to the implementation of the Better Cotton Initiative Programme, timelines and responsibilities. (ii) Is understood by Producer Management and communicated to the Producer Unit Staff. (iii) Is reviewed and adjusted at least annually, taking into consideration the learnings from monitoring activities (Indicator 1.1.2), field-level consultations (Indicator 1.1.3), priorities related to climate change (Criterion 1.7) and recommendations from the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5).	√	√
1.3.1	SH MF	At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified. (i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers, and/or livestock. (ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should be identified through results from monitoring activities (see Indicator 1.1.2), input from field-level consultations (see Indicator 1.1.3) and from the work conducted by the Gender Lead or Gender Committee (Criterion 1.5). (iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.	√	√

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			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
1.3.2	LF	At least five locally relevant four-year targets for continuous improvement and respective annual activities are identified. (i) At least three of these targets shall aim to develop regenerative agriculture in the following areas: soil health, biodiversity and natural habitats, water, pesticides, fertilisers, and/or livestock. (ii) The targets shall address local sustainability hotspots or priorities and should consider input from workers and/or community stakeholders, corrective actions from past assessments or audits and learnings from self-assessments. (iii) The annual activities identified to achieve the four-year targets shall be implemented, and the Producer shall measure progress and monitor the effectiveness.	√	√
1.4.1	SH MF	An effective programme is implemented to strengthen capacities of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production. Training and related activities: (i) Focus on locally relevant practices and innovations; (ii) Are informed by inclusive field-level consultations as per Indicator 1.1.3 as well as feedback from previous trainings; (iii) Use approaches and tools that are effective to drive field-level impact.	√	√
1.6.1	SH MF LF	The Producer demonstrates collaboration or engagement with other relevant stakeholders on locally relevant sustainability issues.	√	√
1.7.1	SH MF LF	The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change risks and adaptation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.	√	√
1.7.2	SH MF LF	The Producer is aware of locally relevant climate change mitigation measures and implements these in line with the activity and monitoring plans.	√	√

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			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
2.1.1	SH MF LF	Locally relevant practices that maximise crop diversity are implemented.	√	√
2.1.2	SH MF LF	Locally relevant farming practices that maximise soil cover are implemented.	√	√
2.1.3	SH MF LF	Locally relevant farming practices that minimise soil disturbance are implemented.	√	√
2.1.4	SH MF LF	Based on soil and plant needs, optimum application of fertilisers aims to maximise benefits and minimise negative impacts, considering and selecting the: (i) Right source of nutrient; (ii) Right rate; (iii) Right timing; (iv) Right place of application.	√	
2.1.5	SH MF LF	Alternative methods (beyond synthetic fertilisers) are used to address nutritional needs of plants and soils. Steps are taken to minimise the use of synthetic fertiliser over time.	√	
2.2.1	SH MF LF	Irrigation methods, technologies and timing are planned and implemented to improve irrigation efficiency and maximise water productivity. * Applicable to irrigated farms	√	√
2.2.2	SH MF LF	Practices are implemented to effectively manage changing rainfall amount, intensity and timing. * Applicable to rainfed farms		√

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			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
2.3.1	SH MF LF	Measures are implemented to protect the quality, availability, and related biodiversity of water bodies.	√	√
2.3.2	SH MF LF	Natural habitats and biodiversity are conserved, and steps are taken to enhance them over time in line with local or regional priorities.	√	√
2.3.3	SH MF LF	Degraded areas on croplands are identified, and steps are taken to restore them over time in line with local or regional priorities.	√	√
2.4.1	SH MF LF	The Producer ensures that no cotton is grown on land converted from natural ecosystems after 31 December 2020, in line with the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Reference Documents.	√	
2.4.2	SH MF LF	Prior to any land conversion, the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Assessment shall be undertaken to ensure that natural ecosystems and High Conservation Values (HCVs) are conserved. Resulting measures are fully implemented as part of the activity and monitoring plans in Principle 1.	√	
3.1.1	SH MF	A written Integrated Pest Management (IPM) strategy is developed and implemented which: (i) Covers Indicators 3.1.2 - 3.1.6; (ii) Supports improved awareness and implementation of IPM practices over time; (iii) Informs the activity and monitoring plans under Principle 1.	√	√
3.1.2	SH MF	Methods are implemented that help grow a healthy crop, discourage the build-up of pest populations and diseases and preserve and enhance populations of beneficial organisms.	√	√
3.1.3	SH MF	Farmers are informed of appropriate seed varieties, based on consideration of suitability for local growing conditions and reducing susceptibility to key pests and/or diseases.	√	√

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			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
3.1.4	SH MF	Regular monitoring is conducted on crop health and levels of pests and beneficial organisms. Field observation and decision-making tools are used to determine when and how to control pests.	√	√
3.1.5	SH MF	Farmers are aware of non-chemical methods (for example, biological, physical and cultural) for managing key pests, and their use is prioritised as part of the IPM strategy.	√	√
3.1.6	SH MF	Pesticides are only used when a defined pest threshold, such as an Economic Threshold Level (ETL) where these are available and applicable, is reached. If pesticides are used: (i) Low toxicity active ingredients are preferred; (ii) They are selected and applied in a way to mitigate resistance.	√	
3.1.7	LF	An Integrated Pest Management strategy is implemented which: (i) Discourages the build-up of pest populations and crop diseases and supports beneficial organisms; (ii) Includes regular monitoring of crop health, pests, diseases and beneficial organisms; (iii) Prioritises non-chemical methods; (iv) Ensures pesticides are used only when defined pest thresholds are reached; (v) Prioritises low toxicity active ingredients and manages plant resistance if pesticides are used.	√	√
3.3.1	SH MF LF	Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs) shall not be used if they are listed in the Better Cotton Initiative Prohibited Pesticides List.	√	
3.3.2	SH MF LF	A plan is implemented to phase out pesticides defined as carcinogenic (category 1a or 1b), mutagenic (category 1a or 1b) or reprotoxic (category 1a or 1b) by the EU Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) by 2028 or earlier.	√	

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			Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation
3.4.1	SH MF LF	If pesticides included in the Better Cotton Initiative High Environmental Hazard List are used, measures are implemented to mitigate environmental risks.	√	√
4.1.1	SH MF LF	Locally relevant good practices for seed selection (where possible), planting date, planting rate, row spacing, crop growth and weed management are implemented to increase the probability of producing high-quality fibre.		√
5.8.2	SH MF LF	Workers have regular rest breaks with access to potable water. Where there is a risk of dehydration, heat stroke and related illnesses, access to shade is provided and other measures are implemented to prevent and address these issues.		√
5.8.3	SH MF LF	Safety and health risks are identified, and measures are implemented to minimise these risks (including training for farmers, workers and relevant supervisors). If accidents or injuries occur, medical attention is provided, and steps are taken to prevent recurrence.		√
6.1.1	SH MF	The Producer identifies, monitors, and confirms key livelihoods focus areas based on engagement with individuals involved in farm-level cotton production and other relevant community-level stakeholders.	√	√
6.1.2	SH MF	Based on 6.1.1, locally relevant measures are taken that deliver improvements against the defined key livelihoods focus areas over time.	√	√

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Annex 3:
Glossary of Terms

Better Cotton Initiative / Khaula Jamil
Muzaffargarh, Punjab, Pakistan. 2018.

Annex 3: Glossary of Terms

Beneficial insects/organisms

Any organism that benefits the crop. Benefits include pest control, pollination and maintenance of soil health. The opposite of beneficial organisms are pests.

Better Cotton Initiative Certification

According to assurance outcomes, a Better Cotton Initiative Certification is awarded at the Producer level (Producer Unit or Large Farm) after the Producer is assessed as compliant against all relevant Indicators in the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria. It allows Producers to sell their cotton as 'BCI Cotton' in the supply chain.

Biodiversity

The diversity among living organisms — plants, animals, fungi and microorganisms — which is essential to ecosystems function and services delivery.[10]

Calendar spraying

Application of pesticides at specific days or timings without consideration of the pest population.

Capacity strengthening

As used in this document, it refers to activities that aim to unlock, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes of individuals involved in farm-level cotton production to contribute to positive social, economic and environmental impact.[11]

Carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic (CMR) substances

Carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic (CMR) substances are those which cause specific types of harm to human health. Carcinogenic chemicals can cause or promote cancers. Mutagenic chemicals can cause genetic mutations. Reprotoxic chemicals can damage the reproductive process.

Child labour

Work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work that:

- Is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or
- Interferes with their schooling by:
- Depriving them of the opportunity to attend school;
- Obliging them to leave school prematurely; or
- Requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.[12]

Climate change

Long-term change in the average weather patterns that have come to define Earth's local, regional and global climates. It is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and it is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.[13]

10 FAO. 'The International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers'. (2019).
11 Adapted from: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 'The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working towards good practice.' (2006).
12 ILO. 'What Is Child Labour (IPEC)'.

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Climate change adaptation

Individual or collective strategies, initiatives and measures aimed at reducing the vulnerability and increasing the resilience of natural and human systems to the actual or expected impacts of climate change.

Climate change mitigation

Human intervention to reduce sources or enhance sinks of greenhouse gases.[13]

Coercion

Threat and menace of any penalty used to impose work on an individual against their will. Workers can be actually subjected to coercion, be verbally threatened by these elements of coercion or be witness to coercion imposed on other co-workers in relation to involuntary work. Elements of coercion can include, amongst others: threats or violence against workers or workers' families, relatives or close associates; restrictions on workers' movement; debt bondage or manipulation of debt; withholding of wages or other promised benefits; withholding of valuable documents (such as identity documents or residence permits) and abuse of workers' vulnerability through the denial of rights or privileges, threats of dismissal or deportation.[14]

Collective action

Collective action is a specific form of collaboration. It aims at solving environmental and social problems by addressing many of the issues associated with isolated action. It consists of inter-organisational collaborations. Examples include community engagement, community involvement, civic engagement, service learning, volunteerism and coalitions.

Contamination

Contamination in the context of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria refers to the impact pesticides can have on human health, food commodities, and the environment. It can result from the improper use, storage or disposal of pesticides and their containers.

When environmental contamination occurs, it can affect — directly or indirectly — soil, water, vegetation, animals, including beneficial insects, non-target plants and neighbouring communities.

Contamination (cotton fibre)

Any foreign matter, i.e., any material in a lot of cotton other than cotton lint or trash (cotton leaf). It can be either man-made (e.g., grease, plastic, cloth, hair, machinery parts, etc.) or natural (e.g., bark, grass, seed coat fragments, etc.). Contamination can occur during picking, transportation and ginning and can include items such as jute, textiles, thread pieces, polyethylene, pieces of polypropylene string, human and animal hairs, metal items, bird feathers, paper, cigarette packages and others.

Conversion (of natural ecosystems)

Change of a natural ecosystem to another land use or severe and sustained degradation that results in the profound change of a natural ecosystem's physical structure and species composition.[15]

Criteria

Criteria are outcomes that should be aimed for within a Principle.

Crop disease

Crop disease occurs when a crop plant's essential physiological or biochemical systems are disrupted by a plant pathogen leading to symptoms. Plant pathogens are usually fungal, bacterial, viral organisms or nematodes.

13 Adapted from: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 'Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C'. Glossary, (2018).
14 ILO Department of Statistics. 'Guidelines concerning the Measurement of Forced Labour'. (2018).
15 Adapted from: Accountability Framework Initiative. 'Terms and Definitions'. (June 2019).

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Crop diversity

Crop diversity is the variance in genetic and phenotypic characteristics of plants used in agriculture. Over the past 50 years, there has been a major decline in two components of crop diversity; genetic diversity within each crop and the number of species commonly grown. Above ground diversity of crops leads to below ground diversity, as different species of plants associate with different soil organisms, providing the food for the natural soil food web. Different organisms are responsible for different nutrient cycles, and the soil food web functions at its best when as many of those relationships are present as possible.[16]

Cutoff date

The cutoff date specifies the date after which specific types of land conversion are not permitted under the Better Cotton Initiative Land Conversion Approach.[17]

Debt bondage

Debt bondage refers to being forced to work to repay a debt and not being able to leave or being forced to work and not being able to leave because of a debt.[18]

Decent work (DW)

Decent work (DW) refers to work which provides equal opportunities for everyone to work productively in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. This concept is understood to encompass respect for labour rights, expressed in the ILO core labour standards[19] and national labour legislation, alongside the promotion of safe and productive work, social protection and social dialogue.

Degraded area/land

Degraded land is land which has lost some of its natural productivity or other environmental values due to processes directly or indirectly caused by humans. It is still possible to grow cotton on the area, but it means that productivity and natural potential is less than it could be. Degraded land does not always look barren, and signs can be invisible.

Severely degraded land is land where pronounced and sustained human impacts (whether direct or indirect) have altered the physical structure and species composition of the native vegetation to the extent that the land — in the absence of active restoration measures — is unlikely to be able to provide long-term environmental values.[20]

Discrimination

Discrimination refers to distinction, exclusion or preference based on any characteristics that are not related to merit or the inherent requirements of the job. It includes, but is not limited to, discrimination based on gender identity or sex characteristics, sexual orientation, age, nationality, ethnicity, language, race, class, caste, social origin, religion, belief, abilities and disabilities, health, political affiliation, political views, membership of a trade union or other workers' organisation, marital status and pregnancy-related discrimination.[21]

Economic threshold

Pest population level or extent of crop damage at which action should be taken to prevent economic losses.

16 Farming for a Better Climate. 'Regenerative Farming, Maximising Crop Diversity Practical Guide'.
17 Accountability Framework Initiative. 'Operational Guidance on Cutoff Dates'. (June 2019).
18 ILO, and Walk Free Foundation. 'Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage'. (2017).
19 ILO. 'ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow-up'.
20 Modified from the Accountability Framework Initiative, the Roundtable on Sustainable Biomaterials and the International PhD Student Cancer Conference
21 ILO. 'ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Its Follow-up'. Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

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Family members

Family members, or family workers in an agricultural context, are persons who help another member of the family run a farm and who are not considered employees. They can be the spouse, daughter or son of the farm owner or other relatives such as a sister or brother, aunt, uncle or cousin, provided that they live in the same household as the owner or in a house located on the same plot of land and with common household interests.[22]

Farmers

The concept of farmers as used in the Better Cotton Initiative P&C v.3.2 includes persons of any gender, background and identity (see Commitment to Social Inclusion) and any member of a household or family who shares farming duties. Landowners or tenants who lease land for cultivation at a fixed rate may also be considered farmers.

Farming communities

Farmers, workers, their household members and all the people directly involved, benefitting from or affected by cotton production within a cotton producing area.

Fertilisers

Fertiliser refers to a chemical or natural substance or material that is used to provide nutrients to plants, usually via application to the soil but also to foliage.[23]

Synthetic or inorganic fertilisers are nutrient-rich fertilisers produced industrially by chemical processes, mineral extraction or by mechanical grinding. Organic fertilisers are carbon-rich fertilisers derived from organic materials, including treated or untreated livestock manures, compost, vermicompost, sewage sludge and other organic materials or mixed materials used to supply nutrients.[24]

Fibre quality

The quality of the cotton fibre as defined through three broad elements: the inherent characteristics of the fibre (strength, length, finesse and uniformity), the level of trash (cotton leaf remaining in the lint) and the level of contamination (anything found in the cotton lint that is not cotton fibre or cotton leaf).

Field Facilitator

Field Facilitators are part of the management structure for Better Cotton Initiative Producer Units. They are trained field-based staff who help organise farmers, collect farm level data and carry out capacity strengthening activities in farming communities. Field Facilitators are typically employed by either Programme Partners or their affiliated Local Partners.

Forced or compulsory labour

Forced labour is work exacted under the threat of penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily.[25] In essence, a person experiences a forced labour situation if they enter work or service against their freedom of choice and cannot leave it without penalty or the threat of penalty.

Free, prior and informed consent

A collective human right of Indigenous peoples and local communities to give and withhold their consent prior to the commencement of any activity that affects their rights, land, resources, territories, livelihoods and food security. It is a right exercised through representatives of their own choosing and in a manner consistent with their own customs, values and norms.[26]

22 Eurostat. 'Glossary:Farm Labour Force - Family Labour'. Eurostat Statistics Explained.
23 FAO. 'Global Soil Doctors Programme: A Farmer-to-farmer Training Programme'. (2019).
24 FAO. 'The International Code of Conduct for the Sustainable Use and Management of Fertilizers'. (2019)
25 ILO. "Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29)." (1930).
26 Accountability Framework Initiative. 'Terms and Definitions'. (June 2019).

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Freedom of association

Freedom of association refers to the right of workers and employers to freely form or join organisations that promote and defend their interests at work without interference. The right to organise applies to all workers and employers, including farmers and other persons in the informal economy. As a fundamental labour right, freedom of association enables workers to shape their working conditions through social dialogue.[27]

Gender equality

Gender equality refers to the fact that rights, responsibilities and opportunities should not depend on a person's gender identity or sex characteristics. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men (as well as girls and boys) are taken into consideration, recognising the diverse and intersectional nature of different groups of people. Gender equality is not only a women's issue but should concern and fully engage all members of society, and it is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.[28]

Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS)

The Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) provides a standardised global system for classifying and communicating the hazards associated with chemicals. The GHS was developed by the United Nations and adopted in 2002. Subsequently, many countries have adopted GHS as a basis for their own regulatory systems.

The GHS covers a wide range of chemicals and includes criteria for their classification based on their physical, health and environmental hazards. It also includes standardised communication guidelines, such as labelling elements, including signal words, pictograms and hazard statements; as well as standardized safety data sheets, which provide detailed information about the hazards of a chemical and how to safely handle and use it.

Overall, the goal of the GHS is to improve the safety of workers and the general public by providing consistent and clear information about the hazards of chemicals. The GHS also provides a basis for harmonisation of rules and regulations on chemicals at a national, regional and global level.

Grievance mechanism

A formal or non-formal, legal or non-legal mechanism for individuals, communities and/or their representatives negatively affected by any business activities or operations who wish to raise a complaint, and do so anonymously, if preferred. The grievance mechanism should be trusted, accessible and recognised by all parties concerned. The grievance resolution process should be impartial and transparent while respecting confidentiality and the wishes of the complainant at every step.

27 ILO. 'Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87)'. (1948).
28 Based on: UN Women. 'Gender Mainstreaming: Concepts and Definitions'.

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Group 3 of the Pesticide Action Network's International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)

The Pesticide Action Network's (PAN) International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)[29] is a list of pesticides that are considered to pose particularly high risks to human health and the environment.

The list is created by compiling information from the World Health Organization, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the European Commission and the Pesticide Property Database.

Group 3 contains active ingredients which meet PAN's environmental toxicity criteria. They are classified as:

- Very persistent in soil, sediment and marine/freshwater
- Very bioaccumulative
- Very toxic to aquatic organisms
- Highly toxic to bees

Harassment

Unwanted conduct related to a certain characteristic, aiming at violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. It includes, but is not limited to, bullying, sexual harassment and intimidation.

Heat stress

Heat stress refers to heat received in excess of that which the body can tolerate without suffering physiological impairment. Four environmental factors contribute to the stress level experienced by a worker in a workplace with hot conditions: temperature, humidity, radiant heat (e.g., from the sun or a furnace) and wind speed. Above a certain threshold of heat stress, the body's internal regulation mechanisms are no longer capable of maintaining a body temperature at a level required for normal functioning. As a result, there is an increased risk of discomfort, limitations in physical functions and capabilities and ultimately also of injuries and heat-related illnesses.[30]

29 PAN International. 'PAN International List of Highly Hazardous Pesticides (PAN List of HHPs)'. (December 2024).
30 ILO. 'Working on a WARMER Planet The Impact of Heat Stress on Labour Productivity and Decent Work'. (2019).

High Conservation Value (HCV)

A High Conservation Value (HCV) is a biological, ecological, social or cultural value of outstanding significance or critical importance. The six categories of HCVs are:

- HCV1: Species Diversity: Concentrations of biodiversity including endemic species and rare, threatened or endangered species that are significant at global, regional or national levels. E.g., the presence of several globally threatened bird species.
- HCV2: Landscape-level Ecosystems, Ecosystem Mosaics and Intact Forest Landscapes: Large, landscape-level ecosystems and ecosystem mosaics that are significant at global, regional or national levels and that contain viable populations of the great majority of naturally occurring species in natural patterns of distribution and abundance. E.g., a large tract of Mesoamerican flooded grasslands and gallery forests with healthy populations of hyacinth macaw, jaguar, maned wolf, giant otter and most smaller species.
- HCV3: Ecosystems and Habitats: Rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems, habitats or refugia. E.g., patches of a regionally rare type of freshwater swamp.
- HCV4: Ecosystem Services: Basic ecosystem services in critical situations, including the protection of water catchments and control of erosion of vulnerable soils and slopes. E.g., a forest on a steep slope above a town that poses an avalanche risk.
- HCV5: Community Needs: Sites and resources fundamental for satisfying the basic necessities of local communities or Indigenous peoples (for livelihoods, health, nutrition, water, etc.), identified through engagement with these communities or Indigenous peoples. E.g., key hunting areas for communities living at a subsistence level.
- HCV6: Cultural Values: Sites, resources, habitats and landscapes of global or national cultural, archaeological or historical significance and/or of critical cultural, ecological, economic or religious/sacred importance for the traditional cultures of local communities or Indigenous peoples, identified through engagement with these local communities or Indigenous peoples. E.g., sacred burial grounds within a forest management area or new agricultural plantation.[31]

Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs)

Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs), as defined by the HHP criteria agreed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations/ WHO Joint Meeting on Pesticide Management[32], are pesticides that are acknowledged to present particularly high levels of acute or chronic hazards to health or environment according to internationally accepted classification systems such as the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Globally Harmonised System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) or their listing in relevant binding international agreements or conventions. In addition, pesticides that appear to cause severe or irreversible harm to health or the environment under conditions of use in a country may be considered and treated as highly hazardous.[33]

31 HCV Network. 'HCV Approach'.
32 FAO. 'Pest and Pesticide Management'. NSP - Highly Hazardous Pesticides (HHPs).
33 FAO. 'International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides Annotated List of Technical Guidelines for the Implementation of the International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides'. (2013); FAO/WHO. 'International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management Guidelines on Highly Hazardous Pesticides.' (2016).

Inclusion

Inclusion is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in the political, social, economic and cultural life for people who are vulnerable or excluded, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, respect for rights and participation in leadership and decision-making. In the context of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria, 'inclusive' means giving particular attention and taking the necessary measures to ensure that that all individuals have equal opportunities to access activities, services and benefits. Special consideration should be given to women, youth and vulnerable and excluded groups. Opportunities for participation should allow them to choose when and how to contribute to issues that affect them.

Indicator

In the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria, Indicators refer to specific requirements under each Criteria against which Producers are assessed for compliance before they can be certified to sell BCI cotton.

Individuals involved in farm-level cotton production

Includes all members of farming households, workers, tenants, sharecroppers and anyone else involved in the farm-level production of BCI cotton, regardless of their productive role and gender identity, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, age, nationality, ethnicity, language, race, class, caste, social origin, religion, belief, abilities and disabilities, health, political affiliation, political views, marital or any other status.[34]

Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Integrated Pest Management is the careful consideration of all available pest control techniques and subsequent integration of appropriate measures that discourage the development of pest populations. It combines biological, chemical, physical and crop specific (cultural) management strategies and practices to grow healthy crops and minimise the use of pesticides. This reduces or minimises risks posed by pesticides to human health and the environment for sustainable pest management.[35]

International Labour Organization's (ILO) Indicators of Forced Labour

The International Labour Organization has identified 11 main indicators of forced labour which include: abuse of vulnerability, deception, restriction of movement, isolation, physical and sexual violence, intimidation and threats, retention of identity documents, withholding of wages, debt bondage, abusive working and living conditions and excessive overtime. Indicators such as restriction of movement, retention of identity documents, physical and sexual violence or intimidation and threat are strong indicators of forced labour. The existence of other indicators combined with a strong indicator can point to a situation of forced labour.[36]

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination overlap and create unique dynamics and effects. All forms of inequality are mutually reinforcing and should therefore be analysed and addressed simultaneously to prevent one form of inequality from reinforcing another.[37]

34 Adapted from: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 'Report on the World Social Situation: Identifying Social Inclusion and Exclusion'. (2016): 17–31.
35 FAO. 'Pest and Pesticide Management'.
36 ILO. 'ILO Indicators of Forced Labour'. (2012).
37 Adapted from: Hankivsky, Olena. 'Intersectionality 101.' Institute for Intersectionality Research & Policy'. Simon Fraser University, (2014).

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Intimidation and threats

Behaviours and practices that cause another person to fear violence and/or harassment.

The term 'violence and harassment' in the context of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.[38]

Labour rights violations

Labour rights violations include cases of child labour or forced labour, discrimination, workplace violence and harassment, interference in freedom of association and collective bargaining, substandard working conditions or abusive recruitment practices.

Large Farms (LF)

In the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System, Large Farms (LF) are defined as farms with a size typically above 200 hectares of cotton which either have mechanised production or are structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. LFs participate with Better Cotton Initiative on an individual basis or (in some contexts) through a LF Group Assurance model.

Medium Farms (MF)

Under the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System, Medium Farms (MF) are defined as farms with a farm size typically between 20 to 200 hectares of cotton which usually are structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. MFs are grouped into Producer Units for licensing purposes.

Montreal Protocol

The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is the landmark multilateral environmental agreement to protect the stratospheric ozone layer. Adopted on 15 September 1987, the protocol has been ratified by 198 countries and the European Union, which makes it one of the most agreed upon international treaties ever.

The ozone layer is a protective layer in the Earth's atmosphere that filters out harmful ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Ozone-depleting substances (ODS) are synthetic chemicals that contain chlorine or bromine atoms, which can destroy the ozone layer when released into the atmosphere. The Montreal Protocol aims to phase out the production and consumption of close to 100, mainly human-made, ODS over time in order to protect the ozone layer and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Nationally registered pesticides

List of pesticides legally authorised within a given country (some countries might register only particular pesticides for use on cotton).

Natural ecosystem

Forest and non-forest vegetation, including woodlands, shrublands and grasslands, that is largely native and whose physical structure and species composition is determined to be the natural ecological processes and/or the traditional management practices (including forest fallows as part of traditional swidden practices).

Natural habitat

The unique ecosystem in which a particular organism lives and where the basic needs of the organism to survive are met: food, water, shelter from the weather and a place to breed its young. All organisms need to adapt to their habitat to be able to survive.[39]

38 ILO. 'Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).' (2019).
39 WWF. 'Habitat and Adaptation'.

Natural substances

Natural substances for the purpose of crop protection correspond to non-chemical treatment and can be associated with biopesticides. These are pesticides derived from natural material such as animals, plants, bacteria and certain minerals and can be either 'homemade' or commercially produced.

Non-chemical methods

Various pest control techniques that do not rely on pesticides. Instead, pest control is achieved by mechanical, biological or cultural means.

People in vulnerable situations and/or facing exclusion

People in vulnerable situations are groups at risk of harm, exploitation or adverse impacts and who have challenges to access various rights, opportunities and resources due to situational physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, such as poverty, age or health issues (situational disadvantage)

People facing exclusion are those groups who historically have been unable to fully access and/or benefit from social, economic and political rights, opportunities and resources, including investments, due to their identities, such as race, caste, ethnicity and others (systemic disadvantage). Both categories can be overlapping (see also intersectionality) and are highly dependent on the country and local context.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - Appropriate

In the context of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria, appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) refers to specialised clothing, material or equipment to be used/worn in the application of pesticides as detailed in the pesticide label in order to avoid and/or mitigate exposure to hazardous substances in the form of dermal absorption, ingestion and inhalation. The materials should be impermeable to water, typically non-woven (to prevent passage of pesticides), chemical resistant and washable so that the toxic elements can be removed after each use. Such PPE should be suitable and comfortable for the tasks to be carried out and appropriate to the prevailing climatic conditions.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) - Minimum

In the context of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria, minimum Personal Protective Equipment refers to the minimum expectation for farmers and workers to protect themselves when handling pesticides by wearing/using garments and equipment that protect the following specific body parts from dermal absorption, ingestion and inhalation:

- Face and airways (eyes, ear canal, nose and scalp);
- Limbs (arms, forearms, palms, legs and feet);
- Abdomen and genital area.

Pest (populations)

A pest is an organism that causes harm to humans, their livestock, crops or possessions. The key word is 'harm' and is usually interpreted as 'damage', which can usually be measured (often quantitatively) and be equated to economic loss. Pest populations refer to the number of organisms of each pest species found in a particular area at a given time, e.g., presence in a single cotton field or across a wider geographical area.

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Pesticide

Any substance or mixture of substances intended for preventing, destroying or controlling pests. The term includes substances intended for use as plant growth regulators, defoliants, desiccants or agents for thinning fruit or preventing the premature fall of fruit, as well as bio-pesticides. It also includes substances applied to crops either before or after harvest to protect the commodity from deterioration during storage and transport.[40] Pesticides refer to both synthetic and natural substances that are applied for any of these purposes.

Pesticide mixture

A pesticide mixture is when two or more pesticides (insecticides, fungicide and/or miticides) are combined into a single spray solution. The definition of pesticide mixtures as used in the P&C includes cases where chemical pesticides and fertilisers or other agricultural inputs such as defoliants are mixed.[41]

Plant resistance

The heritable ability of plants to avoid harm from enemies, such as pests or diseases, partially or fully, thus minimising the amount of damage experienced by the plant.

Principles

Principles are the overarching sustainability areas in the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria.

Producer

Under the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System, the Producer defines the unit of licensing and can be either a Producer Unit for Smallholders (SH) or Medium Farms (MF) or an individual farm in the case of Large Farms (LF).

Producer Unit (PU)

A Producer Unit (PU) is a group of Smallholders (SH) or Medium Farms (MF) who are organised together under a common management structure to participate in the Better Cotton Initiative Programme. Each PU is overseen by a dedicated PU Manager who is responsible for implementing an internal management system to support, train and monitor farmers across the PU. The size of a PU depends on local circumstances, although the optimal size is between 3,500 to 4,000 farmers for a SH PU and around 100 farmers for a MF PU. Farmers in a SH PU are further divided into Learning Groups.

Producer Unit (PU) Staff

In a PU context, PU Staff includes everyone involved with the implementation of the standard, including the PU Manager, Field Facilitators, Gender Leads or Gender Committee Members, Lead Farmers (in some contexts) and other PU Staff.

Producer Unit Manager

The main individual responsible for implementation of the Better Cotton Initiative Principles and Criteria at the Producer Unit level.

Producer Management

In a Producer Unit (PU) context, this relates to anyone accountable for the implementation of the standard, particularly PU Managers and their deputies as well as project leads. In a Large Farm context, this refers to the people accountable for the management of the farm and also accountable for the implementation of the standard, often the farmers themselves.

40 FAO. 'International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides, Revised Version'. (2005).
41 Cloyd, Dr. Raymond A. 'Pesticide Mixtures'. Kansas State University, Department of Entomology'. (2011).

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Re-entry intervals

The minimum amount of time that should pass between the time a pesticide was applied to an area or crop and the time that people can go into that area without protective clothing and equipment.[42]

Resilience

Household resilience comprises the capacities of families and communities to prepare for and to react to stressors and shocks in ways that limit vulnerability and promote sustainability.

Restoration (land/biodiversity/natural habitats)

Process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem (and its associated conservation values) that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed.[43]

Rotterdam Convention

The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure (PIC) for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade is a legally binding international treaty that was adopted in 1998 and entered into force in 2004. It focuses on procedures related to the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides. By ensuring shared responsibilities and that importing countries are fully informed of the potential risks before allowing their importation, it aims to protect human health and the environment from the risks posed by the use and trade of hazardous substances.

The objectives of the Convention are:

- To promote shared responsibility and cooperative efforts among Parties in the international trade of certain hazardous chemicals;
- To contribute to the environmentally sound use of those hazardous chemicals by facilitating information exchange about their characteristics, providing for a national decision-making process on their import and export and by disseminating these decisions to the Parties.[44]

Annex III of the Convention lists the chemicals that are subject to the PIC procedure as laid out by the Convention. It includes pesticides that have been identified as hazardous and banned or severely restricted in at least two countries that are members (Parties) of the convention and that are subject to significant international trade.

Sharecroppers

Better Cotton Initiative defines sharecroppers as individuals who cultivate cotton on land they do not own and compensate landowners through a share of the crop or in-kind labour. Unlike tenants, sharecroppers do not pay fixed cash rents.

Smallholders (SH)

Under the Better Cotton Initiative Standard System, Smallholders (SH) are defined as farms with a farm size typically not exceeding 20 hectares of cotton which are not structurally dependent on permanent hired labour. SH are grouped into Producer Units for licensing purposes.

Soil cover

Soil cover refers to vegetation, including crops and crop residues on the surface of the soil, for the sake of protecting the soils from erosion caused by heavy rain and wind or preventing the soil from drying out in a drought.[45]

42 Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. 'Pesticides - Re-entry Interval'. OSH Answers Fact Sheets.
43 Accountability Framework Initiative. 'Terms and Definitions'. (June 2019).
44 UN Environment Programme. 'Rotterdam Convention Overview'.
45 Adapted from: Farming for a Better Climate. 'Regenerative Agriculture: Keeping Soil Covered'.

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Soil disturbance

Farming practices that interrupt natural soil processes, including physical or chemical alterations.[46]

Soil health

The capacity of soil to function as a living system. This depends on the soil's chemical, physical and biological characteristics. Soil fertility, defined as the ability to sustain plant growth by providing essential plant nutrients, is linked to soil health. Healthy, biodiverse soil is fundamental to thriving crops, cycling nutrients and filtering water. Improved soil health can enhance productivity and yields, which can directly improve farmer income.

Soil or plant testing

Soil or plant testing refers to a wide variety of soil or plant analyses usually conducted to estimate the concentrations of plant nutrients in order to determine optimum fertiliser recommendations in agriculture.

Soil Organic Matter

Soil organic matter (SOM) is the organic matter component of soil, consisting of plant and animal detritus at various stages of decomposition, cells and tissues of soil microbes and substances that soil microbes synthesise. SOM provides numerous benefits to the physical and chemical properties of soil and its capacity to provide regulatory ecosystem services. SOM is especially critical for soil function and quality. To approximate overall SOM levels, soil organic carbon is a widely used measurement.

Stockholm Convention

The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) is a legally binding international treaty that was adopted in 2001 and entered into force in 2004.

The Stockholm Convention seeks to eliminate or restrict the production, use and release of POPs. POPs are organic chemical substances (i.e., they are carbon-based) that possess a particular combination of physical and chemical properties such that, once released into the environment, they:

- Remain intact for exceptionally long periods of time (many years);
- Become widely distributed throughout the environment as a result of natural processes involving soil, water and, most notably, air;
- Accumulate in living organisms, including humans, and are found at higher concentrations at higher levels in the food chain; and
- Are toxic to both humans and wildlife.

The Convention's provisions include the identification of POPs and control measures, technical assistance and capacity building and a monitoring mechanism to assess the implementation of the Convention's requirements.[47]

Sustainable livelihoods

A sustainable livelihood is achieved when farmers, farm workers and farming communities have the knowledge, skills, power and choice to use reliably accessible material and non-material resources to sustain or improve their well-being – even in times of shock, and without harming the current or future well-being of others or the environment.

Water body

A physical accumulation of water above and/or under the Earth's surface. Examples of water bodies include streams, rivers, lakes, oceans, wetlands, estuaries, ponds, canals, reservoirs or groundwaters.[48]

46 Adapted from: Farming for a Better Climate. 'Regenerative Agriculture: Minimise Soil Disturbance'.
47 UN Environment Programme. 'The Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants'. (2004).
48 Alliance for Water Stewardship. 'The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard, Version 1.0'. (2014).

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Water quality

A term used to describe the chemical, physical and biological characteristics of water, usually with respect to its suitability for a particular purpose. Put another way, it is a measure of the condition of water relative to the requirements of one or more biotic species and/or to any human need or purpose.[49]

Workers

Better Cotton Initiative defines workers as all individuals carrying out field-level production work on cotton farms, regardless of gender, background and identity. Workers can be temporary, seasonal or permanent and recruited directly by the farmer or sub-contracted, e.g., through a labour broker. Workers are normally paid for their work but can also be non-wage-earning such as family members or community exchanged labour.

Workers (migrant)

Individuals who move to another country or area to engage in a remunerated activity on a cotton farm for a period of time, e.g., seasonal or temporary work. Workers who cannot return to their place of residence at the end of the working day and have to be accommodated closer to their place of work are considered migrant workers.

Workers (permanent)

Workers who are employed 12 months a year. These workers might support production of other crops (beyond cotton) within the wider farm area.

Workers (seasonal)

Workers who are employed during the entire cotton season – 3–7 months a year. These workers tend to be paid by month or in lump sum for the entire season, or sometimes as a percentage of the yield. Contrary to sharecroppers, seasonal workers do not have decision-making powers over inputs.

Workers (temporary)

Workers who are employed on a short-term basis for specific tasks. Temporary workers are normally paid at piece-rate (either for a defined period, e.g., day or hour, or for the volume of cotton picked, the area irrigated or sprayed, etc.). In some countries, such workers can be referred to as 'casual', 'interim', 'contractual' or 'freelance' labour and can have different legal statuses. For Better Cotton Initiative purposes, all these workers are categorised as 'temporary'.

World Health Organization (WHO) Class 1

World Health Organization (WHO) Class 1 refers to a classification system used for pesticides and other hazardous substances based on their toxicity to humans.

WHO Class 1 substances are those that are highly hazardous and can cause 'severe acute' or chronic health effects in humans, even at low doses. These substances can cause death, cancer, mutations, birth defects or other serious health impacts. Class 1 is subdivided into Extremely Hazardous (Class 1a) and Highly Hazardous (Class 1b).

49 Alliance for Water Stewardship. 'The AWS International Water Stewardship Standard, Version 1.0'. (2014).

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