Standard: Better Cotton Production Principles and Criteria

Scope

BCI is exclusively focused on cotton production and has one approved standard: The Better Cotton Production Principles and Criteria. The Production Principles and Criteria provide a globally applicable definition of Better Cotton.

Sustainability outcomes

The social and environmental outcomes of the Production Principles and Criteria, and the sustainability issues addressed, are captured in the following principles of ‘Better Cotton’:

- Better Cotton is produced by farmers who minimise the harmful impact of crop protection practices.
• Better Cotton is produced by farmers who use water efficiently and care for the availability of water.
• Better Cotton is produced by farmers who care for the health of the soil.
• Better Cotton is produced by farmers who conserve natural habitats.
• Better Cotton is produced by farmers who care for and preserve the quality of the fibre.
• Better Cotton is produced by farmers who promote Decent Work.

These social and environmental outcomes are expected to interlink with positive economic outcomes for cotton farmers, in which the adoption of improved practices reduces the cost of agricultural inputs while increasing yield and fibre quality, enabling an increase in financial profitability.

**Why is it needed (justification)**

Cotton is one of the most important and widely grown crops in the world. It is estimated that nearly 35 million hectares are under cotton cultivation, representing about 2.5% of the world’s arable land. About 80 countries produce cotton on a commercial scale and more than 90% of cotton farmers live in developing countries on farms of less than 2 hectares. Nearly everywhere it is grown cotton represents an important cash crop for farmers and an economically valuable part of the total national economy. Cotton is for millions of people, in some of the world’s poorest countries, a vital and unique link to the global economy. The International Cotton Advisory Committee estimates that there are about 300 million people who work in the wider cotton industry each year.

There are various negative social and environmental impacts associated with cotton cultivation worldwide that undermine its sustainability. Attention is needed at the farm level where serious impacts on people and the environment can occur. Inefficient irrigation techniques, poor cultivation practices, and improper use of pesticides and fertilizers threaten the availability of clean water, soil fertility, human health and biodiversity. As well as the health and safety impacts related to pesticide use, socio-economic impacts have been reported to include arduous working conditions (particularly for women workers), child labour and forms of forced or bonded labour, as well as indebtedness due to high input prices, crop failure, delayed payment and/or unaffordable rates of interest.

Achieving improvements in the social and environmental conditions of cotton production is essential for human and environmental health, the livelihood of millions of people worldwide, and the future of the commodity. BCI works with organisations from across the cotton supply chain and interested stakeholders to facilitate a sustainability solution for the mainstream cotton sector. BCI’s philosophy is to develop a market for a new mainstream commodity: ‘Better Cotton’ and thereby transform the cotton commodity to bring long - term benefits for the environment, farmers and other people dependent on cotton for their livelihood.

**Performance level**

The BCI Standard is structured as six Production Principles, which are further defined by 24 criteria for smallholders and 44 criteria for medium and large farms. To promote continuous improvement, these generic criteria are used to inform Performance Scales laying out Minimum Requirements and Improvement Requirements for each farmer category. The Minimum Requirements provide the baseline threshold for growing Better Cotton, while the Improvement Requirements assess progress over time.
Adaptations
While the Production Principles and Criteria are globally applicable, the most appropriate management practices and techniques for effective implementation vary according to environmental, social, economic, geographic and climatic conditions. The identification of regionally specific approaches to growing Better Cotton is the responsibility of BCI’s Implementing Partners, who develop National Guidance Material in order to provide farmers with advice, information, and clarity on how to best achieve the Production Principles and Criteria in local contexts.

BCI also values partnerships with other sustainability initiatives as critical to its strategic vision. To date BCI has undertaken several benchmarking processes, successfully resulting in one-way recognition of the ABR, CMIA, and MyBMP standards systems. BCI believes that benchmarking with other existing standards/programmes offers an effective way to mainstream sustainability in cotton production by building on existing knowledge and activities through meaningful partnership.

Standard-Setting and Revision Process

When standard was first written and by whom
The BCI Standard was developed on the basis of input and consultations conducted between February 2007 to May 2008, and July 2008 to June 2009, with Regional Working Groups in Brazil, India, Pakistan and West & Central Africa; BCI Advisory Committee members; Better Cotton Partners; and publicly through the website. The final draft of the Standard was approved in 2010.

Stakeholder categorisation
As a multi-stakeholder membership association, BCI communicates with stakeholders on an ongoing basis and conducts targeted stakeholder engagement and consultation during formal reviews of the Standard. To support effective stakeholder engagement BCI has undertaken comprehensive stakeholder identification and mapping. The interest sectors identified and key stakeholder groups within each sector can be viewed in Annex 1.

Summary of the revision process
BCI is committed to reviewing its Standard at least every 5 years to integrate feedback received from stakeholders and maintain the Standard’s ongoing relevance in the context of emerging sustainability challenges in the cotton sector. The review and revision process is coordinated by the Standards and Assurance Team and supported by a Standard Revision Committee that provides technical expertise and guidance. The BCI Council is the governing body that approves the Standard and ensures the review process has been conducted in accordance with the Standard Setting and Review Procedure.

A formal Standard review comprises at least 2 rounds of public consultation, the second round being required if substantive changes have been made since the first draft. The launch of a public consultation is officially announced on the BCI website. BCI seeks contribution from a wide range of stakeholders and proactively targets under-represented stakeholders and disadvantaged groups. BCI employs diverse communication channels for stakeholder engagement, including but not limited to surveys, newsletters, face-to-face meetings, calls, emails, webinars, or asking support from field staff or partners who have direct contact with stakeholders. After each consultation, a synopsis of the comments received and how they have been addressed is produced. The synopsis is made publicly available and sent to all parties that submitted comments.
Governance
The approval of the Production Principles and Criteria rests with the BCI Council. Elections to BCI Council are voted on at BCI’s General Assembly, and positions are open to all members (except for Associate Members). Each membership category has 3 seats, for a total of 12 seats. Once elected, the Council has the option to appoint up to three additional independent people to the Council, not representative of any specific member category. BCI membership is made up of the following categories: Producer Organisations, Civil Society, Retailers & Brands, Suppliers & Manufacturers, and Associate Members.

Decision-making process
No decision shall be made by the Council unless a quorum as defined in the Council By-Laws is present. The Council shall seek to make all decisions by consensus (absence of sustained opposition). In the case where the Council is unable to reach consensus, the Council shall resort to a vote as determined in the By-Laws of the Council.

Submitting Comments and Complaints
The BCI website provides a focal point enabling any interested party to submit comments, complaints or requests for clarification on the current version of the standard. BCI’s complaints resolution mechanism is detailed in the ‘Grievance Management Procedure,’ publicly available here: http://bettercotton.org/about-bci/members-and-partners/policies/grievances/

*The next formal review of the Standard will take place in 2015*
Annex 1 - Stakeholder Identification