



# Grower Self-Assessment Questionnaire

## *Purpose and Scope*

The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Grower Self-Assessment Questionnaire empowers cotton growers to showcase and strengthen their commitment to sustainable farming excellence. The questionnaire supports adherence to the [U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol's Principles and Criteria](#). This collaborative tool helps growers demonstrate their stewardship while identifying opportunities for growth and innovation. This questionnaire serves as both a compliance verification mechanism in annual Trust Protocol verification assessments and an educational framework to promote continuous improvement in production methods.

## *Review and Updates*

The questionnaire undergoes regular review and updates, and the changes reflect evolving best practices and regulatory requirements. Members are notified of significant changes to requirements. Individual member responses are kept confidential and only aggregated data may be used for industry reporting. The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol maintains program integrity through a straightforward documentation process. Growers keep clear records of their farming activities, including permits, licenses, training certificates, and application logs. These records support their questionnaire responses and are available when needed. To confirm accuracy, third-party verifiers may review responses through on-site visits or by checking digital records and images. Growers complete the self-assessment annually as part of the enrollment process, with support readily available to help them strengthen and document their sustainable farming practices.



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<i>Questionnaire version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Comment</i>
U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Self-Assessment Questionnaire v.1.0	March 2020	The first version of the Trust Protocol SAQ is launched
U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Self-Assessment Questionnaire v.1.1	December 2021 December 2022 May 2023	Update with non-substantive changes
U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Self-Assessment Questionnaire v.2.0	June 2023 – December 2023	Revision process including public stakeholder consultation
	January 2024	Trust Protocol SAQ v2.0 effective
U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Self-Assessment Questionnaire v.2.1	January 2025	Non-substantive content changes and more structural change

# Structure and Components

The questionnaire consists of three distinct sections grouped by the categories in our sustainability best practice principles:

## 1. Mandatory Practices (58 Questions)

- Encompasses practices required by U.S. federal law and U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol core standards
- Full compliance is mandatory for maintaining U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol membership unless it's not applicable under certain conditions
- Covers critical areas including worker safety, environmental protection, and regulatory compliance
- Non-compliance with any mandatory practice may result in membership review

## 2. Recommended Practices (63 Questions)

- Region-specific best practices that support sustainable cotton production
- Requires yes/no responses to measure adoption of best management practices
- Helps identify areas for improvement and development
- Demonstrates commitment to continuous advancement in sustainable agriculture

## 3. In-Depth Farm Analysis (10 Questions)

- Detailed quantitative assessment of specific farming operations
- Requires percentage-based responses to measure implementation levels
- Provides measurable metrics for tracking progress
- Supports data-driven decision making for farm management

# Principle 1: Soil Health and Regenerative Practice Management



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>1.1</b> Assure farm meets Conservation Compliance provisions (e.g., highly erodible land) of the U.S. Farm Law as well as any state or local requirements.	Required	In compliance
<b>1.2</b> Where significant changes in topography exist, orient rows along contours.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>1.3</b> Prevent or alleviate soil compaction through prescribed tillage operations, controlled traffic patterns and avoidance of traffic where soil moisture is above field capacity.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>1.4</b> Work with advisors or mentors who have expertise in soil health.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>1.5</b> Plant cover crops with a goal to have living roots on as many months of the year as possible to increase soil micro-organisms, protect soil and improve soil organic matter.	Quantitative	Based on percentage of fields in your farm  1) Less than 25 % 2) 26-50% 3) 51-75% 4) Above 76% 5) Not applicable
<b>1.6</b> Construct and maintain erosion control structures such as contour terraces, catch basins, diversion channels and grassed waterways.	Quantitative	
<b>1.7</b> Maintain plant residue on soil surface year-round.	Quantitative	
<b>1.8</b> Use permanent and/or annual windbreaks to reduce wind erosion.	Quantitative	
<b>1.9</b> Rotate cotton with other crops when economically feasible.	Quantitative	
<b>1.10</b> Utilize conservation tillage practices such as minimum, strip, mulch or no-till.	Quantitative	

## Principle 2: Nutrient Management



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>2.1</b> Check and comply with local regulations when applying manure.	Required	In compliance
<b>2.2</b> Have a nutrient management plan that considers soil type, soil pH, and related local conditions while avoiding excess fertilization and conducting soil tests as appropriate for nutrients and micronutrients.	Required	In compliance
<b>2.3</b> Apply manure in a manner to minimize movement to surface or ground water.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.4</b> Use enhanced- efficiency fertilizers and additives as appropriate.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.5</b> Apply only recommended amounts of nutrients to meet attainable productivity targets.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.6</b> Test animal wastes and manure used for fertilizer for nutrient content, and match rate applied to crop needs.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.7</b> Apply fertilizer as close to time of crop need as possible.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.8</b> Work with an agronomist or other qualified expert with training in nutrient management to improve run-off water quality.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.9</b> Monitor plant nutrition needs by in-season tissue testing, such as petiole monitoring.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.10</b> Keep records of application dates, materials and rates to track efficiency and identify opportunities for improvement.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.11</b> Consider soil types when selecting fertilizer sources and also the fertilizer types match to crop needs	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.12</b> Use GPS or other precision application tools, such as variable rate application systems where nutrient and soil variations warrant.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.13</b> Keep records of application dates, materials and rates to track efficiency and identify opportunities for improvement.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>2.14</b> Conduct soil test to determine residual N, P & K and micronutrients and apply only recommended amounts to meet attainable productivity targets.	Quantitative	Based on how frequently you are testing soil in your farm 1) at least once in every 2 years 2) at least once in every 5 years 3) at least once in 10 years 4) No lab testing ever done



# Principle 3: Water Management



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>3.1</b> On installation of new wells or existing wells (where applicable), comply with local and state requirements including licensing if appropriate.	Required	In compliance
<b>3.2</b> Utilize scientific models for water quality monitoring to forecast the potential for nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment, and chemical runoff losses across a field such as FieldPrint calculator or probes or gauges or meters.	Required	In compliance
<b>3.3</b> Conserve and utilize natural rainfall through practices such as using rain water harvesting methods, soil amendments, etc.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.4</b> Utilize flow meters or canal structures to measure water use.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.5</b> Utilize irrigation strategies which complement overall management of crop, pests and harvest date.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.6</b> Use soil, climate, or plant-based measurements such as moisture probes or potential evapotranspiration (PET) data to monitor soil and crop water status.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.7</b> Use riparian buffer when water features are present.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.8</b> Utilize variable rate irrigation (VRI) on fields with known spatial variability in soil types, topography, and/or non-crop areas.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.9</b> Install and maintain filter strip/buffer strips/field borders.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.10</b> Install and maintain grass waterways where applicable.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.11</b> Install and maintain sediment control basin.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.12</b> Implement stream habitat improvement for native species.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.13</b> Assess the effectiveness of water management plan by monitoring, measuring, and managing current irrigation strategy.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>3.14</b> For flood/furrow irrigation use tail water recovery systems.	Recommended	Yes/No

# Principle 4: Crop Protection



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>4.1</b> Following harvest, destroy stalks to eliminate, reduce or prevent overwintering insect and disease pests in keeping with local or regional conditions and regulations.	Required	In compliance
<b>4.2</b> Participate in community-wide and area-wide approaches to pest management, such as containment and eradication involving resistant invasive or non-native pests.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.3</b> Manage weed seed bank by spot-applying post-emergence and layby herbicides or hand-rogue sporadic infestations to prevent seed buildup.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.4</b> Inspect and document fields in spring and fall for weed species and density to select appropriate weed strategy.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.5</b> Monitor for pesticide resistant pests and follow recommended guidelines for resistance management.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.6</b> Use plant-based measurements to help determine economic thresholds (e.g., square and/or boll retention).	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.7</b> Use production practices that promote healthy stands such as appropriate date of planting, optimum soil temperatures, appropriate seeding rate, seed vitality and seedbed preparation.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.8</b> Inspect and keep annual records of fields and weed, insect, disease pressure.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.9</b> Use qualified consultants or certified crop consultants to monitor crop and pest status and make recommendations for management.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>4.10</b> Maximize control provided by naturally occurring predators and pathogens by avoiding unnecessary insecticide applications and selecting least disruptive materials.	Quantitative	What percentage of acres on the farm are you doing this practice 1) Less than 25 % 2) 26-50% 3) 51-75% 4) Above 76% 5) Not applicable

# Principle 5: Chemical Management



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>5.1</b> Communicate information to employees on hazardous chemicals through labels, safety data sheets (SDS), and training programs as well as a written hazardous communication program and recordkeeping.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.2</b> Comply with Worker Protection Standard regarding protective clothing, posting, restricted re-entry intervals, and training.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.3</b> Consider climatic and environmental factors such as temperature inversions, wind speed and wind direction.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.4</b> Consider environmentally sensitive sites such as homes, desirable vegetation, streams, rivers lakes and public areas.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.5</b> Follow label and use directions of crop protection products, and only on the crops specified.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.6</b> For restricted use pesticides, maintain records of plant protection chemical applications according to the product label, such as product name, rates, field locations, etc.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.7</b> Maintain required training and certification of pesticide applicators consistent with current requirements.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.8</b> Make records available for audits by state enforcement officials consistent with current regulations.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.9</b> Obtain necessary permits, licenses, and training for the application of crop protection products.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.10</b> Report pesticide use consistent with state laws and regulations.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.11</b> Use enclosed cabs on all ground boom application equipment for restricted use pesticides.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.12</b> Use only crop protection materials registered and approved by the U.S. EPA and state regulators.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.13</b> Be aware of school and residential areas and maintain buffer zones for harvest aid applications.	Required	In compliance

Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>5.14</b> Calibrate equipment and monitor for intended coverage.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.15</b> Follow precautions listed on harvest aid chemical labels.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.16</b> When required for a specific restricted use pesticide, including highly hazardous pesticides, employ closed application and delivery systems and product-specific mitigation as mandated on label, to prevent exposure of workers and operators, spills and environmental exposure.	Required	In compliance
<b>5.17</b> Use charcoal air filters or any comparable system in enclosed cabs of all ground boom application equipment.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.18</b> Use science-based action thresholds to initiate pesticide treatments.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.19</b> Dispose of sprayer rinse water by spraying on crops listed on label in accordance with label directions.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.20</b> For mixing liquid fertilizers, provide for impermeable surface, sloped to keep spills contained where applicable. Locate farm chemical storage and handling facilities as far from water sources as possible—at least 500 feet from surface water sources and 300 feet from water well.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.21</b> Maintain pesticide storage in separate free-standing building or cabinet used only for pesticides. Post signs and keep building locked. Provide roof and maintain impermeable floor or install curbs in storage and handling areas to contain leaks and spills of pesticides and fuels. No drain or provide floor drain to acceptable holding tank.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.22</b> Recycle farm chemical containers where recycle centers are available or dispose of rinsed containers and empty bags in municipal landfill. Check local ordinances on disposal of pesticide containers.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.23</b> Work with suppliers to improve health and safety, e.g., with farm equipment manufacturers and with suppliers of crop protection products on recycling containers and new mixing/application systems.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.24</b> Enhance the efficacy of synthetic fertilizers by embracing their synergistic potential when integrated with organic soil amendments including compost and animal manure.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.25</b> Use appropriate storage of fertilizers including manure to prevent leaching and runoff.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>5.26</b> Choose application method (e.g., ground or aerial) according to local conditions and proximity to sensitive areas i.e., buildings, streams, etc.	Recommended	Yes/No



## Principle 6: Biodiversity



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>6.1</b> Quantify the Habitat Potential Index for the 10% or more of the cultivated cotton land's immediate surroundings using Field to Market tools or complete the U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol Fieldprint® Analysis (this is provided when you complete step 6 of enrollment).	Required	In compliance
<b>6.2</b> Be able to access maps, images, or sketches of the whole farm that can be used for identifying cover types such as forest, cultivated land, field borders, water features, wet lands, riparian areas, buffer zones, grassed areas, and non-profitable degraded areas for consideration for conversion to wildlife usage.	Required	In compliance
<b>6.3</b> Convert highly erodible non-productive land to conservation reserve, permanent pasture, or wildlife habitat areas.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>6.4</b> Conduct your own wildlife population trends assessment and whether you view the population each common species such as bobwhite quail, turkey, and deer as declining, stable or increasing.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>6.5</b> Engage a private land wildlife biologist for a farm visit to evaluate future possibilities to increase and support wildlife.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>6.6</b> Use return on investment analysis to evaluate each acre or zone of a field for profitability and consider converting non profitable land to conservation areas or enrolling in programs such as the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>6.7</b> Enrolled or have participated in an existing program such as Conservation Reserve, EQIP, or other federal or state conservation programs.	Quantitative	Based on the percentage of area on the farm 1) less than 1% 2) 2-5% 3) 5-10% 4) over 10% 5) Not applicable
<b>6.8</b> Enhance pollinator habitat by allowing native vegetation (e.g., wildflowers or native grasses) to become established in appropriate areas.	Quantitative	

# Principle 7: Fiber Quality and Traceability



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>7.1</b> Consider data from replicated trials or other reliable sources when selecting varieties.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.2</b> Keep records of fields, bales and fiber quality.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.3</b> Select varieties with fiber quality profile and yield potential consistent with market needs and profitability.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.4</b> Use application technology such as adjuvants and proper nozzle size to ensure good coverage while maintaining drift control.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.5</b> Inspect module covers and wraps for damage and repair as needed to prevent plastic contamination.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.6</b> Locate modules to appropriate site as soon as possible to provide greatest protection from water damage.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.7</b> Base selection and rates of harvest aid materials on crop status using techniques such as percent open boll, nodes above cracked boll, environmental conditions and harvest schedule.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.8</b> Inspect fields and remove any plastic mulch, shopping bags, plastic hay twine or other potential lint contaminants.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>7.98.7</b> Urge ginner to follow practices to completely remove module cover materials and provide 100% inspection of module before entering the seed cotton feeders.	Recommended	Yes/No

# Principle 8: Farm Management



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>8.1</b> Based on storage volume, maintain written emergency hazardous spill plan (Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures plan requirements or other regulatory requirements).	Required	In compliance
<b>8.2</b> Follow local regulations for unused and/or abandoned water wells.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.3</b> If applicable based on storage volume, provide dikes for petroleum tanks to hold 110% of tank volume.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.4</b> Locate above-ground petroleum storage tanks at a minimum of 25 feet from any source of ignition or propane source.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.5</b> Lock out electrical power before performing maintenance or service. Tag out with detailed instructions on tag to help prevent accidental injury to personnel.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.6</b> Maintain well casing height in compliance with local regulations.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.7</b> Provide regular employee educational programs dealing with farm safety, pesticide handling and on-farm environmental concerns.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.8</b> Read label and follow any local ordinances on disposal of pesticide containers.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.9</b> Secure all pesticides during transportation and ensure they do not come in contact with human or animal food, clothing, bedding, toiletries or similar items.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.10</b> Triple rinse all jug, bottle or bucket pesticide containers and encourage supplier of totes to rinse totes or take other measures to minimize exposure to workers or the environment.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.11</b> Work to assure on-farm disposal sites are in compliance with state and local regulations. Properly dispose of used motor oils, adhesives, paints, cleaners or lubricants.	Required	In compliance
<b>8.12</b> Use anti-backflow devices or maintain air-gap of at least 6 inches between tap or hose and liquid in spray tank. Do not make cross-connections between water supplies.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>8.13</b> Locate wastewater disposal systems more than 500 feet from potential surface water sources.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>8.14</b> Test drinking water used by family and farm workers periodically to assure bacteria, nitrate and other pollutants do not exceed safe levels.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>8.15</b> Ensure that unloading operations of Anhydrous Ammonia are performed by reliable persons properly instructed and given the authority to monitor careful compliance with all applicable procedures.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>8.16</b> Install cement pads and curbs around petroleum storage tanks to contain leaks (where applicable). Locate as far from wells as possible.	Recommended	Yes/No
<b>8.17</b> Position water wells upslope from all sources of contamination. If well already exists, take measures to prevent direct flow of runoff into well or casing.	Recommended	Yes/No

## Principle 9: Worker Well-being



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>9.1</b> Ensure the farm has a clear set of procedure in case of any worker grievances.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.2</b> Workers have clear work-related agreements and expectations either in written or verbal contract.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.3</b> Be knowledgeable of rules in accordance with U.S. labor laws for hiring migrant workers, including their children, housing, working conditions and compensation.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.4</b> Comply with regulations applicable to agricultural operations under the Occupational Safety and Health Act as well as EPA worker protection standards and other appropriate regulations.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.5</b> Employees have access to sanitation that consists of drinking water, toilet and handwashing facilities.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.6</b> Ensure that accident and emergency procedures, including first aid kits and access to appropriate transportation to medical facilities, are in place.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.7</b> Equal wages are paid to workers who perform the same job, irrespective of gender.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.8</b> Identify confined spaces and provide guidance on proper procedures to follow when entering these spaces.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.9</b> Maintain safety guards and/or shields on farm equipment.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.10</b> Participate in producer, professional, or civic organizations actively promoting community well-being.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.11</b> Post slow-moving vehicle emblem for any machine that travels 25 mph or less on public roads.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.12</b> Post, record and report occupational illness and injuries in a timely manner.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.13</b> Provide a roll-over protective structure (ROPS) on all tractors operated by employees.	Required	In compliance



Questions	Type of question	Possible answers
<b>9.14</b> Provide personal protective equipment for eyes, ears, face, head, feet, and hands where necessary.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.15</b> Review and update the health and safety program periodically; conduct periodic meetings and training sessions.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.16</b> The farm abides by the state laws regarding nighttime work and prohibited hazardous occupations allowed for underage minors.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.17</b> The wage rate paid to workers is equal to or higher than the federal minimum wage and wage records show that workers are paid regularly and on time through an appropriate method of payment.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.18</b> There are no forms of forced labor or forced prison labor on the farm.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.19</b> There are no workers employed below the minimum age for employment defined by law.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.20</b> Use of corporal punishment, mental or physical coercion, sexual harassment or physical or verbal abuse or harassment of any kind is prohibited.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.21</b> Workers have the right to establish or join organizations of their own choosing and there is no management interference with the right of workers to bargain collectively.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.22</b> Provide housing for temporary labor that consists of shelter, water supply, toilet facilities, bathing facilities, sewage disposal facilities, lighting, refuse disposal, first aid, pest control, and reporting of communicable disease.	Required	In compliance
<b>9.23</b> Take measures such as posting Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) placards and posters in common areas in order to advise of the policy to prevent all forms of discrimination in the workplace and also advise of grievance procedures.	Required	In compliance