Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning System:
The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol

Version 1.0 - May 2025

Contents

Section A- Defining the intended change

A1. The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol

The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol is the voluntary sustainability program for U.S. cotton growers and traceability platform for all U.S. Cotton.

The Trust Protocol's mission is to create a sustainable standard for U.S. Cotton that is data-powered, traceable by design, and generates positive impact through the global cotton value system – from farms to finished product.

Our vision is to be the world's most trusted fiber program where full traceability is a reality and continuous, measurable improvement of our environmental footprint sets the standard for the global market. Read more about our program here.

The U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol provides a set of voluntary sustainability principles and criteria for U.S. cotton growers in order to promote achievement of social and environmental management practices aligned with global regulatory requirements and market needs. The program serves as guidance for best practices and uses a framework emphasizing continuous improvement within the farming operation. The Trust Protocol drives change by encouraging environmental preservation, ensuring fair treatment of workers, and demonstrating U.S. cotton's commitment to be an environmentally sound and responsibly produced product. The Trust Protocol also incorporates tools developed by the Field to Market program and other partners to measure sustainability metrics.

The Trust Protocol is a non-profit governed by a multi-stakeholder board of directors including growers, brands/retailers, civil society representatives from conservation and wildlife initiatives, ginners, merchants, marketing cooperatives, textile manufacturers, and cottonseed crushers/handlers. The mission is to meet U.S. cotton customers' sustainability needs and to provide transparency about cotton industry efforts to promote grower economic livelihood, environmental stewardship, caring of people and community, and personal and corporate integrity.

A2. Objective of the Program

The Trust Protocol provides a voluntary mechanism to support individual cotton grower management programs and communicate common elements of best management practices.

The Trust Protocol was developed as a platform for measuring environmental impact and assuring rights of workers while maintaining profitability. The objective of the program is to meet the evolving requirements of the three pillars of sustainability for the U.S cotton industry relevant to economics, environment, and social standards, while assuring continuous improvement.

A3. Guiding Principles

A3.1 To have the largest positive impact at scale, program objectives must be reasonably achievable by growers, encourage use of best available technology, have a positive effect on environmental metrics (land, water, and air) and provide tangible market access incentives through brand and retail customer acceptance.

A3.2 To drive change at the national scale and engage the majority of cotton acres in the U.S.

A3.3 To help the U.S. cotton industry achieve their national established sustainability goals, initiated with 2025 targets established for land use, energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, water use, soil conservation, and soil conditioning index (soil carbon).

A3.4 To assure employee health and safety with an emphasis to meet or exceed all national standards regarding labor rights, workplace conditions, and fundamental principles of employment conditions. Additional assurance to legal enforcement of U.S. worker health and safety requirements is provided by the Trust Protocol's second and third-party assurance.

A3.5 To enhance profitability for cotton growers by supporting the adoption of best management practices that improve soil, water, and climate resilience. The Trust Protocol also supports growers in identifying opportunities for continuous improvement.

A4. MEL system description

A4.1 Scope and boundaries

A4.1.1 The Trust Protocol's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system is designed to measure, evaluate, and learn from both field-level environmental impacts and value chain activities. The system encompasses two main data categories:

1. **Field Practice/Grower Data**: This includes field-level data, including coordinates for extracting environmental characteristics and properties, as well as information on management practices. This data is then used to generate comprehensive environmental metrics covering land use efficiency, water use, energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, soil conservation, and soil carbon. These metrics allow us to track aggregate program achievements against established baselines and targets.
2. **Value Chain Data**: This includes traceability information, member participation metrics demonstrating the program's reach and market uptake (growers, gins, merchants, brands, retailers, and manufacturers), and supply chain verification data capturing the movement of eligible materials through the manufacturing value chain to finished products. This data supports member reporting and marketing claims.

The MEL system does not directly measure economic impacts at the individual farm level but does track program-level metrics that indicate economic benefits through market access, efficiency improvements, and value creation.

A4.1.2 Our MEL system follows a structured data journey from collection to impact reporting

1. **Data Collection**:
    a. **Farm level**: The Trust Protocol utilizes The Seam, as our Qualified Data Management Partner (QDMP) for the Field to Market Fieldprint Platform, to securely collect our growers' essential field data: geographic coordinates (for extracting field characteristics) and management practices. The Seam provides the data governance framework for this initial collection and securely stores this information on their database. We receive this data, which is supplemented by information from a grower self-assessment questionnaire, and are responsible for data cleaning, accuracy verification, processing, and the subsequent calculation of environmental metrics.
    b. **Supply chain level**: Supply chain data is collected through the Protocol Platform, which enables traceability and chain of custody verification. Combined, the Protocol Platform and the TextileGenesis Platform make up our proprietary Protocol Consumption Management Solution (PCMS) to collect information on volumes of eligible materials, U.S. Cotton and Protocol Cotton. Eligible materials are defined in the Trust Protocol's Claims Framework and transacted from cotton bales to finished products in the supply chain.

At the beginning of the process, a brand selects which products to track, their suppliers, and the season to begin. The supply chain is then informed of the requirements and ultimately the demand requirements are communicated downward to the yarn spinners who source the required U.S. Cotton or cotton specifically grown on Protocol producers' farms.

Merchants, marketing cooperatives and agents upload the initial fiber shipment in files that contains each unique Permanent Bale Identification (PBI) number which is validated in the PCMS against the USDA/FAS database for authenticity and non-duplication. The Protocol Platform then sends this data to the supply chain systems, currently through TextileGenesis™ where all members – including fiber, yarn, fabric and garment makers– will perform their required data entry steps.

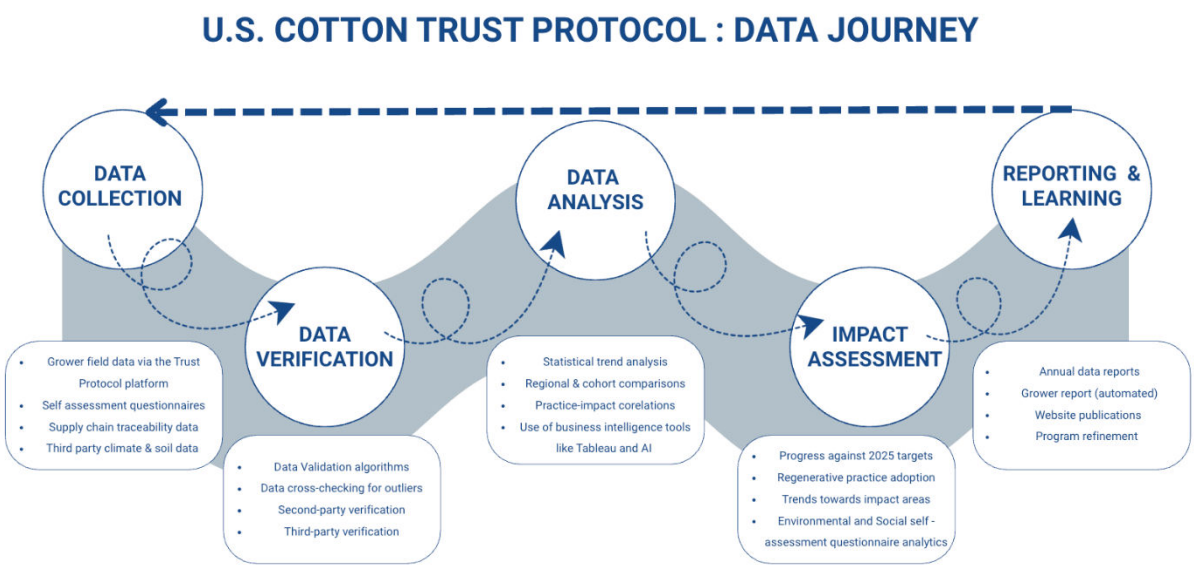
After finished product shipments have been recoded to the brand and retail member, the shipment and consumption data is placed on the Brand Dashboard to allow them to see data related to each shipment by purchase order, as well as the total volume of cotton specifically grown on Protocol producers' farms or U.S. Cotton fiber consumed.

2. **Data Verification (farm level data)**: Our data handling process begins with a thorough cleaning stage, where the completion and accuracy of the Grower Self-Assessment Questionnaire is carefully checked. Any identified outliers are flagged, and growers are then prompted to submit corrections to their data. Following this initial cleaning, a multi-level verification process is implemented. This includes second-party checks and third-party verification conducted by Control Union Certifications, Averum, and IDFL: Textile Testing & Quality Assurance. This comprehensive approach ensures the accuracy and credibility of the data provided by our grower members.

3. **Data Analysis (farm level data)**: Our analysis focuses on field-level environmental sustainability metrics. We employ statistical methods to identify trends, measure progress against baselines, and evaluate the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices. To further uncover patterns and opportunities for improvement, we utilize advanced analytics such as AI/ML models and business intelligence tools like Tableau.

4. **Impact Assessment**: The analyzed data is used to assess progress against the program's environmental targets set by U.S. Sustainability Task Force and evaluate the broader impact of sustainable cotton production practices. The Trust Protocol also leverages external data sources including USDA-NASS cotton production statistics, USDA-NRCS soil conservation models, drought monitoring data, and climate databases to provide context and enhance the accuracy of impact assessments.

5. **Reporting and Learning**: Findings are communicated through annual reports, website publications, and stakeholder engagement, creating feedback loops that inform program improvements and strategic direction.



A4.2 Initial development and review

A4.2.1 The Trust Protocol's MEL system has evolved significantly since the program's inception. Initially focused on establishing baseline metrics and developing data collection methodologies, the system now embraces a robust Theory of Change that connects program activities to measurable environmental outcomes and broader impacts.

The development of our Theory of Change involved extensive stakeholder consultations with growers, industry experts, brands and retailers, conservation organizations, and academic partners. This collaborative approach ensured that our metrics and evaluation methodology aligned with both scientific best practices and practical industry needs.

As the program has matured, our MEL system has expanded to incorporate more sophisticated data analytics, enhanced visualization capabilities, and automated reporting functions. Regular reviews by our multi-stakeholder board of directors ensure that the system remains rigorous, relevant, and responsive to evolving challenges and opportunities.

The MEL system undergoes a comprehensive review every five years to incorporate new scientific understanding, technological advancements, and feedback from program participants. This iterative approach allows us to continuously refine our methods and metrics to better capture the program's contribution to sustainable cotton production.

Section B- Key components of the MEL system

C1. Data and information

C1.1 **Data and information**

Evolution of Data Use

The Trust Protocol's approach to data has evolved substantially since the program's launch. Initially, we focused on establishing baseline metrics for key environmental indicators and developing standardized data collection methodologies. Today, our data strategy has matured into a comprehensive system that not only measures environmental performance but also drives continuous improvement through actionable insights.

Our current data approach enables us to:

- Track progress against established sustainability targets
- Identify patterns and trends in best management farming practices
- Segment data by region, growing conditions, and farming systems
- Correlate specific practices with environmental outcomes
- Provide personalized insights to growers for continuous improvement

Looking forward, we aim to further enhance our data capabilities by:

- Implementing advanced predictive analytics to forecast environmental trends
- Developing more granular climate impact models
- Integrating satellite and remote sensing data for enhanced verification
- Expanding life cycle assessment capabilities to provide more comprehensive impact measurements
- Enabling more sophisticated benchmarking tools for growers with help of collaboration and partnerships

C1.2 **Data systems and tools:**

The Trust Protocol leverages several key data systems and tools to collect, analyze, and report sustainability metrics:

Grower Data/ Field Inputs

1. **Protocol Platform**: Our proprietary digital platform serves as the central hub for member registration, data collection, and traceability tracking across the supply chain.
2. **Grower member enrollment and Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)**: Proprietary digital platform for collecting data on grower practices related to soil health, water management, biodiversity, and other sustainability dimensions.
3. **Field to Market's Fieldprint® Platform**: Integrated with our systems, this platform enables the calculation of environmental metrics based on grower-provided field data.
4. **USDA-NRCS Models**: Including the Integrated Erosion Tool and Soil Conditioning Index to assess soil conservation and carbon sequestration embedded into the Fieldprint platform.
5. **Verification Management System**: Tracks the planning, execution, and results of second and third-party verification activities.

6. **Climate Data Integration System**: Incorporates regional climate data to contextualize environmental performance and normalize metrics across diverse growing conditions.
7. **Water Use Metric (WUM)**: An AI-driven metric that integrates critical concepts of blue water (irrigation) and green water (rainfall) to provide a more comprehensive view of water management across different field conditions.

Value Chain Data

1. **Protocol Platform**: Our proprietary digital platform serves as the central hub for member registration, data collection, and traceability tracking across the supply chain. The Protocol Platform supports value chain traceability by integrating our Protocol Consumption Management Solution with third party technology for tracking cotton through the entire value chain.
2. **TextileGenesis**: Integrated with the Protocol Platform, this platform is where all members – including fiber, yarn, fabric and garment makers– record the movement of materials in real time to achieve article level traceability.

C1.3 **Business intelligence tools**

To transform raw data into actionable insights, the Trust Protocol employs several business intelligence tools:

1. **Tableau**: Custom dashboards for internal program management, grower performance visualization, and executive reporting.
2. **GIS Mapping Tools integrated in Tableau**: Spatial analysis capabilities for regional performance assessment and visualization.
3. **R and Python Analytics**: Custom statistical analysis and machine learning packages for data modeling, trend analysis, and predictive analytics.
4. **Interactive Reporting Platform**: Web-based system that generates personalized sustainability reports for growers and other program participants.
5. **Sayari**: A commercial Risk Intelligence Platform providing access to global corporate and trade data through a SaaS platform. This platform is used to assess entity compliance risks, for vetting responsible participation in our program.
6.

C1.4 **Organizational Data Governance:**

The Trust Protocol has established a robust data governance framework to ensure the quality, security, and appropriate use of all program data. Key elements include:

1. **Data Ownership and Rights**: Clear policies defining data ownership rights for growers and other program stakeholders.
2. **Data Quality Management**: Protocols for data validation, verification, and continuous quality assurance for ensuring data accuracy and reliability.

3. **Data Security and Privacy**: Comprehensive security measures and privacy protections aligned with global best practices and regulations for safeguarding all program data as well as growers' and stakeholders' information.
4. **Data Access Controls**: Role-based access controls ensuring appropriate data visibility and access both within the organization and for authorized external stakeholders.
5. **Data Retention and Archiving**: Clear policies governing the systematic retention, secure archiving, and responsible disposal of all program data throughout its lifecycle.

The above elements are assured through the Trust Protocol's partnership with The Seam, the Trust Protocol's key technology partner. The data governance practices above are developed and maintained by The Seam and the Trust Protocol supports review and revision of these policies and procedures.

As the Trust Protocol program and MEL system matures, additional development of these policies and procedures will likely be necessary. Considerations for adaptation and changes to these policies and procedures will occur in line with the learning processes outlined in Section D- Learning and Communications.

C1.4 **Digital data and information strategy or Data Strategy:**

The Trust Protocol's data strategy is guided by four core principles:

1. **Accuracy**: Ensuring all data collected is verified, reliable, and representative.
2. **Actionability**: Focusing on metrics that drive meaningful improvement in sustainable practices.
3. **Accessibility**: Making insights available to stakeholders in formats that facilitate understanding and action.
4. **Adaptability**: Maintaining flexibility to incorporate new metrics, methodologies, and technologies as sustainability science evolves.

C2. Monitoring Function

C2.1 Theory of Change and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Trust Protocol's Theory of Change establishes clear pathways from program activities to desired impacts. Our model connects specific interventions to short-term outputs, medium-term outcomes, and long-term impacts across environmental and social dimensions.

Program Activities:

- Grower enrollment and data collection via self-assessment of sustainability practices
- Assessment of environmental impacts
- Second and third-party verification
- Supply chain traceability verification
- Stakeholder engagement and reporting
- Education and training about regenerative practices

Short-term Outputs:

- Increased awareness of sustainable farming practices
- Baseline measurement of environmental performance
- Enhanced documentation of on-farm practices
- Verified sustainable cotton entering the supply chain

Medium-term Outcomes:

- Adoption of water and soil conservation practices
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and energy use
- Improved biodiversity management
- Increased market access for sustainable U.S. cotton
- Greater transparency in cotton supply chains

Long-term Impacts:

- Climate resilience in U.S. cotton production
- Enhanced soil health and ecosystem services
- Reduced environmental footprint of U.S. cotton
- Improved grower livelihoods and community wellbeing
- Transformation of cotton supply chains toward sustainability & traceability

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Our monitoring system tracks progress through the following key metrics:

Environmental Performance:

- Land use efficiency (sq.ft/lb of cotton)
- Water use efficiency (lb/ft^3)
- Energy use (BTU/lb)
- Greenhouse gas emissions (lb. CO_2e/lb)
- Soil conservation (tons/acre/year)
- Soil carbon (Soil Conditioning Index)

Practice Adoption:

- Percentage of growers implementing conservation tillage
- Percentage of growers using cover crops
- Percentage of growers practicing crop rotation
- Percentage of growers using precision nutrient application
- Percentage of growers implementing integrated pest management
- Percentage of growers practicing biodiversity indicators
- Percentage of growers for 131 region-based self assessment questions covered through Principles & Criteria

Program Reach and Engagement:

- Number of enrolled growers
- Percentage of U.S. cotton acreage enrolled
- Number of participating brands and retailers
- Number of participating mills and manufacturers
- Volume of Protocol Cotton in verified supply chains
- Volume of U.S. Cotton in verified supply chains
- Geographic distribution of program participation
- Public marketing and impact claims

C2.2 Research and Evaluation

The Trust Protocol conducts targeted research and evaluation activities to deepen understanding of program impacts and inform continuous improvement. Our approach combines the data analysis we conduct internally with external research partnerships to generate robust evidence on the effectiveness of sustainable cotton production practices.

C2.2.1 How we conduct research to substantiate our impacts and further our objectives.

Internal Research Activities:

- Statistical analysis of environmental metrics to identify trends and assess the effectiveness of conservation efforts
- Cohort analysis to track the performance of grower groups over time
- Regional analysis of geography and climate data to provide regional context for sustainability and conservation efforts
- Assessment of the effects of specific management approaches on sustainability outcomes

External Research Partnerships:

- Collaboration with organizations such as Field to Market, Soil Health Institute, etc.
- Engagement with conservation organizations on impact assessment such as biodiversity
- Partnerships with climate research institutions on carbon sequestration modeling
- Industry research initiatives exploring market impacts and consumer perceptions

Evaluation Framework:

Under the evaluation framework, the Trust Protocol implements the SMART methodology (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to systematically assess all program elements, enabling precise tracking of progress against quantifiable targets with defined timelines, ensuring interventions remain strategically aligned with core objectives and maintain technically feasible implementation parameters.

1. **Specific**: Our environmental sustainability metrics are precisely defined with unambiguous calculation methodologies and clearly delineated system boundaries. This ensures everyone understands exactly what is being measured and how.
2. **Measurable**: All environmental sustainability metrics are calculated at the field level using robust, process-based models. These values are then aggregated at program level with defined units, supported by statistical confidence intervals and reproducible measurement protocols for consistent and reliable results.
3. **Achievable**: Targets for our metrics are realistically determined based on thorough data-driven baseline analysis. This ensures that the targets are feasible across the diverse agricultural systems and production environments within the program.
4. **Relevant**: Metrics directly connect to raw material environmental impacts, regulatory requirements, and market demands through validated causal analysis.
5. **Time-bound**: Progress against the metrics is tracked against explicit temporal dimensions, including annual benchmarks, trend analysis over time, and defined endpoint objectives for 2025 and beyond. This allows us to assess our performance and adapt strategies as needed within defined timelines.

Section D- Learning and communication

U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol has established robust mechanisms to ensure that monitoring and evaluation findings translate into organizational learning and program improvements. Our approach emphasizes both structured reflection on data insights and transparent communication with stakeholders.

Internal Learning Processes:

The Trust Protocol implements several formal learning processes to integrate evaluation findings into program development:

1. **Annual Impact Review**: A comprehensive assessment of environmental performance data that informs program strategy and identifies areas for enhanced support or intervention.
2. **Monthly Performance Dashboards**: Regular updates on key metrics shared with the management team and board to enable timely adjustments to program activities through monthly team meetings.
3. **Grower Webinar**: Regional sessions where monitoring data is shared with growers to facilitate peer learning and practice improvement.
4. **Board of Director Reviews**: Expert analysis of monitoring results to validate methodologies and recommend refinements to data collection or analysis approaches.
5. **Annual data governance review:** Review of data governance policies and procedures with the Trust Protocol's technology partners including, but not limited to, The Seam and TextileGenesis.

Examples of Learning-Internal Changes:

Example 1: Water Use Metric Development: Monitoring historical grower data revealed challenges in comparing water use efficiency across different cotton-growing regions due to variations in rainfall patterns, irrigation practices, and inconsistencies in grower-provided estimates of non-irrigated yields. In response, the Trust Protocol developed a new AI-driven Water Use Metric that provides a more comprehensive assessment of water productivity by integrating both blue water (irrigation) and green water (rainfall). A key advancement in this new metric is the replacement of subjective grower estimates with AI-modeled non-irrigated yield values using environmental and management variables. This innovation supports data-driven decision making and has enabled more accurate benchmarking and targeted improvement strategies for growers.

Example 2: Cohort-Based Support Model: Analysis of environmental performance trends showed that growers who had been in the program for multiple years consistently achieved better results than newer participants. This insight led to the development of a cohort-based support system that provides tailored guidance to growers based on their program tenure and performance trajectory, accelerating the improvement journey for new participants.

External Communication Channels:

The Trust Protocol communicates monitoring and evaluation findings through multiple channels:

1. **Annual Impact/Data Report**: Comprehensive public report detailing program achievements, challenges, and environmental performance metrics.
2. **Grower Data Reports**: Personalized reports providing individual growers with performance metrics and benchmark comparisons.
3. **Brand & Retailer Updates**: Regular briefings for downstream partners on program progress and supply chain implications.
4. **Scientific Publications**: Collaboration with academic partners to publish peer-reviewed research on program impacts.
5. **Stakeholder Webinars**: Interactive sessions presenting key findings and gathering feedback from diverse stakeholders.
6. **Industry Conferences**: Presentations at major cotton and textile industry events to share insights and best practices.

Through these communication channels, the Trust Protocol maintains transparency about both achievements and challenges, fostering trust among stakeholders and creating opportunities for collaborative problem-solving.

Section E- Team Roles and Responsibilities

The Trust Protocol's MEL activities are coordinated by a dedicated team with support from teams across the organization. Clear roles and responsibilities ensure effective implementation of monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes.

RACI Matrix for MEL Activities:

Activity	Standards & Assurance Team	Field team	Comms team	Membership team	Supply Chain team	Finance & Operations	Executive leadership	Board of Directors	Technology partners
MEL system design and updates	R	C	I	I	I	I	A	I	C
Environmental metric algorithm development	R	C	I	I	I	I	A	I	C
Field data collection	C	R	I	I	I	I	A	I	C
Field data validation	R	C	I	I	I	I	A	I	I
Statistical analysis execution	R	C	I	I	I	I	A	I	I
Field-level data verification	R	R	I	I	I	I	A	I	I
Impact evaluation methodology	R	C	C	I	I	I	A	C	I
Annual technical reporting	R	C	C	I	I	I	A	I	I
Performance visualization development	R	I	C	I	I	I	A	I	I
Stakeholder-facing data presentation	R	I	C	I	I	I	A	I	I
API documentation queries	R	C	C	I	I	I	A	I	C
Methodological review	R	C	I	I	I	I	C	A	I
Technical roadmap development	R	C	C	I	I	I	A	C	I
Budget allocation for technical resources	C	C	C	I	I	I	R	A	I

Activity	Standards & Assurance Team	Field team	Comms team	Membership team	Supply Chain team	Finance & Operations	Executive leadership	Board of Directors	Technology partners
External technical partnership management	R	C	C	I	I	I	A	I	C
Traceability system design & updates	I	C	I	C	R	I	C	I	C
External traceability partnership management	I	I	C	C	R	C	A	I	C
Chain of custody governance	A	I	I	C	R	I	C	I	C
Value chain data validation	A	I	I	C	R	I	C	I	I

Key:

- **R**: Responsible– The team that performs the work
- **A**: Accountable - The team ultimately answerable for completion and quality
- **C**: Consulted - The team whose input is sought before final decisions
- **I**: Informed - The team kept updated on progress and decisions

The Standards & Assurance Team maintains primary responsibility for the technical implementation of the MEL system, with critical dependencies on Field Team data acquisition activities and Communications Team interface design. Executive Leadership maintains accountability for most operational aspects, while the Board of Directors assumes accountability for strategic direction and methodological integrity

Section F- Opportunities for Engagement

F1. Cotton industry engagement

The Trust Protocol has defined a stakeholder engagement approach and it is outlined in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan. U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol actively engages with the U.S. cotton industry to strengthen monitoring and evaluation processes and promote shared learning about sustainability practices. Key industry stakeholders include:

Organizations:

- National Cotton Council (NCC)
- Cotton Incorporated
- State and regional grower associations/ co-operatives
- Gins

These organizations contribute to the MEL system by providing industry context for data interpretation, facilitating grower feedback on metrics and methodologies, and supporting the dissemination of learning through established communication channels.

Engagement Mechanisms:

- Joint Measurement Development: We collaborate with Cotton Incorporated to create better ways to measure sustainability progress. Together, we've developed methods that are both scientifically sound and practical for farmers to implement, ensuring our metrics reflect regional conditions.
- Shared Technical Assistance: Our organizations combine expertise to provide comprehensive support to growers. Cotton Incorporated brings deep agronomic knowledge, while the Trust Protocol contributes measurement expertise, creating a complete package of assistance for farmers implementing best management practices.
- Coordinated Field Demonstrations: We jointly organize field days where growers and stakeholders can see sustainable practices in action and learn about measuring their environmental impact.
- Connected Research Initiatives: Our research priorities are aligned to maximize impact. When the Trust Protocol identifies measurement challenges through our data collection, Cotton Incorporated, NCC and other state and grower co-ops with gins can direct research resources to address these needs.
- Unified Industry Messaging: We align our communications about sustainability to present a consistent message to the entire cotton supply chain, from farmers to brands and retailers, strengthening the industry's sustainability story.

Example: The Field to Market Award-Winning Collaboration

Our work with Cotton Incorporated exemplifies effective industry collaboration. The 2023 Field to Market Collaboration of the Year Award recognized how we've integrated sustainability measurement with practical implementation support for farmers.

The award recognized several achievements-

- **Combined Strengths**: Cotton Incorporated's research capabilities plus the Trust Protocol's verification systems create a comprehensive program.
- **Higher Adoption Rates**: Aligned support from both organizations increases farmer participation.
- **Data-Driven Improvement**: Trust Protocol measurements identify opportunities, then Cotton Incorporated provides specific practice guidance, such as cover cropping agronomy techniques.

- **Connected Supply Chain**: Cotton Incorporated educates farmers on practices while the Trust Protocol verifies results for brands and retailers.
- **Climate-Smart Innovation**: Our Climate Smart Cotton Program helps farmers implement and measure climate-friendly practices.

This collaboration delivers both practical farmer support and the verified data that supply chain partners need.

F2. Global cotton and textile industry engagement

The Trust Protocol actively engages with global cotton and textile organizations to align sustainability approaches and share measurement insights.

Key Global Partners:

- Textile Exchange
- Cascale and Worldly
- Soil Health Institute
- Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, Field to Market
- International Cotton Advisory Committee
- Cotton Incorporated

Engagement Methods:

- Standard Alignment: We work with other cotton sustainability programs to compare metrics and methodologies, reducing the reporting burden on the supply chain.
- Data Sharing: We participate in initiatives to standardize how sustainability data is collected and reported across the cotton sector.
- Collaborative Impact Assessment: We join multi-stakeholder projects to evaluate the collective impact of cotton sustainability efforts worldwide.
- Knowledge Exchange: We contribute to global forums where sustainability measurement approaches and results are shared.

Example 1: Textile Exchange Regenerative Agriculture Working Group

The Trust Protocol engaged directly with Textile Exchange's Regenerative Agriculture Working Group to help refine their Regenerative Framework outcomes. We provided practical feedback based on our measurement experience with regenerative practices in U.S. cotton production, helping ensure the framework's indicators are both meaningful and measurable.

Our contributions included:

- Sharing insights on measuring soil health improvements
- Providing input on how to verify regenerative practice adoption
- Helping align the framework with existing measurement systems
- Ensuring the framework addressed cotton-specific environmental impacts

Example 2: Higg Index Data Standardization

In 2024, the Trust Protocol helped shape the methodology for the Higg Index toward data standardization. We contributed our expertise in farm-level data collection and verification to improve how cotton production impacts are represented in the Higg Materials Sustainability Index.

Key contributions included:

- Advising on appropriate data formats for farm-level environmental metrics
- Sharing verification protocols that ensure data quality
- Helping establish data standardization methodology for LCA impacts
- Providing insights on regional variations in environmental impacts

This collaboration helps ensure that brands and retailers using the Higg Index have access to standardized, reliable data about cotton production impacts, creating a more consistent approach to sustainable sourcing decisions across the industry.

The Trust Protocol engages with the broader global cotton and textile sector to contribute to harmonized approaches to sustainability monitoring and share learnings that advance industry-wide progress.

F3. Contact

For more information about the Trust Protocol's MEL system or to explore opportunities for engagement, please contact:

MEL System Inquiries/ Data & Metrics:

- Standards and Data Lead
- Email: integrity@trustuscotton.org

Stakeholder Inquiries:

- Stakeholder engagement manger
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