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U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol (Trust Protocol) – engaging stakeholders and ensuring programme relevance.

This document, prepared in support of Trust Protocol application for ISEAL community membership, summarises the ongoing monitoring, stakeholder consultation and review of the U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol to ensure it remains relevant to its goals to improve the impact of U.S.-grown cotton on people and planet.

The US Cotton Trust Protocol is a new programme, launched in July 2020, and as such its approach to governance is evolving with scale and maturity, along with guidance from its multi-stakeholder board. Following the first annual progress report in September 2021 and the validation of results from the field, an annual cycle of programme review and iteration will be established.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Trust Protocol is governed by a multi-stakeholder board of directors including producers, brands/retailers, conservation and wildlife civil societies, 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 on cotton industry efforts to promote producer economic livelihood, environmental stewardship, caring of people and community and personal and corporate integrity.

In developing the Trust Protocol, leaders from U.S. cotton industry organizations including the National Cotton Council, Cotton Board, Cotton Council International, and Cotton Incorporated engaged ten technical experts in cotton biology and production to discuss how future technologies would impact trends in fourteen key performance indicators, which are used to assess the sustainability of cotton production systems. As a result, recommendations for six science-based U.S. cotton industry goals were presented in 2017 to the newly formed Cotton USA Sustainability Task Force. A seventh goal, enrolling 2.5 million acres into Field to Market's Fieldprint Calculator, was also set - the Fieldprint Calculator is the tool that will measure continuous improvement and environmental metrics.

The recommendations of the expert group included goals for the next five, 10 and 30 years. The Trust Protocol was formed by the Cotton USA Sustainability Task Force as a program to enable the industry to reach goals while emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement.

Following the launch of the Trust Protocol and formation of governance statutes in 2020, the programme sets out to maintain stakeholder engagement and consultation as routine and integrated discipline in the ongoing evolution of the programme, and will communicate regularly about opportunities for stakeholder involvement.

Monitoring

The Trust Protocol is continuously monitored through the following practises:

- Relevance to growers – in addition to direct dialogue with growers and their representatives on the Trust Protocol board, second and third party assurance verifications provide a direct source of feedback on the applicability of the programme at farm level. For example, the

difference between declared and actual (verified) practises on the farm will indicate any need to review the question set and data gathering methodology.

- Relevance to industry – in addition to representation on the Trust Protocol board, frequent and wide-ranging engagement is maintained throughout the Protocol year with members and prospective members from all stages of the textile value chain. Direct feedback from industry members is received through individual meetings, trade events, surveys and wider observation of industry needs and trends.
- Strategic partnerships bring specialist expertise and capability to the programme, providing insight that enhances the Trust Protocol’s ability to maintain relevance to the groups it serves, and adopting established best practises.
 - [The Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture](#) is a diverse collaboration working to create opportunities across the agricultural supply chain for continuous improvements in productivity, environmental quality, and human well-being. By uniting the agricultural supply chain and key stakeholders around a common measurement framework, Field to Market seeks to drive continuous improvement in the sustainability of commodity crop production. By partnering with Field to Market on agricultural metrics, U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol can be confident of remaining on the leading edge of scientific developments in field level environmental impact measurement.
 - [Control Union](#) provides supply chain assurance programmes across a wide range of agricultural commodities in diverse geographies, and throughout the textile value chain. In addition to designing and delivering the Trust Protocol farm audit, Control Union provides expert guidance on assurance throughout the programme, ensuring consistent and robust monitoring. Refer to the Trust Protocol Programme Manual & Control Union Verification Protocol documents for detail.
 - [Textile Genesis](#) is a technology provider of a solution that leverages blockchain technology to provide unparalleled supply chain transparency specifically for the textile and apparel industry. With agreements in place with several sustainable fiber and certification sources, including Textile Exchange, Lenzing Fibers, Recycled Polyester, Responsible Wool, recycled cotton and the U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol, Textile Genesis is creating a central hub for sustainable fiber supply chain transparency – enabling Trust Protocol to integrate with and advance in supply chain transparency.

Reviewing

Trust Protocol strategy and operational efficacy is regularly reviewed by its multi-stakeholder board and expert advisors. The following enables a continuous source of feedback and review from a broad range of stakeholder groups, such that the Trust Protocol can ensure its relevance:

- Direct stakeholder dialogue
 - Trust Protocol Board – see ‘Trust Protocol Structure of Governance’ for detail. Board meetings are held (frequency) to ensure regular and open dialogue. Care has been taken to involve critical friends at board level, ensuring healthy challenge to the continuous improvement of the programme, and closely involving organisations with shared interest, for example the Better Cotton Initiative.

- External committees – Trust Protocol representatives are cross populating knowledge and best practise in a number of fora, ensuring participation and learning wherever cotton sustainability is being discussed at expert level. Including but not limited to; Sustainable Apparel Coalition, Textile Exchange, Cotton 2040, ICAC delta Project, Soil health Institute.
- Textile sector sustainability conferences & trade events are attended by Trust Protocol representatives to ensure a two way dialogue with relevant organisations around the world and at each step of the value chain. Including but not limited to; Innovation Forum, Bremen World Cotton Conference, Sustainable Brands, Textile Exchange Conference.
- National Cotton Council hosts regular events in growing and manufacturing regions to meet with users of the Trust Protocol and build relationships in the value chain from farm to store (Cotton Days, Farm Tours, Cotton Sourcing fairs).
- Alignment to global goals and initiatives – Trust Protocol has been designed with global goals in mind, and regularly reviews this landscape to ensure contemporary relevance. Including but not limited to; Paris Climate Change Agreement, UN Climate Change Charter for fashion, G7 Fashion pact, Textile Exchange Sustainable Cotton Commitment, German and Dutch Sustainable Textile Alliance.
- Inspection and benchmarking to other programmes by third party initiatives such as the German Textile partnership (ITC platform) brings external validation of the programme.
- Evolving policy and regulation is closely monitored and supported by direct dialogue with leading policy makers. Including but not limited to; EU Commission and the development of the Textile Strategy roadmap, US Border Control in relation to forced labor in supply chains.
- Indirect stakeholder research is commissioned to gather insights and opinions from key groups the Trust Protocol may not have a relationship with – for example textile industry research through Cotton Council funded surveys (e.g. Sourcing Journal) or citizen insight through consumer surveys.

Looking forward, the Trust Protocol seeks more structure in its approach to programme review and improvement, hence participation in the ISEAL community and progression toward the ISEA codes of best practise.