

Farm Programme Guidelines



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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this Document

This document has been created to provide guidelines for OCA's Farm Programme projects and deliver a comprehensive overview of OCA's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System. The OCA M&E System allows for the comparison of results of individual Farm Programme Projects in an aligned fashion, driven by measurable output and outcome-based indicators that show the development of economic conditions and integrity over time. The data enables the active management and promotion of continuous improvement within the Farm Programme and the organic cotton sector.

About the Organic Cotton Accelerator

At the Organic Cotton Accelerator (OCA), we believe organic cotton is the catalyst for a truly sustainable textiles sector. As a multi-stakeholder organisation, we unite the sector to unleash the potential of organic cotton, from field to fashion, for people and the planet.

We envision a future where, every time a farmer switches to organic cotton, there is a ripple effect of positivity; farmers earn more and their land and soils are fertile for future generations, protecting our planet. We call this the Organic Cotton Effect.

We're committing to enabling this future by creating a transparent, responsible and resilient organic cotton supply chain that prioritises delivering farmer prosperity and meeting the sector's shared sustainability goals. As an accelerator, we want to get to this future, faster.

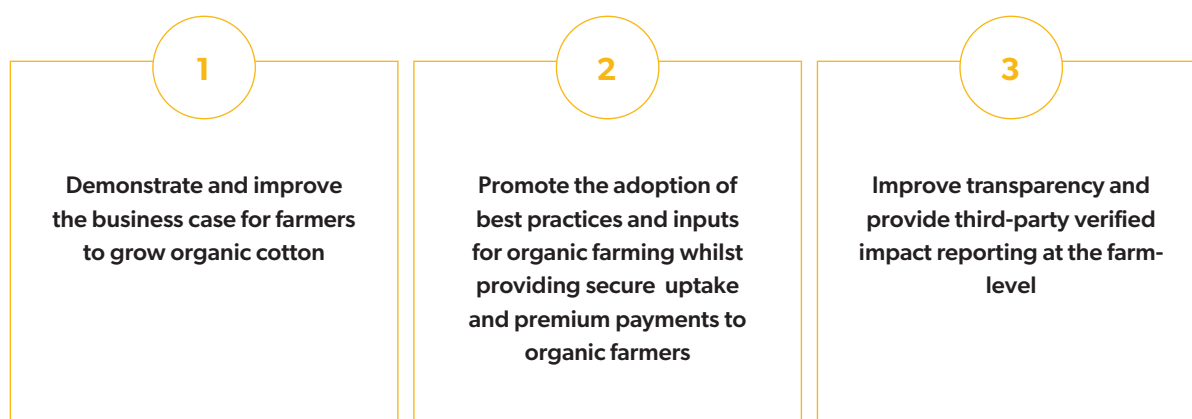
Since our establishment in 2016, with founding partners Laudes Foundation, H&M, Kering, Eileen Fisher, Textile Exchange, Tchibo, Inditex and C&A, OCA has been committed to convening the sector around a common agenda and using our platform's collective investments to act as a catalyst for change.

For more information on OCA and what we do visit: www.organiccottonaccelerator.org

The Farm Programme

OCA's programmes are focused on creating the conditions for organic cotton to thrive – by putting farmers first. We enable brands and retailers to act in their own supply chain in a concerted action so we truly move the market. OCA's flagship Farm Programme creates a direct relationship between organic farm groups and brands and retailers to create secure offtake and better prices for organic farmers and access to organic seeds and training. This relationship aims to strengthen the business case for organic farmers to grow cotton organically and support their livelihoods.

The Farm Programme objectives are:



We are not a certification standard – we operate on top of the organic certification system, and add value to the sector by addressing critical issues that go beyond certification. Through our Farm Programme, we evidence continuous improvement in social and environmental impact, and invest in the security and resilience of organic cotton directly at the farm level. Brands invest in OCA's programmes because our approach delivers the assurance that their investment in organic is delivering meaningful impact – it goes directly to farmers in the form of verified premium payments; it enables the delivery of quality farm services by our Implementing Partners and it gives them greater visibility over the source of the organic cotton entering their supply chain.

Amongst other practices of organic production and trade that secure the integrity of the end-product (i.e.; refraining from using synthetic pesticides and fertilisers or adopting crop diversification practices), it is integral that the organic cotton value chain does not deliberately use genetically modified cotton.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Brands/Retailers: The OCA partner Brands/Retailers actively involved in the Farm Programme

Control Farmer: Conventional farmers (where possible) who have similar characteristics to the intervention farmers, such as farm size, land dedicated to cotton and other crops, region, farm income, farming expenses, but who are not participating in the intervention programme.

Criterion: A means of judging whether or not a principle has been fulfilled

Farmers: Organic (certified/in-conversion) farmers that are part of the groups and organisations from which the Implementing Partner sources their cotton.

Genetically Modified Organism: Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) means an organism, with the exception of human beings, in which the genetic material has been altered in a way that does not occur naturally by mating and/or natural recombination.

Indicator: A quantitative or qualitative variable which can be measured or described, and which provides a means of judging whether a Program actor contribute to the expected outputs, outcomes and impact.

Internal Control Systems (ICS): An organised group of farmers /producers who intend to produce organic products/engage in organic processes in accordance with the National Standards of Organic Production.¹

Implementing Partner (IP): Value chain players that are part of the Farm Programme. They are contracted by the Brands/Retailers and manage and source organic cotton from organic farmer programmes/groups growing cotton. IPs can cover one or more (integrated) steps in the supply chain, e.g. cooperatives, ginneries, spinners, weavers, garment makers.

Organic Agriculture: Organic Agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic Agriculture combines tradition, innovation, and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and good quality of life for all involved.²

Premium: An additional bonus payment on top of the price received for seed cotton from the Brand and Retailer and transferred through the supply chain to the farmer to assist with improving the farmer's business case.

Principle: An essential rule or element for measuring, regulating or guiding conduct or practice.

Third Party Agency: Third-party entities that conduct data collection and validation activities.

1. IFOAM, 2011. Position Paper: The Use Of Organic Seed And Plant Propagation Material In Organic Agriculture. [\[online\]](#)

2. IFOAM, 2016. Position Paper: Genetic Engineering And Genetically Modified Organisms. [\[online\]](#)

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

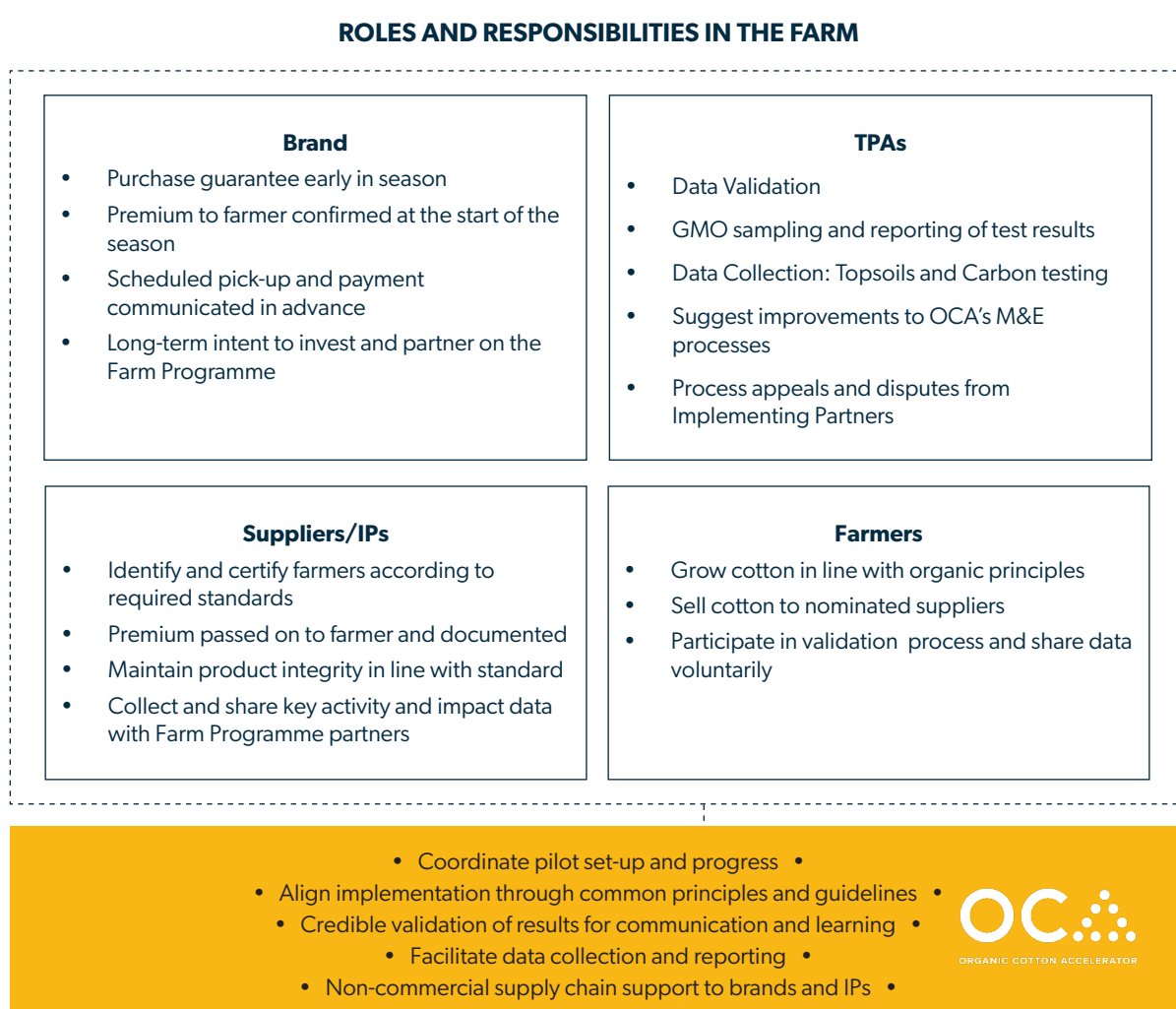
The OCA Secretariat is responsible for coordinating the joint efforts of all partners involved, maintaining contact with all stakeholders, and designing and coordinating the central Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. The M&E system – explained in more detail in this document – allows for increased levels of transparency and fact-based learning. Multiple stakeholders are involved in the process of initiating, measuring, collecting, coordinating, verifying, communicating and reporting, impact data for OCA’s sourcing interventions. OCA has a coordinating function to ensure the different stakeholders collaborate in accordance with its M&E guidelines so that consistent impact can be recorded and corrective action can be initiated where needed. To support all stakeholders within the M&E framework OCA maintains and refers to the following documents;

- Farm Programme Guidelines
- Verification Manual
- Requirements for Third-Party Verifiers
- Approved Verifier List
- Standard Operating Procedure for GMO Sampling and Testing

In addition OCA is the single coordinator and organises contracting of the third-party agencies.

The roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders involved in an OCA Farm Project is detailed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Roles and Responsibilities of the Main Stakeholders Within the OCA Farm Programme



4

MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

The Purpose of M&E

OCA has developed a Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) System to track and learn about the effectiveness of the Farm Programme Projects in contributing to the aspired goals. The following M&E guidelines provide an overview of the data collection, management and validation processes that will be in operation for OCA's Farm Programme Projects. The data is collected and shared among respective OCA partners and facilitates fact-based learning about the impact of sourcing practices on the business case of organic cotton farmers. This will inform the future design of OCA's Farm Programme and the adoption of best practices in sourcing strategies in the coming years. OCA also expects that the increased level of transparency brought by this M&E System will foster trust among the different actors involved in the Farm Programme projects and contribute to enhancing the overall credibility of our efforts.

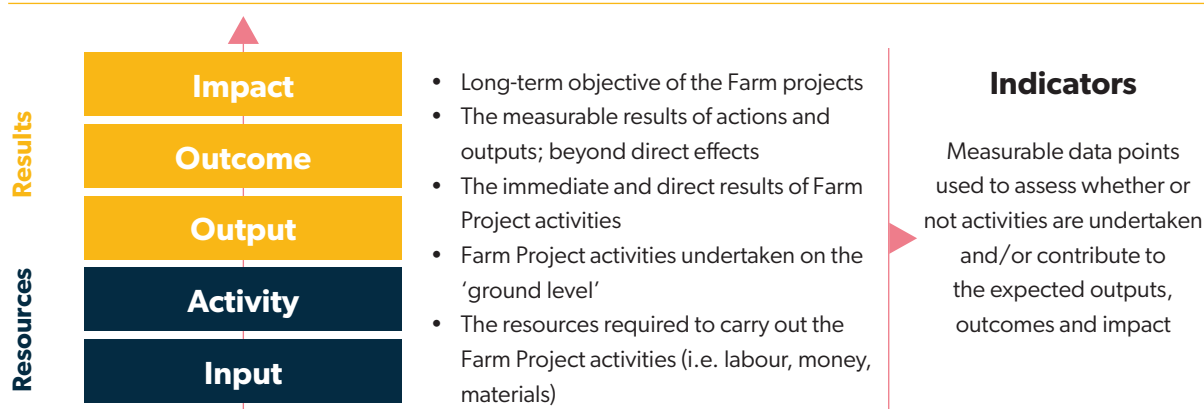
In summary, the design and implementation of a solid M&E system for the sourcing interventions serves the following objectives:

- **Performance measurement:** assessing the direct results of the OCA intervention practices, and to what extent they lead to improvements in the business case for smallholder farmers. Evaluating existing and piloted activities to enable continuous and comparative learning.
- **Enhancing transparency and credibility:** enhancing the credibility of the Farm Programme Projects and their results through adherence to a verifiable and transparent data collection system.
- **Communicating results:** share results to sector stakeholders and consumers to showcase the effect of the intervention activities.
- **Continuous improvement and learning:** contributing towards a cycle of shared measurement and continuous learning to improve future intervention design and understand possible changes to Brands' and IPs' practices to scale up the benefits to organic cotton farmers.

OCA's M&E Structure and Logic

The OCA M&E System for the Farm Programme Projects follows the logic and approach of a Results Framework, visualising how activities on the ground are expected to lead toward the aspired goals (see Figure 2). A Results Framework maps the linkages between how an intervention's planned activities (and the inputs required to implement them) are expected to deliver certain direct results or outputs, which in turn lead to the achievement of intermediate and long-term objectives, which can be respectively termed outcomes and impact.

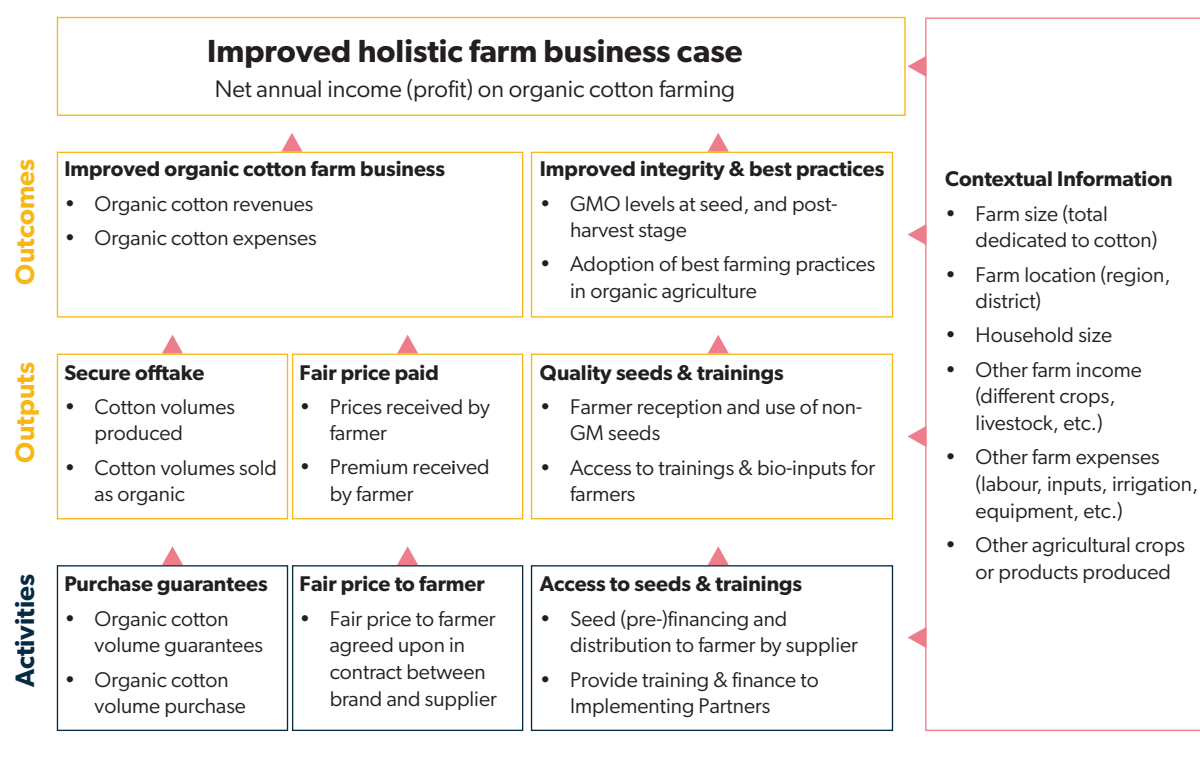
Figure 2. *The Logic of a Results Framework*



Following the logic of the Results Framework, the M&E System for the Farm Programme Projects is presented in Figure 3. It visualises the underlying assumption of the Farm Programme Projects, where the set of different practices and contractual agreements between Brands, Implementing Partners, and farmers (activities) is expected to lead to a different direct result (outputs) in terms of secured offtake, payment of a fair price, and the use of quality organic seed and trial new and improved methods of fortifying the sector be it through livelihood increase or creation of village industries. This in turn is expected to contribute towards the sourcing interventions' long-term aim of improving the business case for organic cotton farmers and enhancing organic integrity at the source (outcomes and impact).

Note: The Results Framework presented in Figure 3 is applied to all OCA Farm Programme Projects to track progress in an aligned matter. However, there is the possibility to track other additional and unique indicators in case individual projects are interested in testing specific additional practices (e.g. new payment method to farmers, additional input pre-financing, specific training modules etc.). In case a project wants to test the effect of a particular intervention; a specific set of indicators can be established in close consultation with the OCA Secretariat to monitor the activity closely and create a 'proof of concept'. If successful, the piloted concepts could become standard practices or general recommendations to the OCA Farm Programme Projects.

Figure 3. OCA's Results Framework



Indicators for OCA's Farm Programme Projects

OCA has defined a set of indicators at each level of the M&E Results Framework, translating the desired outputs, outcomes, and objectives of the programme interventions into a set of measurable data points. The indicators consist of:

- Farmer profiles
- Price and payment (price paid to OCA farmers, method of payments, verification of payments)
- Farmer Economics
- Yield
- Crop varieties
- GMO testing

The data is used to monitor the impact of intervention activities and their expected results.

Activity and Inputs

The contractual agreement between participating Brands and their respective Implementing Partner(s), and the implementation of the activities in line with those contracts will be tracked by OCA. Information regarding the agreed volumes, qualities and fair farm prices will be administered, as well as whether seed financing or other activities was committed by Brands. OCA will support and track testing, training, and data collection activities at the Implementing Partner.

Outputs

The direct results of the sourcing agreements and their implementation will be measured by tracking output indicators, in the following areas: secure offtake; fair price paid; and quality seeds and trainings.

Outcomes and Impact

In turn, two expected long-term outcomes form the next step in the results chain:

1. improving the net organic cotton income for farmers
2. improving the integrity and best farming practices of organic cotton

At the impact-level, it is expected that the achievement of these two long-term outcomes will lead to the desired objective of an improved holistic farm business case (net organic farmer income, including cotton). Improving the organic business case in comparison with conventional farming can keep farmers incentivised to farm organic - beyond the other motives they might have - and attract new farmers. Meanwhile, improving the trust and transparency regarding the organic cotton integrity at the source is expected to encourage Brands to continue investing in organic and further strengthen the business case for organic cotton farmers.

General and Contextual Indicators

In addition to monitoring the core indicators more general indicators will also be collected over the course of the Farm Programme projects. Besides basic information such as farm size and region, these indicators will involve tracking contextual variables that are important to account for when analysing the business case and/or performance of organic cotton farming.

Additional Indicators

The Third Party Agency will also collect qualitative data which is not included within OCA's M&E System. The collection of qualitative data by the research organisation helps OCA to avoid blind spots when drawing conclusions about the data collected from farmers and Implementing Partners.

Qualitative methods providing insights into aspects of the intervention which cannot be easily quantified. For example, a narrative-based qualitative approach involves asking intervention participants to recount what they think the most significant changes in their lives have been since the beginning of an intervention. This method provides a way to document what changes were perceived as most important by the community that may not otherwise be picked up by quantitative indicators. By documenting the positive and negative experiences as experienced by intervention participants themselves, such qualitative data provides an important addition to OCA's quantitative data collection.

In addition, the external research study will also track quantitative indicators that are not covered by OCA's indicator framework. This includes data related to a more complete (economic) picture of farmers; for example, the additional costs and incomes received by the farmer from other crops or household activities. Similarly, additional environmental data may also be monitored to ensure that the potential effects of other influencing factors, such as rainfall, pest and disease incidence or otherwise, are taken into consideration.

Performance Improvement Criteria

To ensure continuous improvement of practices, and increased impact of the OCA Farm Programme, OCA provides various reports throughout the season and at the end of season (see Section 5 for full overview of reports). One report of particular importance is the Performance Improvement Report (PIR), which uses a list of indicators (shown in Table 1) to evaluate the performance of OCA project participants.

Table 1: PIR Performance Criteria and Indicators

Theme	Criterion*
Creation of an enabling environment by the IP	Enabling services: Project and team
	Enabling Services – Inputs Supply Including Non-GMO Seeds
	Enabling Services – Farmer Trainings & Field Support
	Enabling Services – Procurement and Premium
	Enabling services – documentation, data collection and reporting
Farmer practices	Adoption of organic production practices
GMO integrity	GMO contamination
Other	Any other comments

4.a. Improving Farmer Business Case: Data and Farmer Payment Validation

OCA's M&E system combines two data streams. The first, self-reported data from Implementing Partners and farmers is gathered during our project interventions and shared with the OCA Secretariat. To ensure the accuracy of this reported data, OCA follows a validation approach that reviews and tests the project's data and collection processes. To some extent, this due diligence process will be assured by both the checks conducted and the procedures followed by the OCA Secretariat after receiving the data from Implementing Partners. The second data set is gathered through audits, by an independent, third-party agency (TPA) that is contracted by OCA. In partnership with OCA, the third-party agency (TPA) carries out a validation process between the two data sets to produce one verified data set.

Moreover, the role of the TPA will go beyond data validation activities. Below, are guidelines to improve data credibility, and ensure the correct interpretation of data using additional qualitative research and data from control farmers.

Third-Party Validation of Project Data and Results

Note: Protocols for Sampling and TPA Activities can be found in OCA's Verification and Validation Manual

The TPA contracted by the OCA Secretariat will be responsible for collecting farm level data from a sample of farmers who participate in different Implementing Partner projects. The external researchers will compare their data with the self-reported data from suppliers and farmers recorded in the data collection software system. The purpose of the data validation is to ensure the collection of credible self-reported data and to draw inferences from the same. It ensures that OCA and the Farm Programme participants can communicate information supported by facts and can also make informed decisions on the results of the projects.

To assess to what extent any changes observed during the interventions can be attributed to the intervention activities, the TPA will also collect data from control farmers. Control farmers are (conventional) farmers who have similar characteristics to the intervention farmers, such as farm size, land dedicated to (organic) cotton and other crops, region, farm income, farming expenses, but who are not participating in the intervention programme. The data collected from control farmers will be compared to the data collected for intervention farmers. Control data is important for data credibility purposes as it can be used to provide insights into how likely it is that any changes experienced by intervention farmers were caused by the intervention activities.

A Progress Update Report (PUR) and a Performance Improvement Report (PIR) will be used as guiding tools to provide trends and necessary action plans ([see Section 5](#) for a full overview of these reports).

Note: TPAs will collect this data for OCA and draw inferences and showcase trends. Please note that this is not the actual certification of the organic project. Certification against the organic production standard is done separately by certifying bodies. OCA takes no part in organic certification of projects; our activities are complementary to this

4.b. Improving the Integrity of Organic Cotton: GMO Testing and Follow-up

Purpose of GMO Testing

Organic is a claim that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are not deliberately or knowingly used and that organic producers take far-reaching steps to avoid GMO contamination along the organic cotton value chain,¹ from farmers to spinners, to brands. To manage this, it is essential that organic cotton stakeholders can reliably test their products for the potential presence of GM cotton, as part of other preventative measures.

The purpose of this Standard Operating Procedure is to guide OCA's Third-Party Verification Agencies and Implementation Partners on how to sample and test for GMO presence. A streamlined GMO sampling process should be followed across OCA Farm Projects, so that comparable and consistent GMO testing results can be obtained in the Farm Programme.

GMO testing is used complementarily to the preventative measures taken by Implementing Partners, for example by:

- promoting adequate pre-and post-harvest handling of the cotton
- sourcing cottonseed from authenticated non-GM seed producers and suppliers
- using border crops which, in addition to maintaining biodiversity, can act as physical
- barriers to minimize cross-pollination risks with GM crops in the region of production

GMO Testing Guiding Principles

The process of establishing the GMO testing procedures is guided by the following set of principles:

1. Collecting samples at seed, farm and gin levels to ensure a comprehensive overview of any GM presence within the earliest stages of production. The sample size is determined by the quantity of lint cotton to be sourced through each Farm Project, with the selection being divided up into 40% of samples being collected seed, 30% at farm and 30% at gin level.
2. Reliable and accurate results without unnecessary complexity. The recommended type(s) and methodology of testing should lead to consistent and replicable results.
3. Compulsory use of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) International Workshop Agreement (IWA) 32 protocol on screening of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in cotton and textiles by labs involved in GMO testing activities of Farm Programme Projects in 2021-22. This protocol ensures the screening of genes (GM- elements) that are involved in all known GM cotton events, across all four commercial cotton species (*G.hirsutum*, *G.barbadense*, *G.arboreum*, *G.herbaceum*). Hence, labs should follow the ISO IWA 32 protocol when screening for the presence of GM-cotton. The ISO IWA 32 protocol can be purchased [here](#).

1. Article 4 Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 and Article 5 Regulation (EU) 2018/848, and IFOAM Organics International, Position Paper 'Genetic Engineering and Genetically Modified Organisms', 2016

Follow-Up Actions Based On Test Results

The use of GMO in food and feed is widely regulated in Europe and the United States, mainly on biosafety aspects and labelling of GMO products beyond certain tolerance level (mostly 0.9 to 5%). But a clear level for tolerance and acceptance to GMO presence in cotton is yet to be developed in most countries.

The organic standard in India currently does not apply a tolerance percentage for GMO presence in certified organic cotton. Therefore in case produce is found contaminated it should be treated as conventional.

Products where GMOs have been detected via mandatory and additional testing will be segregated and isolated to prevent mixing with other products and control GMO contamination prior to ginning. This will result in a better control of the integrity of the end- product.

In a case of project samples testing positive for GMO presence, OCA will suggest corrective actions. Corrective actions should be issued and recorded by the TPA and transmitted to OCA in all cases. Corrective actions should already be part of the contingency plan in the Farmer Commitment Agreement (FCA).

5

COMMUNICATIONS AND LEARNING

The data collected from the Farm Programme Projects provides the basis for OCA and its partners to communicate on our results and impact, to demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach, and to improve and scale it. The OCA Secretariat will take responsibility for the central data collection of all data shared by the Implementing Partners and share and communicate this with different stakeholders on an annual basis.

Furthermore, the Secretariat will provide ongoing support to the different intervention partners in their monitoring work. This will be done by further developing and updating our M&E strategy, as well as the M&E System and our set of supporting documents and tools (e.g. the M&E Guidelines and the data collection software). Collective learning sessions will be organized together with Implementing Partners and participating Brands to share the lessons learned from the data, as well as to facilitate knowledge exchange and hands-on experiences in the monitoring work. This information will assist all partners in the adjustment and management of their sourcing practices and supplier relations and will provide increased accountability between our members and the outside world.

Reporting

There is no right or wrong – we measure to become better.

OCA Contributors and Partners propagate the principle of continuous improvement and collectively drive improvements across cotton value chains over time. Given the importance of the Farm Programme Projects in mainstreaming best practices in the organic cotton sector, it is necessary to create feedback loops within the OCA M&E System to encourage growth and development of the project based on observed and measured results.

There are four reports produced by OCA to achieve this communication throughout the season:

1. Progress Update Report (PUR)
2. Performance Improvement Report (PIR)
3. Individual Results Reports
4. Farm Programme Impact Report

1. Progress Update Report (PUR)

A Progress Update Report is produced by OCA based on the results of the TPA data collection and validation. It is a confidential report submitted to the Brands by OCA that is shared throughout the season. It is a project-based update report submitted to the Brands by OCA that is shared at key points in the season with help of information and data shared by the IP.

This report contains:

- Project overview
- Season calendar
- Details of lint procurement VS Farmer Commitment Agreement (FCA)
- GMO presence in cotton
- Key highlights from the field

2. Performance Improvement Report (PIR)

The Performance Improvement Report (PIR) has been created to establish the mandate of continuous improvement firmly. This is done by outlining the IPs performance, and any corrective actions that can be implemented to improve performance. The PIR is shared for internal use between the Brand and the IP at the end of the season.

The PIR is not designed to be punitive. It is designed to be used as a guiding document for the project to identify aspects to improve upon and for the IP and farmers to deliver to higher standards in the long run. A PIR is incomplete without a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) from the project to detail how the implementation team intends to address any concerns highlighted by OCA. In addition, a project's PIR will inform OCA of the level of monitoring required for that project next year.

The report consists of two separate sections:

- **The M&E Feedback (MEF) report** is a list of indicators regarding the Farm Programme, which allows OCA to monitor and evaluate the past season.
- **Corrective Action Plan (CAP)** is completed by the project implementation team keeping in mind the recommendations for improvement suggested by the third party. The CAP is necessary to complete a PIR, as it details how the implementation team intends to address any concerns highlighted by OCA.

3. Individual Results Report

Individual Result Report is shared with Brands, Retailers & Implementing Partners at the end of the season to present how the project performed against the Farm Programme goals. The report contains; the project overview (Number of farmers, Total amount of seed cotton procured, Area of organic cotton production, Seed varieties used, Economic performance above control farmers), farmer profile data, farmer economics, farmer business case, farmer perspective, summary of recommendations for improving the farm project, farmer story and GMO Presence.

4. Farm Programme Impact Report

The Farm Programme Impact Report is shared with OCA Contributors at the end of the season to present how the Farm Programme as a whole performed against the Farm Programme goals. The report contains; project overview (Number of farmers, Total amount of seed cotton procured, Area of organic cotton production, Seed varieties used, Economic performance above control farmers), farmer profile data, farmer economics, farmer business case, farmer perspective, summary of recommendations for improving the farm project and lastly farmer story – a Qualitative case study spotlighting the performance of one farmer within the project.

Looking Ahead

The bold commitments made by OCA Brands/Retailers to move the market and change how one of the most important commodities at the heart of the apparel industry is sourced, have made these sourcing interventions possible. By aligning ourselves with results and impact measured through this common M&E System we can accelerate real, meaningful change in the cotton sector so it better serves the lives and livelihoods of all its stakeholders.

We may encounter unexpected twists and turns along the way but sharing the risks and benefits along the value chain will enhance our prospects for success enormously. Through our Farm Programme, we lay strong foundations which enable us to achieve our vision of the Organic Cotton Effect: organic cotton's powerful and positive impact on people, planet and prosperity.



ORGANIC COTTON ACCELERATOR

Let's unleash the potential of organic cotton, together