



REGENERATIVE  
COTTON  
STANDARD

# REGENERATIVE COTTON STANDARD<sup>©</sup> (RCS)

by AbTF

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# 1 About The Regenerative Cotton Standard

The Regenerative Cotton Standard (RCS) of the Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) aims to support RCS-associated farmers in:

- Building up resilience against the effects of climate change
- Diversifying food sources and income opportunities
- Preserving and improving agricultural landscapes
- Ensuring the respectful use of natural resources

Managing Entities, whose role is to organise RCS-associated farmers and to ensure the traceability of their cotton, are supported in:

- Qualification of farm trainers
- Access to project funding
- Bringing a credible, innovative, and traceable product to the market

Below is an overview of the Regenerative Cotton Standard (RCS), followed by a more detailed description.

## 1.1 Background

The Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) developed its Regenerative Cotton Standard (RCS) specifically for small-scale cotton farmers in the Global South, who represent the vast majority of all cotton producers in the world.

To create RCS, AbTF built on more than 18 years of experience gathered through its Cotton made in Africa (CmiA) standard, which focusses on small-scale cotton farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. With even more holistic and agroecological criteria, RCS is also applicable beyond the context of CmiA.

Small-scale family farmers are severely impacted by climate change, affecting both their crop yields and income due to erratic weather patterns and environmental instability. Many of these farmers face the dual challenges of limited access to essential resources and a lack of knowledge about resilient farming practices. Sustainable farming programs often overlook their unique needs and priorities, leaving them underrepresented in decision-making processes and hindering tailored solutions. Managing Entities supporting these farmers must effectively manage and navigate the complex task of communicating and sharing information with this diverse group, requiring expertise in both technical and interpersonal aspects.

AbTF wants to use its expertise to support Managing Entities in working with RCS-associated farmer groups. A Managing Entity is responsible for enabling the preconditions for sustainable development, for engagement and information exchange with the farmers, and for providing access to suitable inputs, if required. Managing Entities that have already obtained a CmiA certificate are offered the option of adding on an RCS-specific verification. Where Managing Entities have not yet obtained a CmiA certificate, they undergo a verification covering the complete set of criteria and indicators, including CmiA's social and environmental criteria, as well as the holistic set of RCS regenerative criteria at the field level.

As the term "Regenerative Agriculture" is not officially defined or protected, RCS defines it as follows:

**Actively creating co-benefits in interaction between nature, people, society, and the economy to bring agricultural systems into a better state than they are currently in.** To achieve and verify this, it is key to combine suitable and available traditional knowledge and farming approaches with scientific insights and state-of-the-art digital technology.



## 1.2 Philosophy and Value Proposition

### 1.2.1 RCS Philosophy

- The Aid by Trade Foundation is convinced that a more definite shift towards a net positive impact of agriculture is necessary to meet the global challenges which especially small-scale farmers in the Global South are facing today.
- The philosophy behind RCS is based on the premise that cotton can only be produced sustainably if farmed in a way that fosters soil health.
- As cotton is not a stand-alone commodity, RCS targets the entire crop rotation as well as other relevant parts of the production system—such as field margins, areas connecting (nearby) fields, and farm animals—always with the goal of making the whole farming system more resilient in both ecological and economic terms.
- RCS is a both process - and outcome-oriented framework, meaning that proof of continuous improvement towards a positive impact is key.
- Within the RCS system, management of a transition towards regenerative agriculture needs to be adapted to local conditions, including with regard to culture, society, topography, and the climate.
- Involving farmers in prioritisation and planning while building on the knowledge of local farming communities is therefore an essential pillar of RCS. Knowledge of traditional ways of farming is expected to complement scientific findings and support acceptance, effectivity, and adoption rates.
- These elements may require not only investments from all sides into a system change but also a mindset change for Managing Entities as well as for members of the farming communities.

### 1.2.2 RCS Value Proposition

#### **Advantages for RCS-Associated Farmers**

RCS aims to regenerate and return degraded land to production, meaning that farmers could reuse abandoned agricultural lands close to their homesteads, reducing the travel time to their fields and thereby making more time available for targeted interventions.

The framework will support farmers in making better use of available resources and in reducing or replacing synthetic inputs, thereby contributing to a healthier working and living environment.

Farmers gain market access via sales of cotton from a holistic production system, which encourages the optimum use of resources, enhances peer-learning opportunities as well as the development of local businesses, and therefore strengthens overall farm resilience while improving profitability.

RCS honours farmers' experience, handed-down knowledge, ideas, and priorities as well as local circumstances and traditions.

#### **Advantages for the Managing Entity**

The Managing Entity can offer a new and innovative product to cotton traders. It has the chance to qualify its extension staff through AbTF and their partners, gain access to innovative data tools, and more.

The farming communities associated with RCS are expected to increase and stabilise over time due to the support of RCS-affiliated local business units as well as through the use of formerly abandoned land closer to the villages.

#### **Advantages for Buyers and Traders**

Buyers and traders can support sustainable farming operations that have a unique speciality and are backed by a voluntary standard system with credible verification mechanisms and a good monitoring, evaluation, and learning system. They also have the opportunity to obtain Hard Identity Preserved cotton and even crop rotation products, if desired, from a trusted source.



## 2 Overview

This chapter summarises the most relevant points regarding RCS.

### 1. Scope

- The RCS standard includes environmental, social, animal welfare, and management criteria.
- RCS covers the entire farming system (all field crops) associated with cotton cultivation as well as field margins, areas connecting RCS-managed fields in close proximity to each other, and livestock kept by farmers practising RCS or grazing in areas managed according to RCS.
- RCS is not limited to a specific geographical location as long as it is part of a small-scale cotton farming system.
- Organic farming or other sustainable farming certification schemes are not a prerequisite.

### 2. Managing Entity

- RCS requires a Managing Entity that
  - a) delivers training and, if such a system was in place before becoming an RCS candidate, inputs<sup>1</sup> to farmers;
  - b) serves as a gateway for verification;
  - c) provides an RCS focal person to interact with AbTF, farmers, verification staff, etc.; and
  - d) delivers self-assessments, data for the baseline, develops a continuous regeneration plan, and monitors training success, input use, and management plans.
- A Managing Entity could be a cotton company or ginnery, a self-sustaining organisation closely involved in the cotton sector, or a professionally organised co-operative of farmers. In any case, it is mandatory for qualified extension agents or people with sufficient agricultural knowledge to be available, in an adequate ratio, to the farmers the Managing Entity works with.
- A Managing Entity must be willing and able to support the implementation of RCS.

### 3. Farmers and Target Areas

- RCS works exclusively with groups of associated small-scale farmers.
- Farmers that belong to an RCS group must live and farm close enough together, so that peer exchange is easy and areas between fields can be considered for biodiversity measures.
- Areas around homesteads belonging to RCS-associated farmers are included in the sense that all available leftover organic and carbon-containing waste should be recycled as far as culturally acceptable.

### 4. Irrigation

- RCS cotton is produced in a very water-efficient manner. Where irrigation was not used before starting with RCS, cotton must continue being produced without irrigation from surface-water or groundwater sources. Where an irrigated cultivation system was already in place before starting with RCS, efficiency measures must be taken to reduce the use of and dependency on surface water and groundwater.

### 5. Traceability

- Only cotton produced according to RCS can be sold as RCS cotton.
- RCS seed cotton must be fully traceable from the marketplace onwards.
- RCS-verified cotton must be stored and processed separately from any other cotton in the ginnery.

<sup>1</sup> If there is no system of pre-financing inputs, it is essential that the farmers document which inputs have been used in which amounts. This would have to be monitored by the Managing Entity, and aggregated reports must be made available to AbTF. Spot checks of samples in a laboratory could be required to prove that no prohibited substances were used.



6. Self-Assessment, Independent Verification, and Monitoring

- RCS is a voluntary standard system which is verified by an independent third party focussing on the production of seed cotton.
- The indicators are divided into core (mandatory) and improvement (complementary) categories.
- The Managing Entity is responsible for monitoring progress and annually updating the continuous regeneration plan.
- Regular verification missions will be performed by independent verification bodies to guarantee the reliability of the standard and to verify whether RCS-associated farmers meet the standard’s requirements. Successfully verified Managing Entities will then receive a Regenerative Cotton Standard certificate.

## 2.1 RCS Impact Areas at a Glance

RCS is grouped around ten principles that cover several criteria, each associated with measurable indicators. Each of these ten principles is supported by one of three enabling requirements.

The enabling requirements are:

- Responsible management
- Community engagement
- Combination of traditional knowledge and science

It is the impact that matters, and the farmers play a vital role in making it happen. Solutions may be specific to a particular location or context. For many of the field-related indicators, RCS-associated farmers can set their own priorities and decide on their own way to meet the criteria. They will have their say on how the Managing Entity can best support them in achieving continuous and tangible regenerative improvements.



Details on the three enabling requirements and the ten principles can be found in chapter 4.



## 2.2 Eligibility

A Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers' groups must be ready to work according to RCS core criteria from the beginning of the process.

Any CmiA-verified Managing Entity can integrate RCS as an add-on verification if some or all of its associated farmers are ready to take on the additional process.

If a Managing Entity is a cotton company or ginnery, it must fulfil ginnery-level CmiA criteria in addition to RCS criteria.

Certificates obtained under other standard systems, e.g. IFOAM's family of standards for organic or other regenerative field-level standards, can facilitate the process but do not necessarily fulfil all RCS criteria. Details on equivalence and applicability can be found in the Excel version of the RCS matrix, which is made available to RCS candidates.

- Plots must be deforestation-free from 2020-12-31, in line with EU deforestation regulations<sup>2</sup>.
- Centrally managed farms with produce entirely for sale and permanent staff are not eligible.

## 2.3 The Role of the Managing Entity

The Managing Entity, which can be a cotton company or another actor in the cotton/textile supply chain, is responsible for managing the implementation of the RCS standard.

The Managing Entity has an overview of the farmer base and has qualified, regularly trained extension staff to inform, engage, and train all RCS-associated farmers, either directly or via a lead farmer or training cascade. The Managing Entity liaises with individual farmers or farmers' groups and, if possible and common in the regional context, offers input pre-financing schemes to RCS-associated farmers. Finally, depending on its position in the cotton supply chain, the Managing Entity also supports the collection and purchase of raw cotton and other applicable agricultural products, if applicable.

It is also in the position to apply for and administer community project funding through the Aid by Trade Foundation or third parties, implementing these projects together with RCS-associated farmers.

RCS requires a high level of self-organisation and data management by the Managing Entity. This includes a strategic approach, which involves identifying the most relevant/critical areas for RCS-associated farmers and the Managing Entity, analysing the risks and opportunities for these identified points, and developing a strategy for improving the situation over time. The Managing Entity has to demonstrate responsible management and governance with regard to RCS-associated farmers, e.g. in developing and promoting policies regarding human rights.

The Managing Entity is the contact point for AbTF as well as the third-party verifiers and must be able to demonstrate that everyone working with its RCS farmer base operates according to RCS requirements. This requires a functioning system for data collection, assessment, monitoring, and management.

Based on self-assessments and third-party verification results, the Managing Entity is required to design and implement the baseline and a continuous regeneration plan in order to maintain or improve its performance level regarding the criteria and indicators outlined in the RCS standard.

<sup>2</sup> [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products_en)



# 3 Overview of the RCS Impact Monitoring and Assurance Process

A main element of RCS is to identify areas to stimulate and measure continuous improvements at the field and management levels. The impact monitoring and assurance system covers the production areas that are relevant to seed cotton production at the field level as well as areas between RCS-managed fields and related animal husbandry systems. It enables the Managing Entity and AbTF to track progress and to issue RCS certificates to Managing Entities.

The impact monitoring and assurance system requires the following steps to be taken:

- For impact monitoring
  - Baseline: generated or updated once every five years
  - Continuous regeneration plan: updated annually
- For the verification process
  - Self-assessment: conducted annually
  - Third-party verification for candidates and new members: conducted annually or, depending on results, every second year

Before the first verification, AbTF can support the Managing Entity with a set of guiding questions in order to establish suitable conditions for an RCS-associated farming community. To start the verification process, the Managing Entity has to start with a comprehensive self-assessment and documentation, ideally before the cotton is sown.

The documents are submitted via the RCS Assurance Platform.

In keeping with its continuous improvement approach, RCS expects the Managing Entity to stay up to date with relevant information and to develop and follow a regeneration strategy that is in line with the RCS farming communities and their priorities. To this end, RCS offers two tools to serve as a reference and follow-up framework: the **baseline** and the **continuous regeneration plan** (CRP).

## 3.1 The Baseline as a Reference

Once farmers' groups, target areas, and the extension cascade have been defined, the Managing Entity will compile a comprehensive **baseline** as a periodic reference for prioritisation and later improvements. The baseline is a comprehensive status-quo assessment that helps the Managing Entity to prioritise in its continuous improvement activities and to monitor their medium-term impact. The baseline is updated by the Managing Entity every five years.

The RCS baseline touches upon the following points:

- **Stakeholder assessment:** who needs to be addressed, and how, in and around the RCS-associated farming communities to make RCS successful
- **Priorities, perceptions, and expectations** of farming communities regarding their participation in RCS
- **Relevance analysis**, including the views of relevant actors within the Managing Entity and of farmers' representatives: which of the criteria addressed in RCS are critical to the Managing Entity or the farmers, what is the respective circle of influence, and what can and should have priority





- **Risk and opportunity assessment** of the most relevant and prioritised criteria (social, economic, environmental, and cultural), developing alternative scenarios of action for relevant risks that are likely to occur
- **Status quo and**, where relevant, **regeneration plans** for agricultural and natural areas and resources which will be managed by RCS-associated farmers in the future
- **Mapping of geographical areas** and field margins where RCS will be implemented
- **GPS-tagged soil assessments** and laboratory analysis results (wherever possible), representing the different geographical areas and environmental cultivation or management conditions

The above-mentioned points must be updated by the Managing Entity at least every five years. In case of significant changes - e.g. in the farmer base, growing areas, or other relevant management decisions - an update for the points affected by the change needs to be delivered to AbTF at least two weeks prior to the next third-party verification.

Guidance on the different requirements will be offered by AbTF.

## 3.2 The Annual Self-Assessment

It is the responsibility of the Managing Entity to demonstrate results through the annual collection of field-level and management data. RCS uses self-assessments<sup>3</sup> as a key component of its assurance system. The Managing Entity has the duty to report and assess its performance. The self-assessment serves as a tool for the verifiers to define the most important risks regarding non-compliance with RCS requirements and to develop the verification plan.

For Managing Entities, the self-assessment serves as a reflection tool regarding the progress of implementation of the RCS standard, as it assesses and comments on its own progress.

The self-assessment must be completed at least four weeks prior to the third-party verification.

## 3.3 RCS Third-Party Verification

Self-assessments by the Managing Entity are verified by independent third-party verifiers every year for the first two years and, depending on verification results and potential risks, every second year thereafter. It is obligatory that the verifiers check compliance with the criteria and indicators relevant to the field level during the growing season, i.e. between sowing and harvesting.

## 3.4 The Continuous Regeneration Plan (CRP)

Systemic improvements require systemic thinking and planning. Based on the relevance analysis of the baseline, self-assessments, and third-party verification results, the Managing Entity is required to develop and implement a continuous regeneration plan to maintain or improve its performance with regard to the mandatory and relevant criteria and indicators outlined in the RCS standard.

For each Managing Entity joining RCS, it is obligatory to annually revisit:

- The activities and results of the past season
- The planned changes, goals, and strategies for relevant thematic areas in the coming season
- Possible needs for training of trainers and knowledge transfer to the Managing Entity's staff, training materials, learning exchanges, or project investments

The **continuous regeneration plan** (CRP) is mainly a strategic planning instrument that demonstrates that the Managing Entity has considered topics relevant to the implementation and potential upscaling of RCS.

<sup>3</sup> For Managing Entities that possess a valid CmiA certificate, certain criteria will be carried over from the self-assessment and verification results of the CmiA verification (to avoid duplicating submissions or verifications).



The Managing Entity should report in more detail on criteria relevant to the specific context of the Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers. The actions planned and documented in the CRP must be time-bound, locally adapted, and updated annually. The field activities plan needs to be reviewed, prioritised, and agreed with RCS farmers' representatives.

The CRP refers to the previous year (if applicable), providing a structure for planning and documenting continuous improvements while revealing goals and strategies for the following years. It is also a platform for evaluating the success of certain measures, anticipated needs, etc.

Managing Entities can use a format offered by RCS or provide their own format, as long as all relevant items are covered.

## 4 RCS Structure

The RCS standard is structured along principles, criteria, and indicators, which are accompanied by three enabling requirements.

### 4.1 The Three RCS Enabling Requirements

The enabling requirements (ER) are underlying prerequisites that need to be considered and ultimately met by a Managing Entity in order to achieve the defined principles of RCS and create the intended impact.

- A. Responsible management
- B. Community engagement
- C. Combination of traditional knowledge and science

#### A. Responsible Management

Responsible management concerns the Managing Entity's responsibilities. Via responsible management, a Managing Entity provides an environment that enables regenerative transformation. This includes organisational and strategic development, responsible governance and policies, fair agreements, decent and healthy working conditions, living out and communicating RCS-associated values, and providing RCS-associated farmers with knowledge and materials to start their regenerative journey. With this enabling requirement, the Managing Entity also fulfils its monitoring and reporting duties for a smooth and transparent verification process.

#### B. Community Engagement

RCS-associated farming communities are leading stakeholders in shaping their farming environment. Identifying important stakeholders (not only among RCS-associated farmers), following a process of free and informed consent with the communities concerned, and involving farmers in the planning and decision-making processes are all key for generating impact.

RCS-associated farming communities are actively involved in identifying challenges and opportunities for improvement through RCS at the field level, in integrating RCS principles into their farming practices, and in setting their priorities regarding what to tackle first within the current scope of action.

Peer-learning opportunities as well as the possibility of developing local start-up businesses that further the aims of RCS are additional instruments for involving and benefiting local farming communities.

#### C. Combination of Traditional Knowledge and Science

The concept of regenerative agriculture unites several concepts of sustainable agriculture under a scientifically sound roof. Science is important for presenting a proven concept of positive environmental impacts to cotton buyers. At the same time, many of the practices regarded as regenerative incorporate the traditional knowledge that small-scale farmers used to cultivate crops before industrial and external-input-driven agriculture was promoted. Solutions to local challenges are specific to each location and context, and they can



only be tackled by the farmers themselves. Local knowledge and experience (e.g. regarding locations, natural resources, and their uses) can complement and enrich today’s scientific knowledge in the best possible way while assigning responsibility and creating ownership in RCS-associated farming communities. It is mandatory for the Managing Entity and its extension agents to learn about, honour, leverage, and multiply the available traditional knowledge resources on farming and nature in the communities.

## 4.2 The Ten RCS Principles

Each RCS principle connects to one or several enabling requirements.

### The principles are:

1. [Farm resilience is improved.](#)
2. [Farming families’ livelihoods are improved.](#)
3. [Transparency and fairness in co-operation are ensured.](#)
4. [Decent working conditions are observed.](#)
5. [Soil health is restored.](#)
6. [Water resources are preserved.](#)
7. [The climate is protected.](#)
8. [The reduction and safe use of synthetic inputs are ensured.](#)
9. [Biodiversity is enhanced.](#)
10. [Animal needs are respected.](#)

### Glossary:

- c = core indicator
- i = improvement indicator
- f = farmer involvement required

### Principle 1: Farm resilience is improved.

The first RCS principle addresses the development of resilience among the associated farming communities against increasing instability in ecosystems, market conditions, and the climate. Diversification and resource efficiency play an important role, as does knowledge on how to apply regenerative farming practices.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
01.01 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers have access to suitable and appropriate knowledge on regenerative farming practices.	01.01.01 RCS Extension officers receive regular training in agricultural best practices, new developments on regenerative Agriculture (content), and teaching practices (didactics). Their training is documented.	c
01.01 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers have access to suitable and appropriate knowledge on regenerative farming practices.	01.01.02 The Managing Entity promotes and supports local pilot/demonstration farms as well as opportunities for peer learning or farmer field schools within RCS-associated farming communities.	c/f



01.02 The diversity of food and income sources for farms increases.	01.02.01 The number of different crops produced for home consumption or sale increases (cf. indicators 05.05.02 and 01.02.02).	c/f
01.02 The diversity of food and income sources for farms increases.	01.02.02 The Managing Entity offers access to market opportunities and to any necessary inputs other than cotton, e.g. seeds.	i/f
01.03 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers prevent and reduce environmental pollution in and around RCS-associated farms.	<p>01.03.01 Non-biodegradable waste from agricultural production and related consumption is avoided, collected, and possibly recycled.</p> <p>The Managing Entity closely collaborates with lead farmers and village heads to achieve these aims through training, informational materials, and practical solutions.</p> <p>Areas of focus include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Empty pesticide containers (the Managing Entity or related partners must organise a collect-and-return system to ensure safe disposal) cf. indicator 08.10.01</li> <li>- Empty fertiliser bags</li> <li>- empty water bags or bottles used on site at fields or farms</li> </ul>	c/f
01.04 On- and around-farm natural resources are identified and efficiently managed in order to replace externally purchased resources.	<p>01.04.01 The Managing Entity raises awareness among RCS-associated farmers for using available and suitable resources in an efficient manner.</p> <p>This may be done in any format that catches the farmers' attention.</p>	c/f
01.04 On- and around-farm natural resources are identified and efficiently managed in order to replace externally purchased resources.	<p>01.04.02 The Managing Entity returns ginning waste or other available organic wastes from agro-processing units for composting and field application.</p> <p>If the Managing Entity does not have its own ginneries, it cooperates with suitable ginneries or other agro-processors.</p>	i/f
01.05 The quantity of perennial biomass in and around the fields increases in a way that helps overall farm productivity and resilience.	<p>01.05.01 RCS-associated farmers practise reforestation, tree planting, or agroforestry: They introduce or protect shrubs or trees that are native to the area or otherwise suitable. These can be planted in rows or at field margins, for instance, and pruned materials and leaves can be used as mulch/compost in the crop rows.</p>	c/f
01.05 The quantity of perennial biomass in and around the fields increases in a way that helps overall farm productivity and resilience.	<p>01.05.02 RCS-associated farmers practise reforestation, tree planting or agroforestry: The Managing Entity avails access to necessary materials.</p> <p>This can be via providing saplings to farmers, or even by supporting a community- or farmer-run tree nursery in order to provide services to other RCS-associated farmers.</p>	i/f



01.06 Locally adapted low-input varieties are preferred for all crops grown by RCS-associated farmers. For cotton, appropriate varieties which suit changing climate conditions are preferred.	01.06.01 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers source seed varieties that are suitable in the context of a low-input agricultural environment. This accounts for all crops where this is feasible and brings advantages to the farmers.	i/f
01.06 Locally adapted low-input varieties are preferred for all crops grown by RCS-associated farmers. For cotton, appropriate varieties which suit changing climate conditions are preferred.	01.06.02 The Managing Entity seeks to support local seed producers and nurseries who produce seeds which are adapted to the local farming conditions. This accounts for all crops and saplings where this is feasible and brings advantages to RCS-associated farmers.	i/f

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## Principle 2: Farming families' livelihoods are improved.

The second RCS principle addresses income stability, productivity, buffering the risk of monocrop harvest losses, and improved food security for small-scale farmers. Additional studies on farmers' living standards may be conducted by AbTF during the RCS pilot phase.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
02.01 With the RCS programme, the Managing Entity supports mainly small-scale and family farmers.	02.01.01 At least 95 percent of RCS-associated cotton farmers are small-scale farmers who meet all of the following requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Farm work is mostly done by the cotton farmer, the farmer's family, or the community</li> <li>▪ There are no permanently employed workers</li> <li>▪ Parts of the farm's produce are used for family consumption</li> </ul> In addition, at least 90 percent of the total cotton volume produced by the associated farmers of a Managing Entity comes from small-scale farmers.	c/f
02.02 Where already established previously to RCS, the Managing Entity offers pre-financing possibilities for inputs to interested RCS-associated farmers.	02.02.01 If a pre-financing system was in place before starting the RCS programme, the Managing Entity continues to offer such scheme. It must continue as a voluntary, transparent scheme that is easy for RCS-associated farmers to understand.	c/f
02.02 Where already established previously to RCS, the Managing Entity offers pre-financing possibilities for inputs to interested RCS-associated farmers.	02.02.02 The Managing Entity actively informs RCS-associated farmers about the input pre-financing terms and conditions.	c



<p>02.02 Where already established previously to RCS, the Managing Entity offers pre-financing possibilities for inputs to interested RCS-associated farmers.</p>	<p>02.02.03 If providing input pre-financing, the Managing Entity has a system in place to avoid excessive indebtedness by RCS-associated farmers and has suitable ways of debt recovery. Interest rates (if applied) are outlined and favourable compared to market rates.</p>	i
<p>02.03 RCS-associated farmers adopt planting, management, harvesting and storage practices that maximise cotton productivity and fibre quality.</p>	<p>02.03.01 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers in the most promising good agricultural practices (GAP) to maximise cotton productivity and fibre quality. At minimum, the training content includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ timely and appropriate land preparation;</li> <li>▪ timely and correct planting;</li> <li>▪ correct plant population and density; and</li> <li>▪ timely and regular weeding to minimise competition with the crop.</li> </ul> <p>In its training the Managing Entity includes locally validated best practices for nutrient, pest and disease management in order to maximise cotton productivity and fibre quality (cf. criteria 02.03.02; 05.04.02; 08.01.01 and 08.03.01).</p>	c
<p>02.03 RCS-associated farmers adopt planting, management, harvesting and storage practices that maximise cotton productivity and fibre quality.</p>	<p>02.03.02 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers in good management practices for the harvest and storage of seed cotton.</p>	i
<p>02.04 RCS-associated farmers optimise their farm business to achieve a decent standard of living and to be resilient against changes in the market or the climate.</p>	<p>02.04.01 The Managing Entity sensitises RCS-associated farmers on basic business skills including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Profitability calculations for cotton and other crops included in the regular rotation cycle (input-output calculations)</li> <li>▪ Planning agricultural production to meet family needs for food and to provide the income needed for a decent standard of living</li> <li>▪ The importance of diversification</li> <li>▪ The importance of record keeping</li> </ul>	c
<p>02.04 RCS-associated farmers optimise their farm business to achieve a decent standard of living and to be resilient against changes in the market or the climate.</p>	<p>02.04.02 The Managing Entity calculates gross margins from cotton earned by an average RCS lead farmer and an average RCS-associated follower farmer.</p>	c
<p>02.04 RCS-associated farmers optimise their farm business to achieve a decent standard of living and to be resilient against changes in the market or the climate.</p>	<p>02.04.03 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated lead farmers to keep farm-level records for their own farm. At minimum, these records encompass essential production data for inputs and outputs, including hired labour if applicable.</p>	i/f



<p>02.05 The Managing Entity identifies opportunities to support livelihood improvements for RCS-associated farmers and their communities.</p>	<p>02.05.01 The Managing Entity is aware of social and environmental hot spots among its RCS-associated farmers and identifies opportunities to support livelihood improvements. The re-analysis should happen every three years at least.</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>02.05 The Managing Entity identifies opportunities to support livelihood improvements for RCS-associated farmers and their communities.</p>	<p>02.05.02 The Managing Entity has a systematic approach to addressing identified needs and actively supports activities for RCS associated farmers in the areas of education, health, gender equality, and the environment. Indicators for measuring the success of implemented activities are put into place and applied.</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>02.05 The Managing Entity identifies opportunities to support livelihood improvements for RCS-associated farmers and their communities.</p>	<p>02.05.03 The Managing Entity observes, fosters, and supports the engagement of RCS-associated farmers in starting small community businesses which can support the farmer's transition to regenerative agriculture. This could be by providing coaching, training, materials, market access, or direct financial support or subsidies until the business is running. Special attention shall be given to supporting potentially vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, or persons with disabilities, in generating extra income.</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>02.06 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>02.06.01 The Managing Entity has a written gender policy that is communicated to RCS-associated farmers.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>02.06 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>02.06.02 The Managing Entity supports the establishment, organisation, and activities of women's groups for female cotton growers. Up-to-date records of existing women's groups are kept.</p>	<p>i/f</p>

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**Principle 3: Transparency and fairness in co-operation are ensured.**

Small-scale farmers are the starting point of the supply chain, yet their demands are often ignored while their voices go unheard. The third RCS principle therefore demands a fair and transparent commercial relationship between the Managing Entity and farmers. At the same time, fairness and transparency towards the standard owner and third-party verifiers are also required from the Managing Entity, with the aim of ensuring a clear division of responsibilities and a transparent flow of information in order to enable a smooth verification process.



RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
03.01 The Managing Entity has a strategic plan for regeneration activities that are relevant to its RCS-associated farmers.	<p>03.01.01 The Managing Entity delivers accurate and representative data for a thorough baseline.</p> <p>The complete baseline report is submitted prior to the first RCS verification and thereafter regularly every five years. In case of significant changes of the operations, e.g. in the farmer base, growing areas, or other relevant management decisions, a supplement of the baseline report for those elements that are affected by the changes needs to be delivered to AbTF at least two weeks prior to the next third-party verification.</p> <p>AbTF will provide a template for the baseline report with a defined set of questions.</p>	c/f
03.01 The Managing Entity has a strategic plan for regeneration activities that are relevant to its RCS-associated farmers.	<p>03.01.02 Under RCS, Managing Entities make, implement, and annually update a continuous regeneration plan (CRP) that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The activities and results of the past season</li> <li>- Planned changes, goals, and strategies for relevant areas in the coming season</li> <li>- Possible needs for know-how, materials, learning exchanges, or project investments</li> </ul> <p>The actions planned and documented in the CRP must be time-bound, locally adapted, and updated yearly.</p> <p>The Managing Entity should provide a more detailed report on criteria relevant to the specific context of the Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers (cf. indicators 03.01.01 and 03.02.02).</p>	c/f
03.02 Planning of regenerative actions is elaborated by the Managing Entity in close collaboration with RCS-associated farmers.	<p>03.02.01 A strong collaborative mechanism is in place, such that the voices of stakeholder groups are represented and engaged from the beginning of project development and on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>While the primary aim is to build trust and a common understanding on regeneration between the Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers, this is also a way to identify the concerns of stakeholders in the village communities.</p> <p>RCS-associated farmers or their representatives are involved in decision-making, planning, progress monitoring, and success evaluation of RCS indicators that are marked with “f” in the RCS indicator matrix.</p> <p>The farmers’ ideas on and understanding of regenerative agriculture and of challenges and priorities within the RCS framework will be fed back and integrated into the relevance check of the RCS baseline.</p>	c/f
03.02 Planning of regenerative actions is elaborated by the Managing Entity in close collaboration with RCS-associated farmers.	<p>03.02.02 Field-level improvement strategies are co-developed with representatives of RCS-associated farmers.</p> <p>The results of this process feed into the continuous regeneration plan.</p> <p>AbTF will provide guidance on the process.</p>	c/f





<p>03.02 Planning of regenerative actions is elaborated by the Managing Entity in close collaboration with RCS-associated farmers.</p>	<p>03.02.03 The Managing Entity respects the traditional values and ways of life of people concerned by the local impact of RCS, within and beyond the group of RCS-associated farmers. The Managing Entity is aware of and integrates traditional values, ways of life, and knowledge on farming and landscape/ecosystem use, and these are fed into the CRP.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.03 The Managing Entity has the necessary staff capacity to implement the RCS standard.</p>	<p>03.03.01 The Managing Entity has appointed a person responsible for RCS matters, called the RCS responsible. The RCS responsible is in charge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the overall coordination of RCS matters in the entity;</li> <li>▪ handling all necessary RCS-related communication;</li> <li>▪ acting as a liaison between AbTF, the lead verifier, managers, employees, and representatives of RCS-associated farmers regarding RCS matters;</li> <li>▪ the submission of annual self-assessments and annual continuous regeneration plans at the field level; and</li> <li>▪ overseeing compliance, implementation, and monitoring of the Managing Entities' performance regarding the RCS requirements at the field level.</li> </ul> <p>The RCS responsible reports directly to or is a member of the senior management. The above tasks of the RCS focal person are included in the employment contract / job description of the RCS responsible. The RCS responsible has the relevant knowledge and experience to perform the described tasks.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.03 The Managing Entity has the necessary staff capacity to implement the RCS standard.</p>	<p>03.03.02 One or more RCS representatives, or a committee, are appointed for the following issues with relevance for RCS at the field level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Farming practices</li> <li>▪ Working conditions</li> <li>▪ Gender equality</li> <li>▪ Community engagement</li> <li>▪ Fibre quality</li> <li>▪ The environment</li> </ul> <p>The representatives are competent, knowledgeable on the subject matter, and accessible to field extension staff and to representatives of RCS-associated farmers; the representatives have the resources (time and budget) to implement their tasks.</p>	<p>i</p>
<p>03.03 The Managing Entity has the necessary staff capacity to implement the RCS standard.</p>	<p>03.03.03 The Managing Entity has a chart indicating the identities and roles of all persons responsible for the implementation of the RCS standard at field level. This includes all responsables appointed under indicators 03.03.01 and 03.03.2.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.04 The Managing Entity operates a data-management system.</p>	<p>03.04.01 The Managing Entity has a system in place to accurately collect and maintain the following information on RCS-associated farmers or farmer groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Name</li> <li>▪Gender</li> <li>▪Age</li> <li>▪Location (homestead) &amp; contact possibilities</li> </ul>	<p>c</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Locations, size and margins of area under cultivation (cotton crop rotation)</li> <li>▪Inputs provided (type and amount) if applicable</li> <li>▪(Input) pre-finance amount and repayment if applicable</li> <li>▪Seed cotton at market</li> <li>▪Training participation</li> </ul> <p>The data is updated annually.</p>	
03.04 The Managing Entity operates a data-management system.	03.04.02 The Managing Entity has a system in place to collect, compile, and report complete and accurate data at the field level in accordance with the data reporting template in the RCS Assurance Platform.	c
03.05 The Managing Entity ensures an effective RCS audit process.	03.05.01 The Managing Entity provides sufficient and appropriate assistance to the verifiers in order to ensure efficient and effective field-level verification. This includes the provision of staff with local geographical knowledge as well as transportation and logistical support.	c
03.05 The Managing Entity ensures an effective RCS audit process.	03.05.02 The RCS responsible participates in the field-level verification, including the opening and closing meetings.	c
03.05 The Managing Entity ensures an effective RCS audit process.	03.05.03 The Managing Entity agrees that confidential interviews with RCS-associated farmers, all randomly chosen by the verifiers, are conducted without any influence from the Managing Entity.	c
03.06 The Managing Entity regularly assesses risks of non-compliance with RCS and implements corrective actions.	03.06.01 The Managing Entity annually carries out a risk assessment to identify possible risks of nonconformity with RCS core indicators at the field level. The results of the risk assessments are documented in the annually updated continuous regeneration plan (CRP).	c
03.06 The Managing Entity regularly assesses risks of non-compliance with RCS and implements corrective actions.	03.06.02 If risks of non-conformity at the field level are identified, the Managing Entity plans and implements corrective action to address the risks.	c
03.06 The Managing Entity regularly assesses risks of non-compliance with RCS and implements corrective actions.	03.06.03 Corrective Actions and results are documented in the annually updated continuous regeneration plan (CRP).	c
03.07 RCS-managed areas are mapped.	03.07.01 An up-to-date overview map of the production areas is available. The Managing Entity has GPS-mapped or at least paper-mapped margins of cultivated areas which shall be verified as part of the RCS programme. In case the farmer base or cultivation areas change, an update on these needs to be provided in the year of occurrence.	c



03.08 Land ownership and use titles to the agricultural land of RCS-associated farmers are clearly defined.	03.08.01 The Managing Entity should clarify the land tenure and/or use titles, whether official or informal, of any farmers participating in the RCS programme.	i/f
03.09 The Managing Entity has clear and equitable contracts with RCS-associated farmers.	03.09.01 Where contract farming is legally permitted, all RCS farmers (individuals) or RCS-associated farmer groups (in the case of group contracts) receive written contracts in a language understandable to them. At minimum, contracts must indicate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ pre-finance terms and conditions, where applicable;</li> <li>▪ grading, where applicable, and base price;</li> <li>▪ delivery and payment terms and conditions; and</li> <li>▪ an arbitration system to resolve conflicts regardless of jurisdiction.</li> </ul> In all other cases, above purchasing conditions must be transparently communicated to RCS-associated farmers in a written and understandable format.	c
03.09 The Managing Entity has clear and equitable contracts with RCS-associated farmers.	03.09.02 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers have a good understanding of the contract (or purchasing conditions) and the associated rights and obligations.	c/f
03.10 The Managing Entity has a transparent grading and payment system in place for seed cotton and any other applicable crops and guarantees the timely payment of RCS-associated farmers.	03.10.01 The Managing Entity has a transparent system of seed-cotton grading in place at the farmer level and pays different prices for different levels of seed-cotton quality. In countries where seed-cotton grading is not practised at the farmer level, the Managing Entity is exempt from this requirement but obligated to pay the best-quality price to RCS-associated farmers.	c
03.10 The Managing Entity has a transparent grading and payment system in place for seed cotton and any other applicable crops and guarantees the timely payment of RCS-associated farmers.	03.10.02 The Managing Entity provides RCS-associated farmers or farmer groups with a summary of deliveries and payments made, indicating the seed-cotton buying price as well as any deductions made for input provision.	c
03.10 The Managing Entity has a transparent grading and payment system in place for seed cotton and any other applicable crops and guarantees the timely payment of RCS-associated farmers.	03.10.03 RCS-associated farmers are paid for their cotton or other crops in a timely manner, no later than 30 days after delivery to the point of sale. Payments are made in a form convenient for farmers.	c
03.11 The Managing Entity ensures that all RCS-associated farmers receive high-quality training on a regular basis.	03.11.01 Extension services for RCS-associated farmers are in place. The service structure is documented and updated on an annual basis at minimum (including with regard to the extension hierarchy, the number of people per hierarchy level, and the number of farmers per extension agent).	c



<p>03.11 The Managing Entity ensures that all RCS-associated farmers receive high-quality training on a regular basis.</p>	<p>03.11.02 To document the implementation of the training plan, the Managing Entity reports annual data on the RCS-associated farmers trained, with these data including the number of attendees, their gender, and the training topic.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.11 The Managing Entity ensures that all RCS-associated farmers receive high-quality training on a regular basis.</p>	<p>03.11.03 The Managing Entity evaluates the trainings conducted and its effectiveness by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ seeking participant feedback on completed trainings (e.g. the format, content, and follow-up mechanisms);</li> <li>▪ assessing and documenting to what extent the training results in practical changes; and</li> <li>▪ evaluating the training materials periodically to improve their content and delivery.</li> </ul>	<p>c/f</p>
<p>03.11 The Managing Entity ensures that all RCS-associated farmers receive high-quality training on a regular basis.</p>	<p>03.11.04 A training plan for the field level is available and implemented. It covers the training topics, target groups, the training schedule, and the expected number of participants. Training contents must be aligned with RCS criteria.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.12 Inputs provided to RCS-associated farmers by the Managing Entity are of high quality and delivered on time.</p>	<p>03.12.01 In case that the Managing Entity provides inputs to the RCS-associated farmers, it ensures that they receive the inputs provided on time, i.e. in line with good farming practices.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.12 Inputs provided to RCS-associated farmers by the Managing Entity are of high quality and delivered on time.</p>	<p>03.12.02 If the Managing Entity distributes cotton seeds to RCS-associated farmers, the seeds are nationally registered and have at least the minimum germination rate stipulated by seed legislation.</p> <p>If possible, the Managing Entity selects seed varieties that are fit for use in a rain-fed, small-scale farming context and deliver good quality fibres.</p> <p>If legislation does not indicate otherwise, seeds must not be treated with a pesticide coating (cf. indicators 03.12.03 and 05.06.01).</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.12 Inputs provided to RCS-associated farmers by the Managing Entity are of high quality and delivered on time.</p>	<p>03.12.03 Wherever national legislation allows, the Managing Entity promotes and, if applicable, provides seeds dressed with substances that are non-toxic to soil life; such as cow dung, herbals, compost teas, neem etc.</p>	<p>c/f</p>
<p>03.13 Prices for seed, pesticides and any other inputs provided by the Managing Entity are transparent to and known by RCS-associated farmers.</p>	<p>03.13.01 The Managing Entity provides evidence that RCS-associated farmers were informed about prices for inputs - such as cotton seeds, pesticides, or fertilisers - if provided by the Managing Entity on credit at the beginning of the production cycle, i.e. before contracts are signed.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>03.13 Prices for seed, pesticides and any other inputs provided by the Managing Entity are transparent to and known by RCS-associated farmers.</p>	<p>03.13.02 If the Managing Entity provides RCS-associated farmers with inputs, it offers inputs at fair prices. Input prices are considered to be fair if they are at or below market prices.</p>	<p>c</p>



03.14 The Managing Entity ensures the same access to cotton-related resources for all RCS-associated farmers.	03.14.01 The Managing Entity provides male and female cotton growers with equal access to cotton-growing contracts, inputs, and input pre-financing.	c
03.15 The Managing Entity communicates RCS values to RCS-associated farmers and employees.	03.15.01 The Managing Entity displays its commitment to RCS in public workplaces (e.g. input distribution centres) in languages or pictograms understandable to all RCS-associated farmers.	i
03.15 The Managing Entity communicates RCS values to RCS-associated farmers and employees.	03.15.02 The Goals and values of RCS are communicated to and understood by the Managing Entity's top management and relevant operations staff.	i
03.15 The Managing Entity communicates RCS values to RCS-associated farmers and employees.	03.15.03 The goals and values of RCS are communicated to and understood by all representatives of RCS-associated farmers; a schedule for communicating these goals and values to all RCS-associated farmers has been agreed. The Managing Entity provides farmers' representatives with the necessary means to do so.	i/f
03.15 The Managing Entity communicates RCS values to RCS-associated farmers and employees.	03.15.04 Results of the RCS Baseline and planned actions are communicated to and understood by all RCS lead farmers, with the aim to communicate it with all RCS-associated farmers (cf. Indicator 03.01.01).	i/f
03.16 The Managing Entity follows AbTF rules regarding the chain of custody, especially with respect to the preservation of traceability and the marketing of RCS cotton.	03.16.01 Cotton marketed by the Managing Entity as RCS cotton is produced by and bought from RCS-associated farmers. In cases where only some of the farmers are taking part in the RCS programme, the Managing Entity ensures the separation of RCS cotton from non-RCS cotton. If necessary, a separation system is put into place, applied, and documented at all stages.	i/f

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**Principle 4: Decent working conditions are observed.**

RCS intends to ensure that relations between Managing Entities and associated farmers are based on fair principles and are in compliance with ILO core labour standards. However, small-scale farmers are self-employed, and Managing Entities have neither the power nor the right to enforce specific conditions on the farms. The fourth RCS principle address all aspects that the Managing Entity can influence by setting policies, guiding through respectful communication, raising awareness, and demonstrating non-discriminatory behaviour. If any individuals continue to disregard the requirements, the Managing Entity has the right and duty to exclude them from the programme.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
04.01 RCS Managing Entities promote decent work throughout all field operations.	04.01.01 No forced, bonded, trafficked, or otherwise involuntary labour, including involuntary prison labour, is used or tolerated at the field level.	c



<p>04.02 The Managing Entity respects the freedom of RCS-associated farmers to form producer associations.</p>	<p>04.02.01 RCS-associated cotton farmers can freely establish and join farmers' unions and participate in price-setting negotiations through their representatives.</p> <p>The Managing Entity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ respects the right of farmers to form or join farmers' unions;</li> <li>▪ respects the right of farmers' unions to participate in price-setting negotiations; and</li> <li>▪ does not discriminate against farmers for founding or joining farmer' unions and/or for participating in price-setting negotiations through their representatives.</li> </ul>	<p>c</p>
<p>04.03 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>04.03.01 The Managing Entity sensitizes RCS-associated farmers on gender equality, e.g. through training sessions or workshops. Records of training or workshops are kept at least for one year.</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>04.03 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>04.03.02 The Managing Entity ensures equal access to and participation in extension and training for male and female RCS-associated cotton farmers.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>04.03 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>04.03.03 If the holder of a RCS farming contract is female, payments are made directly to the woman or the couple (not to the husband or male partner alone).</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>04.03 The Managing Entity promotes gender equality, empowers women, and raises awareness on gender issues amongst RCS-associated farmers, employees, and workers.</p>	<p>04.03.04 The Managing Entity increases the number of female RCS facilitators (e.g. extension agents and lead farmers).</p>	<p>i</p>
<p>04.04 The Managing Entity implements a policy of non-discrimination and supports disadvantaged groups.</p>	<p>04.04.01 The Managing Entity does not tolerate any form of discrimination. This includes benefits or discrimination in terms of contracting, promotion, remuneration, training, or other activities on any basis, including gender, age, religion, race, colour, caste, ethnicity, nationality, social background, disability, political opinion, sexual orientation, family responsibilities, pregnancy, childbirth, marital status, diseases and membership in farmers' unions or farmers' representative bodies.</p>	<p>c</p>



04.04 The Managing Entity implements a policy of non-discrimination and supports disadvantaged groups.	04.04.02 The Managing Entity has a written code of conduct or policy on non-discrimination that is communicated to RCS-associated farmers.	c
04.04 The Managing Entity implements a policy of non-discrimination and supports disadvantaged groups.	04.04.03 The Managing Entity has informed itself on the situation of potentially disadvantaged or minority groups and considers them when supporting local start-ups and businesses around the RCS production system (cf. Indicator 02.05.03).	i/f
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.	04.05.01 The Managing Entity has a time-bound plan for the prevention of child labour at the field level in accordance with ILO conventions 138 and 182 and applicable national laws.	c
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.	04.05.02 The Managing Entity establishes and implements a child labour policy that includes a clear statement against child labour. The policy also specifies under which circumstances and for which tasks children of RCS-associated farmers are allowed to help on the family farms. This policy is communicated to all RCS-associated farmers. In the case of small-scale farming families, children may help on their family's farm provided the work is not liable to negatively affect their health, safety, well-being, education, or development and that they are supervised by adults and given appropriate training.	c
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.	04.05.03 RCS-associated farmers do not employ children below the age of 15 (14 in certain specified countries) or under the age defined by local law, whichever is higher.	c
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.	04.05.04 Hazardous work at the field level is not performed by anyone under the age of 18.	c
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.	04.05.05 If the verifiers or competent authorities detect that RCS-associated farmers have employed children under 15 for any type of work or children under 18 for hazardous work in the past, the Managing Entity must take the necessary initiative to avoid that those children enter or are at risk of entering even worse forms of labour, supporting them return to education wherever possible by liaising with expert organisations and/or local authorities.	c
04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children	04.05.06 RCS-associated farmers' household members below 15 years of age (14 in certain specified countries) or under the age	c



<p>and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.</p>	<p>defined by local law, whichever is higher, may help on their family's farm after school or during holidays only under the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Children's work is structured so as to enable them to attend school and have leisure time</li> <li>▪ Children's work is appropriate for their age and physical condition</li> <li>▪ Children do not perform tasks that are hazardous to them</li> <li>▪ Children do not work for long hours or under dangerous or exploitative conditions</li> <li>▪ Children are supervised and guided by their parents or legal guardians</li> </ul> <p>Children's school and work time, including the commute between home and school, shall not exceed a combined total of ten hours per day.</p>	
<p>04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.</p>	<p>04.05.07 The Managing Entity conducts spot checks at RCS farms to check the age of farm workers, especially in labour-intensive periods during the cotton season. Records of the checks are kept for at least two years.</p>	i
<p>04.05 The Managing Entity respects the rights of children and ensures that there is no child labour in accordance with ILO Conventions 138 and 182.</p>	<p>04.05.08 The Managing Entity promotes school enrolment and school attendance of children from RCS households by training of RCS-associated farmers.</p>	i
<p>04.06 The Managing Entity ensures a respectful working environment without harassment or corporal punishment and with transparent disciplinary measures.</p>	<p>04.06.01 The Managing Entity does not directly or indirectly engage in, support, or tolerate the use of corporal punishment, sexual harassment, mental or physical coercion, or any other kind of verbal or physical abuse or harassment at the field level.</p>	c
<p>04.06 The Managing Entity ensures a respectful working environment without harassment or corporal punishment and with transparent disciplinary measures.</p>	<p>04.06.02 The Managing Entity establishes and implements a policy for its staff that clearly prohibits sexual harassment at the field level, including behaviour, gestures, language, and physical contact that are sexually intimidating, abusive or exploitative. RCS-associated farmers, employees and workers are aware of this policy and its contents, and it applies to management and workers alike.</p>	c
<p>04.07 A strong, easily accessible and non-discriminative grievance mechanism is in place for the associated farmers and rural communities concerned.</p>	<p>04.07.01 The Managing Entity has a grievance procedure in place which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ is accessible for RCS-associated farmers who wish to file a complaint;</li> <li>▪ allows for complaints to be submitted anonymously;</li> <li>▪ includes a special procedure for cases of sexual harassment (cf. indicator 1.3.5a);</li> <li>▪ ensures no plaintiff will be penalised for submitting a complaint;</li> </ul>	c/f





- addresses complaints in a clear and timely manner;
- reports fully to the complainant and allows for an appeals process;
- ensures that complaints and the corrective actions taken are adequately documented; and
- makes complaints available to the verifiers on request.

<p>04.07 A strong, easily accessible and non-discriminative grievance mechanism is in place for the associated farmers and rural communities concerned.</p>	<p>04.07.02 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers are aware of the grievance mechanism and the arbitration system, understand the procedure(s) and have easy access to the same. RCS-associated farmers are informed on the grievance mechanism and/or arbitration system at the time of contracting and surrounding communities within the multi-stakeholder process.</p>	<p>c/f</p>
<p>04.07 A strong, easily accessible and non-discriminative grievance mechanism is in place for the associated farmers and rural communities concerned.</p>	<p>04.07.03 The Managing Entity does not discipline, dismiss, or discriminate in any way against RCS-associated farmers for using any grievance or arbitration procedure.</p>	<p>c/f</p>
<p>04.07 A strong, easily accessible and non-discriminative grievance mechanism is in place for the associated farmers and rural communities concerned.</p>	<p>04.07.04 The Managing Entity ensures that grievances regarding sexual harassment reported by RCS-associated farmers are referred to specially appointed women or women's committees, including a female senior manager if possible, with direct access to the chief executive. The same principles apply to cases of sexual harassment of groups other than women.</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>04.07 A strong, easily accessible and non-discriminative grievance mechanism is in place for the associated farmers and rural communities concerned.</p>	<p>04.07.05 The Managing Entity has an arbitration system in place to settle disputes with RCS-associated farmers and surrounding communities. This arbitration system can be either a part of the grievance mechanism or a separate mechanism.</p>	<p>i/f</p>

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### Principle 5: Soil health is restored.

Soil health, meaning the functional interaction between soil texture, organic matter, plants, and soil life, is the most essential prerequisite for the long-term productivity and resilience of agricultural soils. That is why soil health is core to any definition of regenerative agriculture.

The fifth RCS principle ensures that soil conditions on RCS-associated farms are regularly assessed and that strategically planned measures are taken to improve soil conditions.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
05.01 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers are aware of the condition of their soils.	05.01.01 Managing Entities and RCS (Lead) Farmers regularly monitor soil health and nutrient conditions. Soils assessments must be representative of the associated farms, preferably with a combination of on-site soil assessment and laboratory analysis. The Managing Entity enables RCS-associated farmers to conduct on-farm soil assessments. The assessment result will feed back into the baseline (cf. indicator 03.01.01) and into the continuous regeneration plan (cf. indicator 03.01.02).	c
05.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers have a locally adapted strategy on how to improve soil health.	05.02.01 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers plan how to monitor and improve soil health over time. Monitoring methods and results, as well as the corresponding activities, must be documented in the continuous regeneration plan.	c/f
05.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers have a locally adapted strategy on how to improve soil health.	05.02.02 The Managing Entity validates publicly available soil data (e.g. from SoilGrids, government bodies or universities) through its own soil health analysis and uses the information to plan suitable actions on soil conservation.	i
05.03 The Managing enables RCS-associated farmers to restore degraded farmland.	05.03.01 The Managing Entity informs RCS-associated farmers about degraded areas on their farmland and trains them in identifying such areas.	c/f
05.03 The Managing enables RCS-associated farmers to restore degraded farmland.	05.03.02 The Managing Entity trains RCS-associated farmers in farmland and ecosystem restoration and, where possible, provides the required materials.	i/f
05.04 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers nurture soil health and apply techniques for soil conservation.	05.04.01 RCS-associated farmers receive regular training in techniques for soil conservation.	c



05.04 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers nurture soil health and apply techniques for soil conservation.	05.04.02 The soil fertility of cultivated fields is preserved and increased. This is measured through soil monitoring (cf. indicator 05.01.01). - Fields must experience suitable nutrient replacement in an (economically and environmentally) efficient manner. - Organic fertilisation and nutrient recycling from local resources and suitable organic waste is always preferred to synthetic inputs or to no inputs. - If synthetic fertilisers are used, they must be replaced with organic fertilisers over time, always ensuring that the soils are not degraded while in use.	c/f
05.04 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers nurture soil health and apply techniques for soil conservation.	05.04.03 Managing Entities and RCS-associated farmers take strategic action to reduce soil erosion and leakage over time. The strategy and corresponding actions must be identified by farmers' representatives and the Managing Entity and be documented in the continuous regeneration plan.	c/f
05.04 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers nurture soil health and apply techniques for soil conservation.	05.04.04 RCS-associated farmers practise purely mechanical land clearance from shrubs and grasses (using tools, machinery, or grazing animals such as goats), while avoiding biological land degradation.	c
05.05 RCS-associated farmers enhance diversity in their cropping systems.	05.05.01 Cotton is not grown in the same field for several years in a row. RCS farmers employ a three-year crop rotation at minimum, including at least one leguminous crop.	c
05.05 RCS-associated farmers enhance diversity in their cropping systems.	05.05.02 The majority of RCS-associated farmers apply at least two of the following techniques: - Employ a four-year crop rotation at minimum, including at least one leguminous crop, at least one cover crop or intercrop, and one deep-rooting crop - Practise intercropping (e.g. strip cropping, an undersown crop, mixing with perennials) in crop rotation (not restricted to cotton) - Include "fallow with grazing" in their crop rotation (cf. indicator 05.07.01)	c/f
05.06 Seeds used by RCS-associated farmers are either untreated or have an organic coating.	05.06.01 None of the seeds used by RCS-associated farmers are treated with synthetic pesticides. - If seed dressing is used, the use of an organic seed coating is mandatory in order to enhance and use soil biology.	c
05.07 Wherever possible, grazing livestock are integrated into the farming system.	05.07.01 Grazing livestock are integrated into the crop rotation (including cover crops and fallow periods) of RCS-associated farmlands wherever possible; a diversity of livestock species intensifies the positive impact.	i/f

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## Principle 6: Water resources are preserved.

With increasingly difficult and extreme weather conditions, water becomes the most precious resource apart from soil. RCS promotes the efficient use and management of rainwater resources, including through soil moisture management. Although the preference is for RCS cotton to be a non-irrigated crop, rain-fed production is not a prerequisite for joining the RCS standard. While irrigation is permitted if cotton was already being irrigated at the time of starting with RCS, care must nevertheless be taken to use water as efficiently as possible. Where relevant, bodies of water are protected from chemical or organic sources of pollution, and the Managing Entity is encouraged to support community projects to restore eroded waterways.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.01 Where irrigation has not been used until starting with RCS, cotton is produced without using irrigation from surface water or groundwater sources.	c
06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.02 Where an irrigated cultivation system was already in place before starting with RCS, efficiency measures must be taken to reduce the use of and dependency on surface water and groundwater, for instance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoiding leakages (pipes) and runoff (field)</li> <li>- Collecting water in or around the field</li> <li>- Using drip irrigation instead of sprinklers or flood irrigation</li> </ul> Water use is metered, and reduction over time is documented.	c
06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.03 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in adopting practices that keep rainwater in the landscape and minimise runoff, evaporation, and overall water needs. Examples include contour and deep bed farming, mulching, cover/border cropping, and increasing soil carbon content via biochar and/or composting techniques.	c
06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.04 The Managing Entity regularly consults publicly available data on precipitation patterns (e.g. volume and inter- and intra-annual variations and trends) for its areas of operation, using this information to increase farmers' resilience to climate change, e.g. by adapting recommendations for scheduling of agricultural practices (cf. indicator 02.03.01 on good agricultural practices).	c
06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.05 The Managing Entity regularly trains and supports RCS-associated farmers in relevant geographical areas in protecting bodies of water and wetlands in and adjacent to the farming areas, for example by maintaining or restoring appropriate riparian buffer zones.	c



06.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in sustainably managing water resources and adapting to changing rainfall patterns.	06.01.06 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers to consider risks to water quality and maintain buffer zones when managing and applying (organic or synthetic) pesticides and nutrients.	c
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### Principle 7: The climate is protected.

Agriculture and the climate are closely connected. On the one hand, agriculture emits greenhouse gases; on the other hand, it is heavily affected by climate change. Regenerative practices can help to avoid greenhouse gas emissions and even remove carbon from the atmosphere. The seventh RCS principle covers criteria regarding emission reduction and avoidance as well as carbon sequestering through soils and plants. RCS criteria regarding deforestation are aligned with the EU regulation on deforestation-free products, with a cut-off date of 31 December 2020<sup>4</sup>.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
07.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.	07.01.01 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers implement activities that improve soil organic matter content over time, such as: - Integrating organic fertilisers (e.g. by using manure, compost, or mulch or by incorporating cover crops) - Returning all available and suitable organic matter or waste into the soil via suitable processes (including manure, composting, fermentation, mulching, and biochar production and use)	c/f
07.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.	07.01.02 Where national law or proven disease pressure do not require otherwise, RCS-associated farmers do not use fire for land preparation or destruction of crop residues. There is regular training or awareness raising to avoid using fire for land preparation, replanting or destroying crop residues. The Managing Entity regularly monitors that RCS-associated farmers are not using fire for the before mentioned activities.	c
07.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.	07.01.03 Field-border vegetation and occasional trees are left to provide shade, food and feed, and habitat for wildlife and to protect the soil from wind and water erosion.	c
07.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.	07.01.04 The Managing Entity seeks opportunities for investments in projects to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions or to adapt to climate change at the farmer level.	i/f

<sup>4</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023R1115&qid=1687867231461>



07.01 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in implementing practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and sequester carbon.	07.01.05 The Managing Entity has a systematic approach and continuously carries out comprehensive activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or adapt to climate change at the level of RCS-associated farmers, such as reforestation/tree-planting projects or projects for installing rainwater harvesting systems or devices that save or produce energy. RCS farming communities concerned need to be integrated in the planning.	i/f
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**Principle 8: The reduction and safe use of synthetic inputs are ensured.**

As a crop, cotton is vulnerable to pests and diseases and requires a high level of attention over the entire season. Especially when planted in monoculture, it requires plant protection and sufficient nutrients to achieve profitable yields. Small-scale farmers have limited access to synthetic inputs, and if they do, the risk of false application is high. It is very challenging for those producers to entirely rely on botanical and natural alternatives from one season to another without long-term preparation. Soils and cultivation systems take time to adapt before reaching a new equilibrium, as do the farmers' experience, knowledge, and skills. RCS therefore strongly emphasises excluding pesticides that are hazardous for people or nature, applying allowed products safely and in a targeted manner only when needed, and working towards a replacement strategy to ensure healthy and balanced soils, thereby reducing pest and weed pressures in the medium term. RCS discourages the use of genetically modified seeds, because currently available commercial GM varieties come along with high investments in potentially harmful synthetic inputs in order to achieve their yield potential. The Managing Entity has to present a strategy for reducing and replacing genetically modified seeds, synthetic pesticides, herbicides, and fertilisers if such products are in use when starting the regenerative journey.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
08.01 The use of any crop protection products that could harm humans or the ecosystem is reduced or avoided entirely.	08.01.01 The Managing Entity trains RCS-associated farmers in scouting for key pests and beneficiary insects and in threshold spraying.	c
08.01 The use of any crop protection products that could harm humans or the ecosystem is reduced or avoided entirely.	08.01.02 RCS-associated farmers do not practise random or calendar spraying.	c
08.01 The use of any crop protection products that could harm humans or the ecosystem is reduced or avoided entirely.	08.01.03 RCS-associated farmers minimise the use of herbicides and replace herbicide use with non-chemical weed control methods. The herbicide replacement strategy and actions must be described in the continuous regeneration plan and have reached at least the piloting stage during the first RCS verification. The Managing Entity supports the farmers by providing training and suitable tools and materials.	c/f



<p>08.01 The use of any crop protection products that could harm humans or the ecosystem is reduced or avoided entirely.</p>	<p>08.01.04 As necessary, RCS-associated farmers are trained in the production, handling, and application of non-chemical methods of pest control. This can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Production and use of locally sourced plant-based pesticides (such as solanum or neem)</li> <li>- Implementation of push-pull intercropping systems</li> <li>- Molasses traps</li> <li>- Bait feeding for beneficial insects</li> <li>- Creation of protected habitats for beneficial insects and other pest predators</li> </ul>	<p>c/f</p>
<p>08.02 Pesticide resistancies are avoided.</p>	<p>08.02.01 The Managing Entity works with the farmers on ensuring that the active ingredients in any used pesticides are regularly changed to avoid creating resistance. If pesticide procurement and distribution are not within their control, the Managing Entity advocates for regular changes of active ingredients. This applies to synthetic pesticides as well as for botanical ones, even though their use phase can be longer.</p>	<p>i</p>
<p>08.03 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers only use pesticides that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) nationally registered and approved for use in the appropriate crop cultivation; and</li> <li>(2) labelled according to national standards in at least one of the national languages or applicable official regional language</li> </ul>	<p>08.03.01 All pesticides used are registered nationally and approved for use in cotton cultivation or in the cultivation of other crops, as applicable.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.03 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers only use pesticides that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) nationally registered and approved for use in the appropriate crop cultivation; and</li> <li>(2) labelled according to national standards in at least one of the national languages or applicable official regional language</li> </ul>	<p>08.03.02 All pesticides used are correctly labelled in accordance with national standards in at least one de facto or de jure official national or applicable regional language.</p>	<p>c</p>



<p>08.04 Highly hazardous pesticides are excluded from use in RCS cotton cultivation as well as in cultivation of other by-products.</p>	<p>08.04.01 Managing Entities and RCS-associated farmers only purchase and use pesticides that are not banned from use for the cultivation under RCS. Substances falling under the following categories are banned under RCS :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Stockholm Convention, Annexes A and B</li> <li>· Rotterdam Convention, Annex III</li> <li>· Montreal Protocol, Annexes</li> <li>· Active ingredients categorised as WHO Class Ia (extremely hazardous) or Class Ib (highly hazardous), respectively listed in categories 1 and 2 of GHS</li> <li>· Pesticides with active ingredients defined as carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic (CMR) substances listed in category 1A and 1B of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS).</li> </ul> <p>For organic production, the regulations relevant for the obtained organic certificate apply.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.05 An up-to-date and complete list of pesticides distributed to RCS-associated farmers is available. This includes any pesticides used in organic production. The list of pesticides includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ brand names, active ingredients, and their concentrations; and</li> <li>▪ the specific protective equipment and training needed to apply the products.</li> </ul>	<p>08.05.01 An up-to-date and complete list of pesticides distributed to RCS-associated farmers, no matter if synthetic or botanical, is available. If the farmers purchase their inputs independently, the Managing Entity needs to co-operate with local suppliers to obtain this information. The list of pesticides includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ brand names, active ingredients, and their concentrations;</li> <li>▪ whether the active ingredients are hazardous to pollinators and life in water; and</li> <li>▪ the specific protective equipment and training needed to apply the products.</li> </ul>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.06 The Managing Entity ensures that (synthetic or organic) pesticides are only prepared and applied by persons that are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) healthy;</li> <li>(b) skilled and trained in the application of pesticides;</li> <li>(c) 18 or older; and</li> <li>(d) not pregnant or nursing.</li> </ol>	<p>08.06.01 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers on the health risks associated with the exposure to (synthetic and organic) pesticides. Special attention is given to the groups of people who must not be involved in the preparation or application of pesticides (i.e. people who are pregnant, nursing, under 18 years of age, not healthy, or not skilled and trained in application).</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.06 The Managing Entity ensures that (synthetic or organic) pesticides are only prepared and applied by persons that are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) healthy;</li> <li>(b) skilled and trained in the application of pesticides;</li> <li>(c) 18 or older; and</li> <li>(d) not pregnant or nursing.</li> </ol>	<p>08.06.02 Field evidence shows that persons preparing and applying (synthetic or organic) pesticides are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) 18 years of age or older;</li> <li>(b) healthy;</li> <li>(c) skilled and trained in pesticide application; and</li> <li>(d) not pregnant or nursing.</li> </ol>	<p>c</p>





<p>08.07 The Managing Entity ensures that any person who prepares and applies pesticides has access to and correctly uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).</p>	<p>08.07.01 The Managing Entity regularly (at least annually) checks (organic and synthetic) pesticide labels and ensures that famers have access to and use adequate PPE recommended for these distributed pesticides. If farmers obtain pesticides not from the Managing Entity but from elsewhere, the farmers are obliged to keep sales receipts that include the product name.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.07 The Managing Entity ensures that any person who prepares and applies pesticides has access to and correctly uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).</p>	<p>08.07.02 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers in the use of minimum protective clothing. Protective clothing for the occupational health and safety of farmers needs to be adequate relative to the applied (organic and synthetic) pesticide and to the application device used (as prescribed in the material safety data sheet or on the pesticide label). In all cases, minimum PPE includes a shirt with long sleeves, long trousers, closed shoes, and a mask when applicable.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.07 The Managing Entity ensures that any person who prepares and applies pesticides has access to and correctly uses appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).</p>	<p>08.07.03 Field evidence shows that RCS-associated farmers wear minimum personal protective equipment while preparing and applying pesticides.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.08 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers apply (synthetic or organic) pesticides in appropriate weather conditions, according to the label and any manufacturer’s instructions, and with appropriate and well-maintained equipment.</p>	<p>08.08.01 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers in: (a) the proper preparation of spray formulations for effective use; (b) safe spraying techniques; (c) maintaining appropriate equipment for (organic or synthetic) pesticide application; and (d) considering weather conditions when scheduling spraying.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.08 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers apply (synthetic or organic) pesticides in appropriate weather conditions, according to the label and any manufacturer’s instructions, and with appropriate and well-maintained equipment.</p>	<p>08.08.02 The Managing Entity monitors adherence to appropriate pesticide use by RCS-associated farmers: Application in appropriate seasonal and weather conditions.</p>	<p>i</p>
<p>08.08 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers apply (synthetic or organic) pesticides in appropriate weather conditions, according to the label and any manufacturer’s instructions,</p>	<p>08.08.03 The Managing Entity offers a service for RCS-associated farmers to maintain their (organic) pesticide-application equipment.</p>	<p>i/f</p>



and with appropriate and well-maintained equipment.

<p>08.09 Pesticides at dedicated (organic or synthetic) pesticide storage areas of the Managing Entity must be stored safely and must fully comply with relevant legislation.</p>	<p>08.09.01 All facilities belonging to the Managing Entity and used for storing (organic and synthetic) pesticides must be dry and clean, well ventilated, sufficiently lit, structurally secure, and equipped with non-absorbent material.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.09 Pesticides at dedicated (organic or synthetic) pesticide storage areas of the Managing Entity must be stored safely and must fully comply with relevant legislation.</p>	<p>08.09.02 Dedicated (organic or synthetic) pesticide storage areas of the Managing Entity must fully comply with relevant legislation. Central pesticide storage facilities must also have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ a sound roof and impermeable floors;</li> <li>▪ shelves with non-absorbent and fire-resistant material;</li> <li>▪ a system to retain spillage;</li> <li>▪ clear, permanent warning signs close to access doors;</li> <li>▪ visible safety warnings, explanations of pictograms, symptoms of intoxication, and first-aid information for each product stored;</li> <li>▪ visible emergency procedure; and</li> <li>▪ an eye-washing area.</li> </ul>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.10 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers store, handle, clean and transport pesticide-application equipment and containers safely, in order to minimise risks for environmental harm and human exposure.</p>	<p>08.10.01 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers in:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the safe storage of (synthetic or organic) pesticides;</li> <li>(b) safe handling;</li> <li>(c) safe transport; and</li> <li>(d) the cleaning of equipment and containers.</li> </ol>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.11 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers dispose of empty pesticide containers safely.</p>	<p>08.11.01 The Managing Entity regularly trains RCS-associated farmers regarding the dangers of re-using empty (organic and synthetic) pesticide containers and how to dispose of them in a safe manner.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.11 The Managing Entity ensures that RCS-associated farmers dispose of empty pesticide containers safely.</p>	<p>08.11.02 The Managing Entity establishes a collection, return, and/or disposal system (organized by the Managing Entity, the government, a supplier, or designated service provider) for empty (organic and synthetic) pesticide containers.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>08.12 The Managing Entity trains farmers in the correct use of potentially harmful pesticides.</p>	<p>08.12.01 In the case of pesticides which are potentially hazardous for pollinators or water species, the Managing Entity instructs the farmers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to keep sufficient distance to waterways and not use the pesticide during rainy periods;</li> <li>- not to spray when a crop is flowering, in order to avoid pollinator intoxication; and</li> <li>- on alternatives to the use of such pesticides.</li> </ul>	<p>i</p>



08.13 RCS-managed farming systems aim at avoiding or replacing use of genetically modified cotton seeds.	08.13.01 Where genetically modified cotton (Bt or HT) hybrid seeds have not been used so far, it is mandatory to continue using GMO-free seeds.	c
08.13 RCS-managed farming systems aim at avoiding or replacing use of genetically modified cotton seeds.	08.13.02 Where genetically modified cotton varieties have already been used before starting with RCS, the Managing Entity needs to develop and implement a stepwise and time-bound strategy for replacing these seeds with suitable non- Bt or HT varieties that are adapted to low-input agriculture.	c

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### Principle 9: Biodiversity is enhanced.

Biodiversity refers to the diversity of life at all levels, from single species to ecosystems. Up to one million species are threatened with extinction. The main driver in the decline of biodiversity is humans' use of land, but climate change is playing an increasingly important role as well. These interlinked crises must be tackled together. The ninth RCS principle addresses actions for preserving and enhancing biodiversity within the circle of influence of the Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
09.01 The Managing Entity responsibly manages and reduces the environmental impact of RCS-managed farms.	09.01.01 The Managing Entity has personnel within its organisation who are directly responsible for environmental performance at the field level and who possess the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to perform their tasks. They report to senior management and have adequate time and resources to carry out their duties.	c
09.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers respect protected areas and areas with high conservation values.	09.02.01 The Managing Entity collaborates with national environmental authorities to identify and map out protected areas and areas with a high conservation value (HCV) within growing areas cultivated by associated farmers. Such areas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary forests and other intact forest landscapes</li> <li>▪ Important bird areas (IBA)</li> <li>▪ UNESCO world heritage sites</li> <li>▪ Strict nature reserves (IUC Ia)</li> <li>▪ Wilderness areas (IUC Ib)</li> <li>▪ National parks (IUC II)</li> <li>▪ Natural monuments or features (IUC III)</li> <li>▪ Habitat/species management areas (IUC IV)</li> <li>▪ Wetlands (Ramsar Convention)</li> <li>▪ Rivers and riparian buffer areas</li> </ul>	c
09.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers respect protected areas and areas with high conservation values.	09.02.02 Where protected areas and High Conservation Value (HCV) areas are identified, the Managing Entity complies with existing official management and monitoring plans in order to maintain those values.	c



09.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers respect protected areas and areas with high conservation values.	09.02.03 Threatened and endangered species in the production area of RCS-associated farmers are identified and respected. Managing Entities can use the IUCN Red List website to identify threatened or endangered species recorded in the growing regions: <a href="https://www.iucnredlist.org/search">https://www.iucnredlist.org/search</a>	c
09.02 The Managing Entity and RCS-associated farmers respect protected areas and areas with high conservation values.	09.02.04 The Managing Entity fosters regular communication with RCS-associated farming communities regarding the identification and protection of endangered local species on and around their farmlands.	c/f
09.03 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in the sustainable use and restoration of natural resources.	09.03.01 The Managing Entity trains and assists communities of RCS-associated farmers in managing and using natural resources and in leading conservation initiatives of their own, e.g. through peer learning, capacity building, or financing materials needed for ecosystem restoration at the community level. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Planting native trees or flowers</li> <li>▪ Safeguarding biological corridors</li> <li>▪ Preserving semi-natural areas (e.g. hedges or meadows)</li> </ul>	c/f
09.03 The Managing Entity supports RCS-associated farmers in the sustainable use and restoration of natural resources.	09.03.02 The Managing Entity supports the transfer and dissemination of traditional knowledge regarding the sustainable and responsible use of natural resources in production areas and areas of high conservation value (HCV). Precondition: It is legal to use the resources.	i/f
09.04 The Managing Entity ensures the responsible use of land.	9.04.01 Cotton and other commercially grown crops are only produced on land that is classified as agricultural or approved for agricultural use under national legislation. Protected areas and areas of high conservation values (HCV) are respected (cf. indicator 09.02.01).	c
09.04 The Managing Entity ensures the responsible use of land.	09.04.02: RCS-associated farmers are not cultivating on deforested land (with a cut-off date of 2020-12-31) and do not practise deforestation or other ecosystem conversion methods.	c
09.04 The Managing Entity ensures the responsible use of land.	09.04.03 In the event of any conversion from non-agricultural land to agricultural land, the Managing Entity assures that the RCS associated farmers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ have the right to use the land (ideally holding land tenure);</li> <li>▪ maintain a ten-metre buffer zone of perennial vegetation with open water (river, stream, ditch, canal, pond, or lake);</li> <li>▪ ensure that no crops are cultivated in the locally mandated buffer zone for officially designated protected areas; and</li> <li>▪ ensure that no crops are cultivated in the locally mandated buffer zone for intact forest landscapes.</li> </ul>	c
09.05 Connected habitats for wild animals and plants are created and preserved.	09.05.01 RCS-associated farmers' groups are informed about and supported in conserving and creating living spaces for wildlife, insects, and plants (cf. Indicator 07.01.03).	i/f



<p>09.05 Connected habitats for wild animals and plants are created and preserved.</p>	<p>09.05.02 The Managing Entity supports community projects in creating diverse and connected living spaces as habitat and migration corridors for wildlife. The sustainable use of these corridors could give rise to community business opportunities (02.05.03).</p>	<p>i/f</p>
<p>09.06 The introduction of invasive species is avoided, and present invasive species are monitored and controlled, if required.</p>	<p>09.06.01 No alien invasive species (species whose spread threatens biodiversity) are introduced into wild areas. Where such species are present, their presence must be monitored and possibly controlled within the circle of influence of the Managing Entity.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>09.06 The introduction of invasive species is avoided, and present invasive species are monitored and controlled, if required.</p>	<p>09.06.02 If alien (and potentially invasive) species are identified on or around RCS-managed farms, the Managing Entity seeks professional advice as well as farmers' knowledge to assess the risks these species pose for natural habitats and functioning ecosystems. If there is a high risk, the species in question must be controlled by the Managing Entity.</p>	<p>c</p>
<p>09.06 The introduction of invasive species is avoided, and present invasive species are monitored and controlled, if required.</p>	<p>09.06.03 Regarding agricultural use, care must be taken when introducing any new plant or animal species to avoid the risk of uncontrolled spreading.</p>	<p>i/f</p>

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## Principle 10. Animal needs are respected.

In most cases, farm animals are part of agricultural production systems, be it as working animals or a food source. As such, RCS-associated farmers need to follow some basic rules regarding animal welfare, which will also benefit the animals' health as well as safe and easier handling.

RCS Criterion	RCS Indicator	c/i/f
10.01 All farm animals have an adequate supply of food and water as well as shelter from predators and the elements. The living conditions of the animals enable them to actively meet their species-specific needs.	10.01.01 All farm animals have regular access to clean water and clean feed, and they can seek protection/shade whenever necessary.	c
10.01 All farm animals have an adequate supply of food and water as well as shelter from predators and the elements. The living conditions of the animals enable them to actively meet their species-specific needs.	10.01.02 All animals held in captivity are granted sufficient space to express their social and natural behaviours such as herd/group interaction, exercising, and resting.	c
10.01 All farm animals have an adequate supply of food and water as well as shelter from predators and the elements. The living conditions of the animals enable them to actively meet their species-specific needs.	10.01.03 Animals held in captivity are granted sufficient space (cf. indicator 10.01.02) for at least six hours of the day (e.g. by daytime grazing).	i
10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.	10.02.01 When animals are kept tethered or in stables, it must be assured that they cannot injure or strangle themselves and that they can choose of their own accord whether to stand or lie down.	c
10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.	10.02.02 Hygienic conditions must be maintained; this includes that the animals do not have to rest in their own excrement and that clean and dry bedding, e.g. sand or straw, is provided where they would otherwise lie on stone or concrete floors.	c
10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain.	10.02.03 All farm animals must be handled in a calm and kind manner. With the exception of self-defence, violent handling or painful beatings are not allowed.	c



They are properly cared for when sick.

<p>10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.</p>	<p>10.02.04 Any unnecessary physical, nutritional, or environmental stress must be avoided. Examples are given in the guidance to this indicator.</p>	<p>c</p>
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<p>10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.</p>	<p>10.02.05 Any farm animal that is sick, injured, or has parasites is treated as soon as possible once the health issue is discovered. If no treatment is available and the animal has a good chance of recovery, the animal must be isolated and have an opportunity to rest and recover.</p>	<p>i</p>
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<p>10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.</p>	<p>10.02.06 When animals are handled and transported for slaughter, unnecessary stress or pain must be avoided. Unnecessary stress includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transport for more than six hours</li> <li>- No access to water before or after being loaded</li> <li>- Insufficient space to stand or sit upright</li> <li>- Hanging upside down</li> <li>- No access to light, air, or stability</li> <li>- Barriers to easy and safe loading and unloading, such as slippery ramps or floors</li> <li>- Exposure to excessive noise, heat, cold, wind, or dust</li> <li>- Transport of sick or injured animals</li> </ul>	<p>i</p>
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<p>10.02 Farm animals must be treated in a calm and kind manner, avoiding unnecessary stress or pain. They are properly cared for when sick.</p>	<p>10.02.07 If a farm animal is sick or hurt without prospect of recovery, it must be killed to avoid unnecessary stress or pain.</p>	<p>i</p>
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## About the Aid by Trade Foundation

The Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) was founded in 2005 and is now an internationally renowned and active non-profit organization for sustainable raw materials. Through its work, it makes a decisive and measurable contribution to improving the living conditions of people and animals and to protecting the environment. With its certified raw materials Cotton made in Africa (CmiA), Cotton made in Africa Organic (CmiA Organic), Regenerative Cotton Standard (RCS) and The Good Cashmere Standard (GCS), the foundation puts its goals into practice. A globally active alliance of textile companies and brands requests the certified raw materials and pays a license fee to the foundation's marketing company, ATAKORA Fördergesellschaft GmbH. This entitles the partners to market their goods with the labels of the standards. In view of the increasing challenges small-scale farmers and textile companies are facing, the standards are of fundamental importance for their resilience and future viability. The AbTF works in close cooperation with industry experts, animal welfare and nature conservation specialists.

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