

# REEL Programme

## Safeguarding Forests and Ecosystems



**COTTON  
CONNECT**

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## Introduction

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The REEL Programme through its REEL Standard and REEL Regenerative Standard integrates strong safeguards to ensure cotton production is deforestation-free, ecosystem-positive, and aligned with global industry expectations. Through the REEL Standard and the REEL Regenerative Standard, the following requirements are in place:

### REEL Standard Requirements

#### 6.1 FOREST CONSERVATION

- **6.1.1** New lands for cotton cultivation shall not be developed through deforestation, on protected land.
- **6.1.1.1** Primary forests and land protected by law shall not be destroyed for the purpose of cotton cultivation.
- **6.1.1.2** Secondary forests over 10 years old shall not be deforested for the purpose of gaining new land for cotton cultivation.
- **6.1.1.3** For secondary forests less than 10 years old and trees around the farm, compensation shall be sought in the form of restoration measures on unproductive land.

#### 6.2 BUFFER ZONES

**6.2.1.3** Naked buffers shall be actively restored through reforestation or other protective measures that allow natural regrowth without human or animal interference.

#### 6.3 ECOLOGICAL COMPENSATION

**6.3.1.2** The cotton farmer shall be able to demonstrate that measures have been implemented to restore natural vegetation.

**6.3.1.3** Cotton farmer groups shall contribute to the plantation of trees, including cotton trees, in their locality.

### REEL Regenerative Standard Requirements

In addition to the requirements mentioned under REEL Standard, the REEL Regenerative Standard also has the following additional requirements:

**6.1.1.4** Sensitive areas of high biodiversity, natural vegetation, fauna, soil, and water sources in the direct neighbourhood of cotton farms shall be identified and conserved.

**6.1.1.5** Farmers shall be provided with a list of wildlife species native to their region and be able to identify which of those species are classified as vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered according to the IUCN Red List (<http://www.redlist.org>).

## 6.4 AGROBIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

6.4.1.4 The concept of Multifunctional Agroforestry shall be trained and actively promoted among farmers.

*Guidance:* Multifunctional agroforestry is a land-use system that integrates trees with crops and/or livestock, aiming to provide a wide range of economic, social, and environmental benefits, going beyond just food production.

6.4.1.5 A nursery shall be established or identified as a source of native tree and plant species for ecological restoration activities on the farm.

### Cut-Off Date for Deforestation

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The REEL Programme aligns with the industry-aligned cut-off date of 31 December 2020, as established by the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

This ensures that:

- Any land deforested after 31 December 2020 is not eligible for cultivation under REEL Programmes.
- Alignment with this cut-off date provides consistency with international legislation, brand requirements, and global market expectations.

### Community Engagement and Education

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The REEL Programme recognises that long-term forest conservation and ecological restoration depend on strong community participation. Farmers and their families are engaged through training on the importance of agroforestry systems, demonstrating how integrating trees with crops contributes to the ecosystem, biodiversity, and resilience. Education extends to children in cotton-growing communities, helping to build an early awareness of the value of trees and the role of ecosystems in sustaining livelihoods. To strengthen practical action, based on the geographical context, specific projects supports community-led tree planting campaigns, including plantation drives and innovative approaches such as seed ball activities.

### Collaboration with Local Institutions

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The REEL Programme also emphasises collaboration with local governments and community-based institutions to enhance forestry and restoration efforts. The programme will make the best attempt to align its interventions with regional initiatives and local biodiversity plans, also making farmers aware about the programmes.