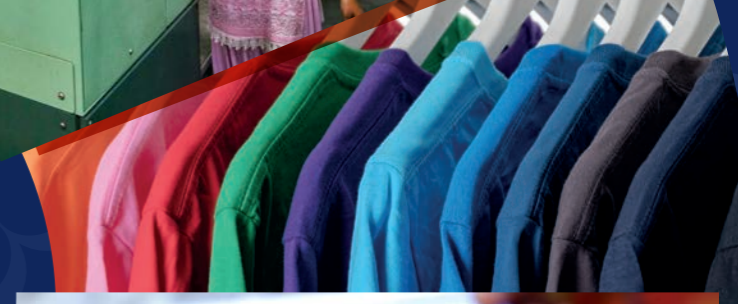


COTTON CONNECT

IMPACT REPORT 2025



POWERING
RESILIENT
SUPPLY
CHAINS



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INTRODUCTION FROM CEO



Alison Ward
Chief Executive Officer,
CottonConnect

Global cotton supply chains are under increasing pressure. Climate volatility, evolving legislation, and rising expectations from brands and consumers are reshaping how cotton must be grown, verified, and traded.

At CottonConnect, we are responding to this challenge by Powering Resilient Supply Chains – connecting farmers, gins, and global brands through systems that are traceable, regenerative, and commercially viable.

This year's Impact Report reports on CottonConnect's progress and how we are delivering traceable, responsibly sourced cotton for global brands and manufacturers. In times of economic and environmental challenge, we are supporting our clients to meet their commercial priorities as they navigate increasing risks and changing legislation. We provide the traceability, assurance, and due diligence required to power the resilient supply chains businesses need right now.

For us, resilience means cotton supply chains that can withstand climate shocks, meet regulatory scrutiny, protect human rights, and remain profitable for farmers. Only by making sustainable production commercially viable can we support the people and nature at the heart of producing raw materials.

In 2025, we strengthened our approach by transitioning the REEL Cotton and REEL Regenerative Codes into certified sustainability standards. This step responds directly to new EU requirements for substantiated sustainability claims and provides brands with independent governance and assurance, while maintaining the environmental and social rigour that has delivered measurable impact for more than a decade. The REEL Programme results in this impact report relate to the year 2024-25 when the programme was verified against the REEL Codes.

Regenerative agricultural practices, many of which are ancestral farming practices, continue to be a key focus for our farmer training. The majority (99.2%) of our REEL farmers are enrolled in our REEL Regenerative programme, with over 260,000 trained on regenerative practices this year. This year, trained farmers achieved a 34.9% increase in profit compared to control farmers, demonstrating that regenerative agriculture can strengthen both environmental outcomes and farm-level economics.

Farmers in the second year of our Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme in Pakistan earned 35.3% higher profits than conventional farmers. Reduced input costs and premium pricing more than compensated for lower yields, demonstrating that organic cotton can be both environmentally responsible and commercially viable.

Importantly, we expanded our Responsible Business for Gins programme beyond HSSE training to include key aspects of human rights due diligence, including human rights compliance, worker welfare, worker residential facilities, and worker protection.

We have already achieved our 2025 goal of 100% traceability across REEL Cotton through our digital platform, TraceBale. In 2024-25 alone, over 152,000 metric tonnes of lint cotton were digitally traced from farm group to supply chain, strengthening transparency and accountability across the system.

For us, Powering Resilient Supply Chains is more than a tagline; it reflects our belief that sustainable cotton must work for farmers, for ecosystems, and for the global brands that rely on them. This is underpinned by the three pillars of Innovating Products, Nurturing People, and Regenerating Planet, with the supporting activities for each pillar detailed in this report.

As we look ahead, our focus remains clear: scaling regenerative agriculture, strengthening traceability and certification, and expanding our impact across landscapes and supply chains. We remain committed to working alongside farmers, ginners, and global brands to ensure cotton production is fit for the future.



OVERVIEW OF COTTONCONNECT

Programmes

Programmes reporting 2024-25 results in this report:

REEL Cotton; REEL Regenerative;
Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme;
Responsible Business for Gins



CottonConnect is also an implementing partner of Better Cotton, which reports its Farmer Results and Impact Reports at bettercotton.org.

Countries

Location of programmes reporting 2024-25 results in this report:
India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Türkiye

TURKIYE

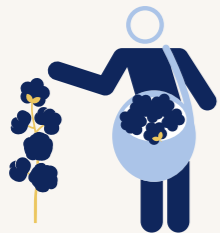
EGYPT

PAKISTAN

INDIA

BANGLADESH

CHINA



Number of farmers
trained in 2024-25:

448,549

Fibres traced through
TraceBale in 2024-25:



152,174
MT lint cotton

Focus areas



Environment



Climate



Livelihoods



Gender



HRDD



COTTONCONNECT: REFLECTION AND DIRECTION

When CottonConnect was founded in 2009, cotton supply chains were fragmented and opaque. Today, they face even greater complexity, with climate volatility, regulatory scrutiny, and rising expectations for traceability and human rights due diligence. Our evolution reflects this changing landscape.

Developing sustainability standards

The REEL Cotton Programme was specifically designed with input from farmers and farmer groups in India, to improve farmers' livelihoods while reducing environmental impact, with the REEL Cotton Code developed in 2016.

The REEL Regenerative Code was then created in 2021 with additional requirements on regenerative agricultural practices to support farmer resilience, climate adaptation, and biodiversity enhancement.

In 2025, both the REEL Cotton Code and REEL Regenerative Code transitioned to become sustainability standards, including certification.

Our digital traceability platform, TraceBale, provides full chain-of-custody visibility from farm group to garment. As legislation tightens and brands require greater substantiation of sustainability claims, TraceBale has become a critical piece of supply chain infrastructure.

Focus on women

Strengthening the role of women in cotton farming communities is not only a social priority; it is central to long-term farm resilience. When women have access to knowledge, income, and decision-making, farm performance and household stability improve.

The Women in Cotton programme covers topics from health and rights, to running a micro-enterprise. Original research with women in cotton farming communities has covered a wide range of topics from working roles and responsibilities, use of technology, and the effect of climate change.

CottonConnect now has a Gender Advisory Panel, comprising eminent gender experts from research and academia, to guide gender initiatives.

Future direction

As the external landscape evolves, so too must our approach. Our new strategy – Powering Resilient Supply Chains – reflects a broader ambition. We are moving beyond improving individual practices to strengthening the entire system that connects farmers, ginners, manufacturers, and brands. The tools and solutions CottonConnect has developed provide an enabling system to strengthen links across the supply chain, with future plans to operate at a landscape level, as part of its holistic, regenerative approach to raw material production.

The challenges facing cotton today demand integrated solutions. Traceability without improved livelihoods is not resilience, and environmental gains without commercial viability cannot be sustained. Our strategy therefore brings these elements together, combining innovation, human rights due diligence, and regenerative agriculture into a unified approach.

UPDATES ON WOMEN FARMERS FROM IMPACT REPORT 2024

Beauty Khutan joined CottonConnect's Women's Entrepreneurship Development Programme in Bangladesh in 2022 and developed a vermicompost business. Since then, Beauty's business in Khulna District has remained stable with regular production and growing market demand, particularly from vegetable and fruit farmers shifting away from chemical fertilisers. Her monthly income has increased from BDT 30,000 (GBP 178) to BDT 35,000 (GBP 208), and she continues to manage production and sales independently, addressing challenges through improved input management and local market linkages.



Photo by Anrud Zubair



Photo by Rehul Rathwa

Nitaben Vijaybhai Tadavi in Narmada district, Gujarat, India took part in CottonConnect's intensive Climate Change Ambassadors training in 2023-24. Continuing in 2024-25, Nitaben prepared and used vermicompost, Jeevamrut, and biopesticides on her farm. By reducing the use of chemical fertiliser and pesticides, her external input costs reduced by around 30%. Despite late rains affecting cotton quality across the area, by mid-harvest she had already harvested 500 kg/acre and expects 700-750 kg/acre, about 15% higher than other programme farmers.



REEL PROGRAMME THEORY OF CHANGE

Resilient supply chains begin at farm level. When farmers adopt better practices, soils improve, input costs fall, yields stabilise, and livelihoods strengthen. The REEL Programme's Theory of Change sets out how structured training and standards-based interventions translate into measurable environmental and economic outcomes. For example, training farmers on the use of biopesticides leads to outcomes, such as farmers using biopesticides in place of chemical pesticides, which in turn leads to impact (e.g. soil health is preserved through the use of biopesticides and reduced use of chemical pesticides).

For each REEL Programme, specific key performance indicators (KPIs) are measured:

Yield

By increasing the amount of cotton harvested, farmers have more cotton to sell, thus increasing their income. This is especially important for smallholder farmers relying on growing cotton to make a living.

Input costs

Introducing sustainable agricultural methods which reduce the use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers reduces the expenditure on these inputs.

Profit

Increased income due to higher yields, combined with reduced input costs, means more profit is retained by the farmer.

Water usage

Growing cotton conventionally uses a lot of water, so sustainable agronomic training promotes water efficiency to preserve this natural resource. Farmers are encouraged to adopt measures to optimise water use for irrigation and recharge water resources.

Chemical pesticide usage

Chemical pesticides can be harmful to farmers during application and can have a negative impact on biodiversity. Farmers are taught to use non-chemical methods of pest control, as well as how to identify friendly and enemy insects, and apply pesticides accordingly.

Chemical fertiliser usage

Chemical fertilisers can have negative environmental impacts and can often be a costly input. Introducing composting and crop rotation can reduce the need for chemical fertilisers, reducing input costs and protecting soil health.



Photo by Kabir Lal

The REEL Regenerative Theory of Change has three impact areas:

Farmer resilience

Improve farming performance, supplement farm benefits, enhance social fairness, secure supply

Climate adaptation

Foster climate mitigation and adaptation

Biodiversity enhancement

Promote agro-ecology, and create and retain natural habitats on farms

Definitions from ISEAL Code of Good Practice "Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards Systems":

Outcome The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term results from the implementation of a standards system's strategies. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

Impacts Positive and negative long-term effects resulting from the implementation of a standards system, either directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. (Adapted from OECD Glossary, 2002).

For the full REEL Cotton Theory of Change diagram, see [page 22](#).

For the full REEL Regenerative Code Theory of Change diagram, see [page 23](#).



REEL PROGRAMME RESULTS

The 2024–25 aggregated results demonstrate that regenerative and responsible farming practices can deliver both environmental gains and economic improvement. Higher profits combined with reduced chemical inputs and improved resource efficiency strengthen both farmer livelihoods and long-term cotton availability.

The REEL Programme results for 2024-25 are aggregated for all REEL Cotton and REEL Regenerative programmes in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, Egypt, and Türkiye. The global aggregated REEL Programme consists 99.2% REEL Regenerative farmers and 0.8% REEL Cotton farmers.

KPIs measurements:

Yield (kg/acre), Water use (m³/acre), Pesticides (ml/acre), Fertiliser (kg/acre), Input cost (USD/acre), Profit (USD/Acre)

Sample size:

Approximately 50% sample of the farmers trained in REEL Programmes, compared with conventional farmers (a control sample of 10% of the sample project farmers).

Verification:

Second-party verified by CottonConnect and third-party verified by FLOCERT.

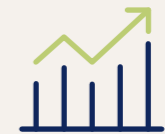
In 2024-25, the REEL Programme included projects in high irrigation area in Pakistan, Egypt and Türkiye, hence the aggregated water reduction figure is lower than last year. The projects in India and Bangladesh continue to achieve higher water reduction results comparable with last year.



Increased yield by **7.5%**



Reduced input costs by **15.4%**



Increased profit by **34.9%**



Reduced chemical pesticide use by **15.2%**



Reduced chemical fertiliser use by **11.8%**



Reduced water use by **1.3%**



Increased natural pesticide use by **127.3%**



Increased natural fertiliser use by **107.6%**



HOW THE RESULTS DEMONSTRATE THE THEORY OF CHANGE

The REEL Programme's aggregated results validate the Theory of Change: targeted training drives practice adoption; practice adoption improves soil health and input efficiency; these improvements increase profitability and resource sustainability; together, they build resilient production systems.

See [page 22](#) for the complete REEL Cotton Theory of Change

See [page 23](#) for the complete REEL Regenerative Theory of Change

SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

Improved soil health, plant growth, and increased yields /profits



Yield increased by **7.5%**



Profit increased by **34.9%**

Soil fertility is safeguarded through reduced use of fertilisers and savings from reduced input costs



Chemical fertiliser use reduced by **11.8%**



Natural fertiliser use increased by **107.6%**



Input costs reduced by **15.4%**

Soil health is preserved through reduced use of pesticides and increased use of bio-pesticides



Chemical pesticide use reduced by **15.2%**



Natural pesticide use increased by **127.3%**

Farmers benefitted from the replication of sustainable best practices

Adoption of sustainable practices

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Sustainable and responsible use of water resources



Water use reduced by **1.3%**

Sustainable waste management practices

Organic farm waste recycled

Preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity in the farmlands

Adoption of regenerative agriculture practices



Photo by Ahmed Emad Handy Mohamed



NAZEK ATTIA – RADWAN BASIN, EGYPT

//
I am very satisfied with the information I received. Many farmers I know now want to join the programme."

Breaking Barriers: One Farmer's Journey Toward Sustainable Cotton Farming

Nazek Attia is a 67 year old farmer from Egypt's Radwan Basin, farming for nearly four decades on a half-feddan plot. For many years, she relied heavily on chemical fertilisers and pesticides, with limited access to training or extension support.

As a woman farmer, it was difficult for her to get timely information on sowing, fertiliser doses, cotton quality, and safe disposal of pesticide containers. Rising input costs and soil fatigue gradually affected both her farm income and household needs.

Nazek joined the REEL Cotton Programme in 2022 to seek practical guidance. During the 2024 season, she took part in hands-on training, field demonstrations, and discussions. She adopted composting, improved picking practices, intercropping, safer pesticide handling, better water management, and the use of cotton stalks to improve soil fertility.

Within one season, cotton productivity increased from 1,260 kg per feddan in 2023 to 1,350 kg per feddan in 2024. Improved cotton quality helped her receive higher prices, while reduced fertiliser use and a 25% reduction in irrigation water lowered costs, saving her around EGP 5,000 (GBP 78). The improved soil condition and crop health gave her the confidence to continue with these practices.

Photo by Mohammed Hamdy



METHODOLOGY

Data collection

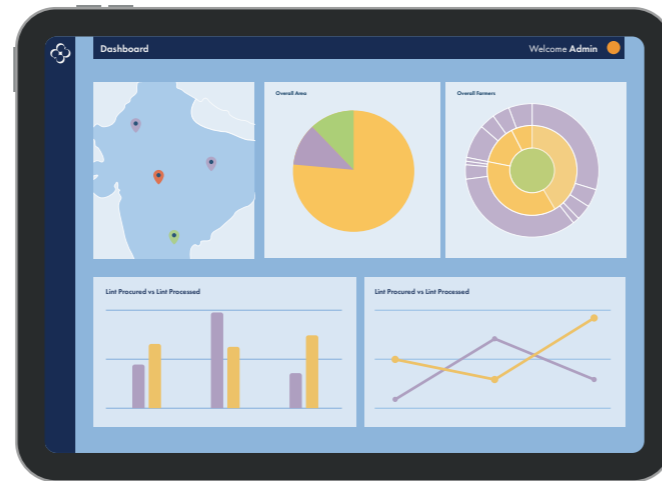
Baseline: Basic information such as demographic, agronomic, and socio-economic details of the previous season is collected by the local implementing partner to analyse the need of the group of farmers. The baseline is conducted only once in the first year of the three-year programme.

Farmer Field Book: Farm-level data is collected throughout the season in Farmer Field Books (on farm inputs, cotton production and income) to supplement the year-end impact assessment and claims. The data is collected by field executives of the local partners at the respective stages of cotton production – land preparation, fertiliser and pesticide application, irrigation, harvesting and selling. The data is reviewed, validated, and digitised by the supervisors and shared with the CottonConnect team.

Data analysis

Analysis: The digitised dataset is checked and validated by CottonConnect, liaising with the local partner with any queries. The dataset is then analysed against the KPIs. Based on the KPIs, the data tables are developed. Historical data analyses are conducted for the completed farmer batches as well as for the ongoing farmer batches based on the results obtained.

Insights: Field-level insights and secondary literature is incorporated to give a 360-degree understanding of the results obtained. The results are compared at various levels including control farmers, previous year results as well as secondary data from government sources. This gives a deeper understanding of the scenario.



VERIFICATION

The verification process ensures adherence of programme activities to all the REEL Code criteria as defined in the Code of Conduct (CoC). The process is carried out by internal teams and external experts.

Internal Verification System – First-Party and Second-Party Verification

The first-party verification, also known as self-assessment, is conducted by the local partner where they audit a process or set of processes in the quality management and implementation of the programme to ensure it meets the requirements of the REEL CoC. The MEL team of CottonConnect does the second-party verification to ensure the programme meets the REEL CoC requirements. The assessment covers the implementation body, including CottonConnect’s farm team and the local partner, farmers being trained under the programme, and gins participating in the programme.

External Verification – Third-Party Verification

CottonConnect works with FLOCERT for the third-party verification of the REEL Programme. FLOCERT conducts the verification in the second year of a three-year programme. FLOCERT conducts the third-party verification where it cross-checks implementation, documentation, and system via data collected by auditors in correlation to REEL CoC.



Photo by Kabeer Lal

The verification by FLOCERT is completed at two levels:

- **Type A: relevant verification at the implementation body level (local partner and CottonConnect)**
- **Type B: relevant verification of farmers and gins**

Under the verification of implementing body, validation of documents related to the internal management system (agreements, etc.), training materials, registers and other documentation required under REEL CoC are cross-verified through the interviews of local partner staff to assess the overall programme knowledge and broader discussions with CottonConnect’s local team.

Farmers are verified by on-site farm and demo plot visits, farmer interviews, Farmer Field Book data cross-verification and documents maintained at the farmer group level. Verification of gins is carried out via on-site visit to the ginning units, interaction with the gin managers/supervisors for overall programme knowledge assessment, relevant documentation checks related to traceability and HSSE, general observations, and interaction with the workers.

FLOCERT shares the verified data with remarks against each criteria of the REEL CoC, a narrative summary of observations and critical findings and an overall score of the programme.

This multi-level methodology monitors the programme against the sustainability criteria of the REEL CoC. The verification process is further explained in the Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and Verification Mechanisms document.



REGENERATIVE AND HOLISTIC FARM APPROACH

Cotton production depends on healthy soils, stable water systems, and functioning ecosystems. Without them, supply chains weaken. The REEL Regenerative programme is designed to protect and restore the natural foundations of cotton farming, ensuring that cotton can continue to be grown productively for generations to come.

Soil Management

Improving soil organic matter is central to climate resilience. Soils rich in organic matter retain water more effectively, buffer crops against drought and extreme rainfall, and reduce reliance on synthetic fertilisers. Farmers were trained to apply nutrients through an Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) approach, which combined organic inputs, soil test-based fertiliser application and intercropping with legumes to naturally fix nitrogen and reduce the application of synthetic fertiliser.

Demonstrations on biochar production introduced farmers to a long-term carbon stabilisation technique that improves soil structure and nutrient retention while contributing to climate mitigation. Biochar is a fine-grained charcoal made from heating biomass such as wood, manure, or crop residues, with little or no oxygen. When biochar is mixed with organic matter such as compost, it helps to create a living soil with a diverse microbial population.

Farmers were trained in several soil management practices, including crop rotation, farm yard manure application, composting solutions such as vermi-compost, soil testing, intercropping, mulching, and reduced tillage.

These adoption rates demonstrate that regenerative practices are becoming embedded at scale, moving beyond pilot interventions to widespread behavioural change.



Photo by Abou Bakar



Project farmers used 11.5% less chemical fertiliser than control farmers.



Project farmers used 130.4% more natural fertiliser than control farmers.



99% of project farmers adopted at least one practice

82% of project farmers adopted at least two practices

Results from REEL Regenerative programme 2024-25, global aggregated figures from programmes in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Türkiye, China, and Egypt.



Pest Management

CottonConnect promoted a holistic Integrated Pest Management approach that brought together ecological, biological, and mechanical practices. By reducing routine chemical spraying and adopting ecological pest management techniques, farmers are rebuilding on-farm biodiversity and reducing exposure to volatile input costs.

Farmers reported a notable reduction in chemical pesticide usage due to the adoption of biorational formulations such as Dashparni Ark, Neem Ark, and NSKE 5%. These measures improved the survival of beneficial insects and reduced crop protection costs.

Farmers were taught pest management practices including yellow sticky trap, pheromone trap, trap/refugee crops, border crops, cover crops, bird perches, homemade biopesticides, and pest scouting.



Project farmers used 14.9% less chemical pesticide than control farmers



Project farmers used 110.2% more natural fertiliser than control farmers

Results from REEL Regenerative programme 2024-25, global aggregated figures from programmes in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Türkiye, China, and Egypt.



89% of project farmers adopted at least one practice

65% of project farmers adopted at least two practices



Photo by Anil Patel

Protecting natural ecosystems

Water conservation and soil moisture techniques such as short duration cover crops and green mulching, conserve moisture in soil, improving soil health, habitat creation and shelter, and biodiversity enhancement. Micro-irrigation systems reduce water use and conserve local water resources.

Agroforestry systems increase carbon sequestration, reduce soil erosion, and create diversified farm landscapes that are more resilient to extreme weather events.

In 2024–25, a biodiversity tracking project in Gujarat, India used bioacoustic monitoring devices to measure pollinator activity. Farms practising regenerative methods recorded 62.6% higher bee activity than control farms, alongside nearly double the number of plant species. These findings provide early evidence that regenerative practices are restoring ecological function, a critical indicator of long-term farm productivity.

Project farms hosted nearly double the plant species (13.4 vs. 7.0, attributed to the distribution of plant saplings under the project). Higher plant diversity is associated with increased bee activity and supports the case for agroforestry and crop diversity as a tool to enhance biodiversity and productivity. The tracking project results will inform measurement of biodiversity to take place over future years.

Regeneration is not a short-term intervention; it is a long-term commitment to restoring soil biology, strengthening ecosystem services, and reducing dependency on synthetic inputs. Embedding regenerative practices at scale, contributes to more stable, lower-risk cotton supply chains.





Restoring Soil Health Through Regenerative Cotton Farming

For many years, Mohamed Assra managed his cotton field the way most farmers around him did—spraying pesticides by the calendar and mixing several chemical products in a single application. But season after season, this began to negatively impact the soil and crop. Salinity increased, beneficial insects vanished, and yields slowly declined, meanwhile the cost of pesticides and fertilisers kept rising.

Mohamed began attending training sessions as part of the REEL Regenerative programme and, for the first time, learned how pests develop, how to identify natural predators in his field, and why spraying without checking pest pressure was harming both his soil and his crop.

He stopped routine spraying and started regular field scouting, spraying only when pest levels crossed economic thresholds. He introduced border crops and intercropping to attract beneficial insects, installed pheromone traps for monitoring, and improved weed and crop rotation practices. To address declining soil health, he reduced chemical fertilisers and increased the use of farmyard manure and bio-fertilisers.

Within one season, the impact was clear. Mohamed reduced his pesticide costs by about EGP 1,500 (GBP 23) per feddan and lowered fertiliser use from 430kg to 350kg while maintaining balanced nutrition. The soil structure improved, salinity levels began to fall, and beneficial insects returned to his fields. Importantly, cotton yields increased by 15%, rising from 1,200kg to 1,400kg per feddan.

By working with nature rather than against it, Mohamed has restored his soil, reduced costs, and improved the long-term sustainability of his farm.

Photo by Mohammed Handy



FARMERS' INCOME AND PROFIT GROW IN SECOND YEAR OF ORGANIC COTTON FARMING

CottonConnect's Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme has been running in Pakistan since 2021-22. The aim of the programme is to increase the availability and uptake of organic cotton, which has minimal impact on the environment by eliminating the usage of chemical pesticides and synthetic fertilisers, efficiently using water, and improving soil health and the overall ecosystem.

In 2023-24, 137 farmers in seven villages in the Dera Ghazi Khan District enrolled in the programme. In the first year of organic farming, these farmers had lower yields than conventional farmers. However, they incurred 39% less input costs, made a slight profit of 1%, and received 2% higher cotton prices than conventional farmers. This trend of increased profit and price was expected to increase in the second year and the farmers continued with the programme.

The trend did continue and in the second year, 2024-25, despite lower yields again, the organic farmers earned 35.3% higher profits than conventional farmers, supported by a 47.2% reduction in input costs due to the elimination of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and a 7% premium on the sale of organic cotton.

The programme generated notable environmental gains, including 100% elimination of synthetic chemical usage, up to a 21.6% reduction in water consumption per acre through efficient irrigation, and widespread adoption of biodiversity and soil health measures such as crop rotation, green manuring, and the use of animal manure.

Independent integrity testing at both the seed and cotton stages confirmed that all samples were GMO-negative, ensuring compliance with organic standards and reinforcing transparency and traceability. Farmers also demonstrated 100% adoption of biodiversity and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices, coupled with water-saving and soil health interventions, laying a strong foundation for resilience and sustainability as the programme progresses in subsequent years.

Qazi Ahsan Ahma, a farmer enrolled in CottonConnect's **Organic Cotton Farmer Training Programme**, in Pakistan, adopted Integrated Pest Management practices using plant-based preparations made from calotropis, bitter apple, and neem. These methods effectively controlled pests while protecting beneficial insects and supporting on-field biodiversity.

For soil nutrition, he applied certified organic fertilisers, improving soil structure and nutrient availability. Over time, crop performance stabilised, and the organic cotton fields became a practical learning site for other farmers.

Qazi achieved an average yield of 672 kg of seed cotton per acre, **reduced input costs by 47%** per acre, and realised **35% higher profits** compared to neighbouring conventional farms—while using **zero chemical inputs**.



Photo by Asad Shabir





Photo by Asad Shabir

ORGANIC INTEGRITY

Organic integrity is the core of any organic programme. CottonConnect has developed a number of systems and critical control points working closely with all parties in the supply chain. This provides brands with confidence in the organic supply chain, while giving farmers and gins access to market and premiums.

CottonConnect's approach towards organic cotton goes through a rigorous process which starts even before sowing, where non-Bt seeds are carefully sourced from the suppliers. Regular GMO and pesticide residue tests are conducted throughout the season, covering at least five stages of the crop. CottonConnect also collects and validates the scope certificates and appropriate training is given to ensure that the cotton is grown and harvested according to relevant organic certification standards.

In 2024-25 CottonConnect exceeded its customers' target organic integrity scores, with an aggregated score across programmes of **99.7% organic cotton.**



Photo by Muhammad Ishaq



RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS FOR GINS

Ginning is a critical control point in the cotton supply chain. It is where traceability must be maintained, where labour standards must be upheld, and where environmental and safety risks can concentrate. Strengthening practices at gin level is therefore essential to building resilient, accountable supply chains. CottonConnect works with gins processing the seed cotton grown in its programmes, to promote responsible business conduct at gin level.

In 2023, CottonConnect introduced the first Responsible Business for Gins Code of Conduct, setting a new benchmark for labour rights, safety, and operational accountability in cotton ginning. Developed in consultation with industry stakeholders and independent verification bodies, the Code formalises expectations at a tier of the supply chain that has historically received limited structured oversight.

The Responsible Business for Gins programme has since expanded to more gins and regions. Aggregated results from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, China, and Türkiye in 2024-25 show:

Compliance with safety aspects

increased from 71% to **93%**

Adoption of precautionary measures

increased from 86% to **92%**

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by gin workers

increased from 95% to **97%**

Hygiene, sanitation, and drinking water for gin workers

increased from 97% to **99%**

Baseline is the aggregate of measurements recorded for 2023-24 endline and 2024-25 baseline which included a new gin. Endline is 2024-25 endline measurements.

These improvements demonstrate measurable progress in embedding responsible practices at gin level, reducing operational risk and strengthening working conditions for thousands of workers.

The Responsible Business for Gins programme has expanded from HSSE training to include key aspects of human rights due diligence.

Human rights compliance: The programme places strong emphasis on protecting human rights and legal compliance.

Worker welfare: To ensure comprehensive worker welfare, participants are asked about the provision of health insurance, regular health check-ups, and working conditions.



Photo by Sunita Chaturvedi

Worker residential facilities: Improvements are made to the residential facilities provided by gins for workers

Worker protection: The programme increases the availability of grievance mechanisms and worker representation structures such as worker committees or unions.

By adopting responsible business conduct, gins help to build a transparent, responsible supply chain. The programme has evolved beyond health and safety to embed Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) principles — aligning with emerging regulatory requirements such as the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. This ensures that labour standards, grievance mechanisms, and worker representation structures are systematically assessed and strengthened.

Sunita Suresh works at a gin in Madhya Pradesh, India, and participated in **Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)** training delivered by CottonConnect under the Worker Safety and Well-being Initiative.

Until a year ago, she did not consistently use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), despite it being available at the gin. Like many workers, she underestimated the long-term health risks associated with daily exposure to cotton dust and workplace hazards. Through practical demonstrations and discussions, Sunita learned how the regular use of PPE can prevent respiratory and skin-related health issues and protect workers from occupational risks.

Since the training, Sunita has adopted the regular and correct use of PPE at work. She reports feeling safer, more confident, and physically stronger during her daily tasks. Her commitment has encouraged other workers, particularly women, to follow safety protocols and make use of available first-aid facilities.

Reflecting on the change, Sunita said: "Learning how to use PPE and the first-aid kit has changed the way we work. We must value our health—nothing is more important."



RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS CONDUCT

CottonConnect takes Responsible Business Conduct very seriously and is committed to protecting and respecting the human rights of people working in cotton production, as an important part of its mission to improve the livelihoods of cotton farmers, workers, and communities.

During 2024-25, CottonConnect implemented Responsible Business Conduct training and monitoring in its gin programmes, farmer training programmes, and for its employees.

Strengthening Responsible Business Conduct: Positive Change Through Worker Awareness

Over the past two years (2023-24 and 2024-25), an awareness initiative has been implemented across 150 villages in the Thorrur Block of Telangana, India, reaching more than 3,000 cotton farmers and labourers connected with the REEL Regenerative programme. Prior to the initiative, awareness of labour rights, workplace safety, and grievance mechanisms was limited, and traditional practices often exposed workers to avoidable risks.

The programme introduced structured awareness sessions through village meetings, group discussions, field demonstrations, and seasonal

campaigns. These activities focused on child rights, fair labour practices, safe working conditions, responsible behaviour, and access to grievance systems. As a result, farmers have begun to adopt more accountable labour practices, while labourers show increased confidence in understanding and asserting their rights.

A strong emphasis was placed on health and safety. Practical demonstrations on the use of personal protective equipment, safe handling and storage of pesticides, first-aid basics, fire safety, and heat-stress prevention have led to safer day-to-day practices in the fields. Farmers and workers report greater attention to risk reduction and personal wellbeing.

The initiative also prioritised the inclusion of women farmers and labourers. Many women now report improved awareness of workplace safety and greater confidence to participate in decision-making at both household and farm levels.

After the training, one labourer said: "Earlier, we were unaware of our rights and safety. Now we feel respected and confident to speak up." Overall, the training has contributed to gradual but meaningful changes at the grassroots level, strengthening ethical labour practices and promoting safer, more respectful working environments across cotton-growing communities.



Photos by Sunaina Chaturvedi



GOALS AND PROGRESS

In 2023, CottonConnect set goals for the REEL Programme in the areas of Environment and Climate, Traceability, and Social. These areas were chosen to address the pressing environmental issues in cotton production, as well as to quantify CottonConnect's long-held priority of enhancing farmers' livelihoods.

The goals are in line with brands' and manufacturers' goals for cotton and textiles production, and industry goals, for example Textile Exchange's Climate+ strategy to reduce GHG emissions from fibre and raw materials production by 45% by 2030.

CottonConnect's Goals

CottonConnect's progress so far

	CottonConnect's Goals	CottonConnect's progress so far
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE	 <p>GHG Emissions Reduce GHG emissions for REEL Cotton by 50% by 2030 (from the baseline year 2017)</p>	 <p>On track GHG emissions are tracked on an annual basis through farm level and programme level assessments Life Cycle Assessment conducted for REEL programmes every three years</p>
	 <p>Biodiversity More than 90% of REEL Cotton farmers are trained to adopt regenerative practices by 2030</p>	 <p>On track More than 99% of the REEL programme farmers are currently being trained on regenerative practices. In future more farmers will be enrolled in the REEL Regenerative programme, ensuring they are trained to adopt regenerative practices, thereby meeting this goal.</p>
	 <p>Soil Health 100% of REEL Cotton farmers improve soil health by 2030</p>	 <p>On track Annual soil sampling is carried out to track year on year progress of soil health against key parameters.</p>
TRACEABILITY	 <p>Traceability 100% of REEL Cotton is traceable by 2025</p>	 <p>Achieved Cotton procurement and processing of all REEL and REEL Regenerative programmes is traced through TraceBale.</p>
SOCIAL	 <p>Smallholder livelihoods Increase the net income and resilience in a sustainable manner for one million cotton farmers and workers by 2030</p>	 <p>On track Over 800,000 farmers have participated in CottonConnect programmes up to and including 2024-25.</p>
	 <p>Women's empowerment 500,000 women trained in Women in Cotton programmes by 2030</p>	 <p>On track 264,269 women participated in Women in Cotton programmes in 2024-25</p>



CONTRIBUTION TO UN SDGS



CottonConnect's programmes increase income and profit from cotton growing for smallholder farmers. (see [page 7](#))

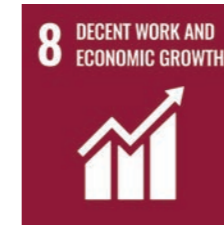
Increased income due to higher yields, combined with reduced input costs, means more profit is retained by the farmer.

The Women in Cotton programme teaches women how to improve livelihoods including running their own microenterprises.



The REEL Cotton Code specifically requires women's pay shall be equal to their male counterpart for the same type of work provided, and there is no discrimination on the basis of gender.

Programmes related to disadvantaged or minority groups among the farmer workforce, in particular women, are in place to improve their position. (REEL Cotton Code 3.1)



The REEL Cotton Code specifically requires equal pay for work of equal value. It prohibits forced and child labour, and supports enrolling of children into schools. (REEL Cotton Code 3.1)

The Responsible Business for Gins Code of Conduct improves health and safety practices in gins. (see [page 17](#))



CottonConnect's programmes support income growth of low-income smallholder farmers and workers through increased profit and yield. (see [page 7](#))

The REEL Cotton Code criteria stipulate no discrimination on sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic or other status. (REEL Cotton Code 3.1)



CottonConnect teaches smallholder farmers about the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, e.g. water. (see [page 7](#))

CottonConnect provides supply chain visibility and traceability for brands and retailers to help consumers make informed choices to choose cotton more sustainably grown. (see [page 4](#))



The REEL Regenerative programme increases capacity in climate mitigation practices and reduces field emissions and chemical fertilisers, which contribute to GHG emissions and climate change potential. (see [page 12](#))



PARTNERSHIPS

Implementing Partners

CottonConnect would like to thank its valuable implementing partners:

India

[Self Employed Women's Association \(SEWA\)](#)

[Myrada \(CIDORS\)](#)

[Hariraj Charitable Trust](#)

[Vasundhara Foundation](#)

[Manavlok](#)

Pakistan

[Rural Education and Economic Development Society \(REEDS\)](#)

Bangladesh

[TMSS](#)

CottonConnect also thanks the Cotton Development Board in Bangladesh for its assistance with farmer training in the REEL Cotton Programme in Bangladesh.

Egypt

[Modern Nile Cotton Co.](#)

Türkiye

[Sanko](#)

Farmers

Smallholder farmers are at the heart of CottonConnect's sustainable cotton programmes, and a trusted partnership has developed over the years working with local implementing partners known to the cotton farming communities.

As part of continuous feedback with farmers, the 2024-25 impact results in this report will be shared with programme farmers through the implementing partners. CottonConnect first piloted a farmer feedback method in 2022, with programme farmers in Madhya Pradesh, India, and Khulna, Bangladesh. Across both locations, the programme farmers found the impact results helpful, identifying areas where they can perform better than conventional farmers and which areas to focus on for better profits, cost savings, and yield. The results from last year's impact report (2023-24) were shared with farmers as part of this farmer feedback method.

Clients

CottonConnect is pleased to partner with a number of leading brands and companies from across fashion, retail, and manufacturing.

Collaborative platforms

CottonConnect is proud to have been a member of these organisations during 2024-25.

2025 Sustainable Cotton Challenge



Indian Chamber of Commerce



ISEAL Community Member



Partners

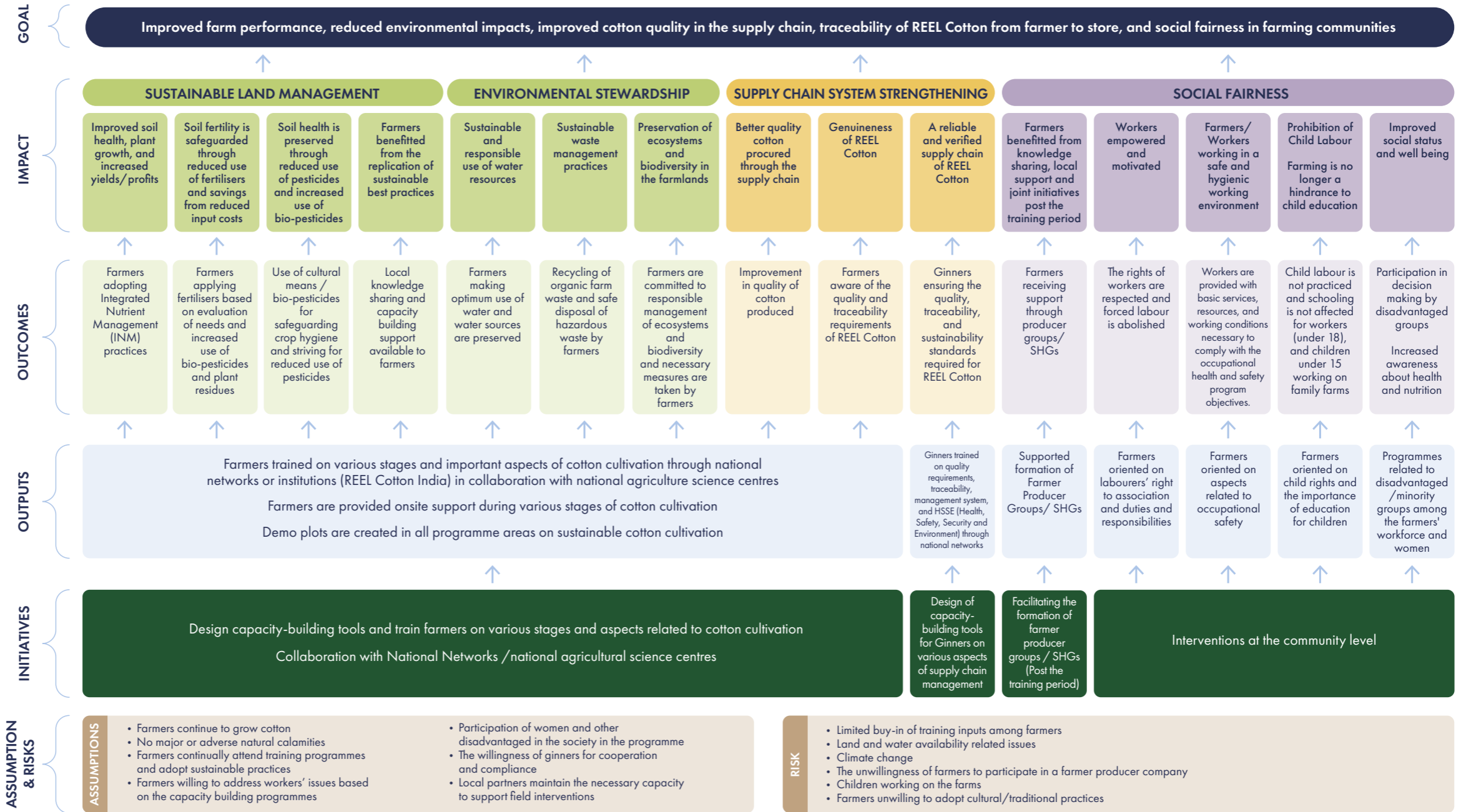
Haelixa

CottonConnect is proud to have taken part in the 2025 Textile Exchange Fiber and Materials Matrix and stand alongside a growing number of programmes committed to improving practices in fibre and raw material production (and helping inform brand and retailer sourcing decisions). Find out more at textileexchange.org.

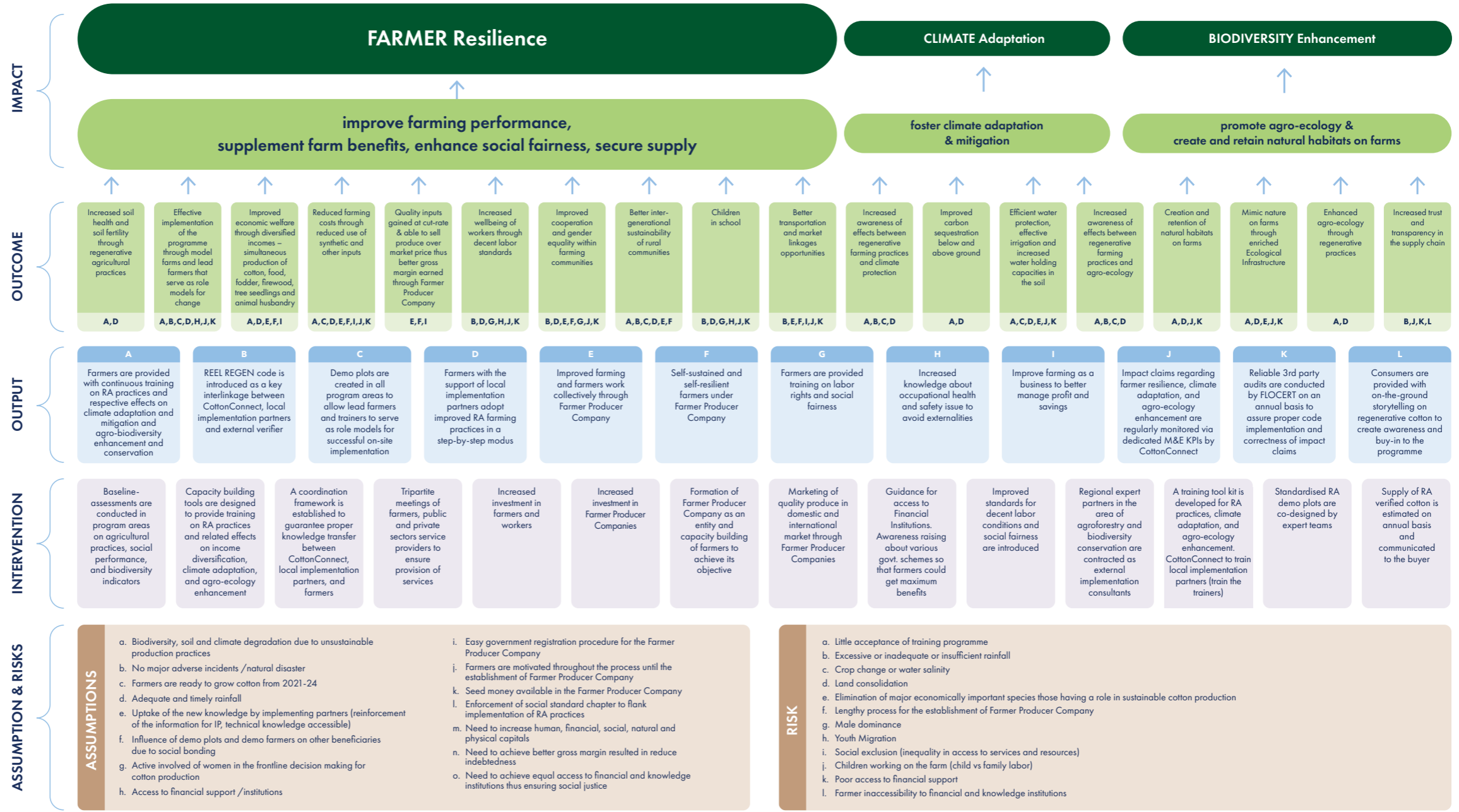
The REEL Cotton Code is approved as a sustainable standard system for sustainable cotton by the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles. CottonConnect is not a member of the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles.



REEL COTTON
THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM



REEL REGENERATIVE THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM



Note: One output can have multiple outcomes, and the interlinkages between them is denoted using alphabet indexing. The outcome 'Increased trust and transparency in the supply chain' will impact at a broader level.



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