

GOVERNANCE OF THE REEL STANDARDS SYSTEM



COTTON
CONNECT

The REEL (Responsible Environment and Enhanced Livelihoods) programme is CottonConnect's flagship sustainability initiative. Launched in 2016 with the REEL Cotton Code of Conduct (CoC), it aimed to embed responsible practices in cotton cultivation. In 2021, CottonConnect introduced the REEL Regenerative CoC, going beyond the original scope to enhance soil health and biodiversity, promote water efficiency, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ensure social fairness and animal welfare, and support farmer income diversification for climate resilience.

In 2025, in response to evolving legislative and certification requirements, CottonConnect transitioned the CoCs into robust, auditable standards:

1. REEL Cotton Standard



2. REEL Regenerative Cotton Standard



To ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness, the REEL Standards are governed by a three-tier structure:

1

Standards Governance Body (SGB)

Serves as the primary decision-making authority for the REEL Standard system(s). Composed of relevant sectoral experts, it ensures credibility, strategic direction, and alignment with international benchmarks. The Standards Governance Body is responsible for providing independent oversight and strategic guidance for the development, implementation, and revision of the Standard system(s) and other key components of the standard system(s) in order to achieve the objectives of the REEL Programme. It monitors implementation effectiveness, establishes key operational policies and ensures stakeholder input is integrated.

2

Advisory Council

A technical body offering sector-specific insights and expert recommendations on standard design, stakeholder consultation, certification, and accreditation processes. The Advisory Council provides technical and sector-specific inputs for the effective management of the REEL Standards. It reviews and advises on the development and revision of the standards, supports stakeholder engagement in line with consultation guidelines, and offers guidance on certification, accreditation, and integrity-related matters. The Council plays a critical advisory role to the Standards Governance Body to ensure credibility and sector alignment.

3

Secretariat

The Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day implementation and operational management of the REEL Standards. It acts as the central coordinating body between the Standards Governance Body, Advisory Council, and stakeholders, ensuring effective communication and execution of decisions. Key functions include overseeing the certification process, maintaining records and documentation, managing resources, and tracking progress. The Secretariat also leads stakeholder engagement, standard system related training, and capacity-building efforts, and handles claims, grievances, and compliance issues in line with established procedures—ensuring the smooth functioning and integrity of the REEL Standards system(s).

Through this structure, CottonConnect ensures that the REEL Standard system remain inclusive, technically sound, and responsive to the evolving needs of both producers and global brands, while driving long-term sustainability across the textile sector.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE

The REEL Standards governance framework actively promotes multi-stakeholder participation. The Advisory Council includes representation from civil society, technical experts, and value chain actors. Broader stakeholder input is sought through public consultations during the development and revision of the standards, ensuring transparency, accountability, and shared ownership of the programme's direction as per the stakeholder consultation guidelines.

REVIEW OF THE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

CottonConnect reviews the REEL Standards governance structure every year to make sure it is still effective and relevant. This is done through a defined review process that includes gathering feedback from all stakeholders who are part of the implementation of the REEL Standard system(s). This process helps identify any changes needed to improve how the system works and ensures it continues to meet the needs of the programme and its stakeholders.

