

FAQ for Certification Bodies: Better Cotton's Transition to a Certification Scheme

Internal and External

Version History

Version Number	Date	Update
1.0	May 2024	Version 1.0
1.1	November 2024	Additional questions added
1.2	February 2025	Additional questions added

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Purpose

This document serves as a resource for organisations who are interested in becoming a certification body for Better Cotton.

Background

Better Cotton is shifting to a certification model and will launch a formal certification scheme, along with the associated procedures from **February 2025**.

Better Cotton has previously used the terminology 'third party verifier' to refer to external auditor organisations. Under the certification model, the term 'certification body' will be used.

For the 2025/2026 season, all certification assessments (and decisions) will be carried out by third party certification bodies.

General Questions

1. Why is Better Cotton making these changes?

The European Union is introducing new regulations. This means in the future, sustainability labels can only be used by schemes which are either established by public authorities, or which meet the definition of a 'certification scheme'.

For Better Cotton, we will need to make several changes to our producer assurance model to meet this definition of certification scheme.

Most importantly, under this new approach all certification assessments and decisions will need to be made by third party certification bodies (CBs) and CBs will eventually need to be accredited to ISO 17065 (by 26-27 season latest).

2. Who needs to be accredited?

Eventually all certification assessments (and decisions) need to be conducted by third party certification bodies who are accredited to ISO 17065.

- From 2025 onwards, certification bodies must either be accredited to ISO 17065 **or** be in the application process of gaining ISO 17065 accreditation **or** have demonstrated sufficient evidence they have the processes in place to apply for ISO 17065 accreditation once Better Cotton's scope is agreed.
- From September 2026, all certification bodies must be accredited to ISO 17065.

This applies to existing third-party verifier organisations and any prospective organisations.

If your organisation is not ISO 17065 accredited, please see the non-accredited section for further information.

3. When will the documents be published?

The Better Cotton CoC Standard v1.1, the CoC Monitoring & Certification Requirements and the Claims Framework v4.0 were published on the 3rd February 2025 on the Better Cotton website.

- General Certification [Requirements](#) for Certification Bodies- this document outlines the requirements for CBs in relation to both Chain of Custody and Producer level assessments.
- Principle and Criteria Monitoring and Certification [Requirements](#)- this document outlines requirements for CBs specific to Producer Level audits.
- Chain of Custody Monitoring and Certification [Requirements](#)- this document outlines the requirements for CBs specific to Chain of Custody audits.

4. How long will certificates be valid for?

For CoC certificates: 3 years

For P&C Producer Units: 4 years

For P&C Large Farms: 3 years

For P&C certificates only: all initial certification audits will have an additional year as permission to trade for the first certificate **only**- see the Principle and Criteria Monitoring and Certification [Requirements](#) for more information.

5. When can CBs start auditing?

CBs can begin certification audits from 3rd February 2025.

6. What templates will Better Cotton provide for CBs?

Better Cotton will provide an audit report templates and an audit checklist. Please see all resources and templates below:

- Farm Level: Knowledge [Hub](#)
- Chain of Custody: CoC Online Resource [Centre](#)

It is up to the CB to create the application form, contract with the auditee and the certificate template.

Please note, we will work on combining resource centres so there is one location for all resources for both farm level and chain of custody.

7. Who will take the certification decision?

It is the responsibility of the CB to take the certification decision and issue the certificate before notifying Better Cotton of the audit outcome. For more information, please see the General Certification Requirements for Certification Bodies.

8. Will Better Cotton provide a list of banned organisations?

Better Cotton will state the ban lists that supplier/manufacturer and retailer/brand organisations must not appear on. It will be up to the CB to check the relevant website for the up-to-date version of the ban list. Better Cotton is also looking to develop its own ban list that will be shared with CBs.

9. Will Better Cotton still be approving new auditors for the CB?

In the short-term Better Cotton will continue to approve individual auditors. However, we are reviewing if this can be done at the CBs discretion as CBs must have a procedure in place for approving competent auditors

10. Which supply chain organisations will need to become certified?

- **Ginners:** Only if they wish to process and sell Better Cotton beyond the 2027/28 season. You can become certified during any one of the coming three seasons.
- **Suppliers/Manufacturers:** Only if they wish to source, process and sell Physical (Traceable) Better Cotton. Mass Balance does not require certification at this point.
- **Retailer/Brand:** Only if they wish to source and sell products containing Physical (Traceable) Better Cotton and use the BCI Content Label. Mass Balance sourced products do not require certification and are not eligible for any kind of marketing or product label.

11. How can I stay updated on developments and changes relating to certification?

Key updates will be shared by email.

This FAQ will be kept updated and available on the Knowledge Hub and 3PV resource centre.

12. When will Better Cotton share their certification procedures?

We published a consultation in November with our draft processes. We are currently working through the feedback received and aim to publish finalised processes in January 2025.

Organisations currently accredited to ISO17065

13. My organisation is already ISO 17065 is certified to another standard, can I use this?

This is accepted as an interim measure until Better Cotton is approved as a scope of ISO17065. Once the Better Cotton programme is approved as a scope of ISO 17065, certification bodies should then gain the scope for Better Cotton.

We are working on the process for Better Cotton to be recognised as an accreditable scheme under ISO17065 and will communicate this in due course. We will update this FAQ with progress.

14. What do I need to do to continue working with Better Cotton?

Provide us:

- Evidence of your ISO 17065 accreditation
- Sign relevant legal agreements
- Adhere to Better Cotton's normative documents

15. My organisation is a global organisation with offices in different regions. Will each region need to be approved by Better Cotton?

Better Cotton's preference is to work with a limited number of Certification Bodies to prioritise quality and calibration. Additionally, one of our key criteria moving forward is to work with Certification Bodies that are accredited to ISO17065.

If you are a global Certification Bodies with multiple regional offices we would aim to enter an agreement with a single accredited office and then we would request that you ensure that relevant regional offices are included within the scope of that accreditation. The responsibility would then be with you as the approved Certification Body to determine which certification activities are conducted at your regional offices and if they are considered sub-offices and/or critical locations.

Non accredited organisations

16. Where can I find out more about ISO 17065?

A copy of ISO 17065 can be purchased from ISO on their website [here](#).

Certification Bodies may seek accreditation from any International Accreditation Forum member national accreditation body. The list of all these organisations can be found [here](#).

17. My organisation is not accredited to ISO 17065. What do I need to do?

You have two options if you wish to continue to work with Better Cotton:

- Apply for ISO 17065 accreditation for your organisation
- Contract your services as an auditor and partner with an existing accredited Certification Body.

18. What does the ISO 17065 accreditation process involve?

The process will vary depending on the accreditation body you are seeking accreditation from. In general, the process will involve a document review of relevant processes such as impartiality and a witness audit.

You should be aware there is an initial financial and time investment required to gain ISO 17065 accreditation.

19. When can I apply for ISO 17065 and Better Cotton's scope?

If you are not yet accredited to ISO 17065, you need to wait for Better Cotton's Farm and Chain of custody standards to become in scope of ISO 17065.

We previously communicated that we expected Better Cotton to be accredited to ISO 17065 by December 2024. We have experienced delays with this and now expect to be accredited by December 2025.

20. How much does it cost to become ISO 17065 certified? Will Better Cotton pay for this?

The cost of ISO 17065 depends on the issuing accreditation body. Better Cotton will not pay directly towards certification body accreditation costs. However, under the certification model, we expect there will be more assessments and more overall work to be done by certification bodies; we expect this will translate into more business and better return on investment for certification bodies.

21. Can I work with Better Cotton in the 2025/2026 season?

Yes, you will need to:

- Show evidence that you have submitted your ISO 17065 application and are the process of gaining ISO 17065 accreditation.



OR

- Complete a self assessment against Better Cotton's General Certification Requirement.

Note our priority is to work with accredited CBs.