EXPERT PANEL ON THE SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE OF COTTON PRODUCTION - SEEP

PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES OF THE SEEP PANEL

2023

FRAMEWORK AND GUIDELINES

Objective 1

- Provide the ICAC with objective, science-based information on the negative and positive social, environmental and economic aspects of global cotton production;

Objective 2

- Gather information from around the world on costs of agricultural labor and the factors that affect those costs to assess their impacts on the social performance of cotton; and

Objective 3

- Make recommendations for further action as appropriate to improve the social, environmental and economic performance of the cotton industry.

The Expert Panel currently comprises a well-balanced group of 15 members from 10 different countries, each bringing valuable knowledge to the work of SEEP

Principal Activities of the SEEP Panel

The SEEP panel has been in operation for over 16 years, during which it has undertaken a range of critical activities. Some of its key initiatives include:

- **2006 – Defining the core areas:** The SEEP panel identified the specific areas about which information should be collected, as well as which countries should be the focus for collection of that information.
- **2008 – Labour issues and costs:** the SEEP panel commissioned a literature review and research evaluation relating to social impacts of global cotton production. The study was conducted by Alastair Usher from Ergon Associates and the final report was published in July 2008. This same year, the ICAC started to carry out a survey of cotton labour cost components in major producing countries on behalf of SEEP. The ICAC Secretariat completed the report over a three-year period between 2009 and 2011.
- **2010 – Pesticide Use:** SEEP acquired pesticide use datasets spanning a 14-year period across six cotton growing countries (Australia, Brazil, India, Togo, Turkey and the USA). In collaboration with the research group Environmental Risk Assessment of Alterra, the datasets were analysed to identify trends in the use of pesticides on cotton and to evaluate the hazards of pesticide use on cotton to human health and the environment in the six nominated countries.
- **2012 – Fact sheets:** SEEP produced 'fact sheets' on a number of topics relevant to the performance of cotton production, including fact sheets on production efficiency – land, water and energy use; greenhouse gas emissions; pesticide use and soil erosion.
- **2012 – Responsible cotton production:** the SEEP panel commissioned a study of cotton-related programmes or initiatives relevant to cotton production that prioritise environmental stewardship, human well-being, and economic viability. The main objective of the study was to review existing systems that set standards and guidelines for responsible cotton production around the world in order to identify core areas they addressed and in particular the indicators of sustainability they adopted.
- **2013 – Summary report on Measuring sustainability in cotton farming systems: Towards a guidance framework:** The panel provided recommendations about the indicators that should be used to measure sustainability in cotton production. They identified 68 indicators and during the World Café session at the Plenary Meeting in Colombia, attendees discussed the sustainability framework approach and its implementation. https://rb.gy/0mwlsq
- **2014-17 Testing the SEEP framework:** The test of the SEEP framework sustainability indicators was implemented in at least 11 different cotton producing countries: Australia, Benin, Bolivia, Cameroon, China, Paraguay, Peru, Senegal, Togo, US and Zambia. Additionally, five countries conducted national workshops to discuss the framework: Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali and Niger. The overall conclusion of the framework pilot testing was the requirement for further guidance to clarify the raw data needed to inform each selected indicator.
- **2018-21 Soil Health:** The SEEP panel prioritised soil health as one of the main areas of work. The ICAC and Cotton Incorporated developed a curriculum of flow-chart-based diagnosis of major biotic and abiotic problems faced in cotton farms across the globe with

an objective to help illiterate farmers address climate risks with access to soil health principles and diagnostics of plant health. A beta version of a mobile, voice-based app was designed in English and included voice descriptions, incorporating images and videos related to soil health, plant health, insect pests, diseases, nutrient deficiencies and best practices to facilitate its use even by illiterate farmers. Play Store: ICAC COTTON EXPERT

- **2019-21 SEEP and the Delta Framework:** The Delta framework is a cross-commodity project, including cotton and coffee, that seeks to align sustainability measurement and reporting at farm level. Members of the SEEP Panel provided their feedback and expertise to help refining and finalising the draft core set of Indicators. A working group was formed to revise, define, and propose a list of HHPs based on FAO/WHO criteria. The panel also provided guidance on the methodology to collect information on pesticide active ingredients. https://www.deltaframework.org/
- **2021 – ICAC World Café:** Although it was not formally a SEEP initiative, the World Café held during the virtual 79th ICAC Plenary Meeting — which had the theme, 'Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainability' — was the direct result of many prior SEEP initiatives. Prior to the live session, 10 moderators organised online table discussions with industry experts on a variety of sustainability-related concepts, summarised the comments and findings, and then created a video that was shown to attendees before a live Q&A was held.
- **2023 - SEEP and Regenerative Agriculture:** The panel worked on a paper designed to stimulate a discussion of Regenerative Agriculture practices and their feasibility for farms resourced at different levels and sizes. The report assesses 22 regenerative agriculture practices across 12 farming systems. https://rb.gy/kmd0pr