



International Cotton Advisory Committee

1629 K Street NW, Suite 702,
Washington, DC 20006, USA



Minutes

60th Meeting of the Expert Panel on Social, Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton Production - SEEP Wednesday, 21st May 2025 - 1:00 pm (GMT +02:00) Virtual

Members:

Allan Williams, Australia
Elke Hortmeyer, EU
Leon Picon, Türkiye
Ryan Kurtz, USA
Bruno Bachelier, EU
Jens Soth, EU

ICAC Secretariat:

Lorena Ruiz, Economist
Keshav Kranthi, Chief Scientist

1. Welcome, brief overview of the agenda and meeting objectives

Mr. Allan Williams opened the meeting by welcoming participants and briefly reviewing the agenda and meeting objectives.

2. SEEP Membership Report

Ms. Lorena Ruiz, ICAC Secretariat, provided an update on the SEEP membership nomination process initiated in early 2025:

- All current members were ratified by their governments or coordinating agencies.
- A new representative was confirmed for Better Cotton: Janis Bellinghausen, Senior Director of Standard Systems Integrity.
- Despite outreach efforts, no nominations were received from West and Central African countries. The main obstacle cited was the language barrier, with French-speaking countries expressing hesitation due to the meetings being conducted in English.

Action Points

- Members agreed on the importance of increasing African representation. Allan and Bruno will explore options for organizing pre-meeting caucuses in French to help amplify regional input.
- Lorena to continue outreach to African partners with a focus on language inclusion.



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3. Water Use in Cotton Production

Dr. Keshav Kranthi provided an update on the upcoming ICAC Water Use Position Paper, drawing on five years of data from over 270 locations across 38 countries. The report analyses both consumptive water use and irrigation efficiency in cotton production. Key findings include:

- Significant improvements in irrigation practices across countries, with a growing shift towards drip and sprinkler systems, and a decline in furrow and flood irrigation.
- Cotton accounts for only 1.6–1.7% of global irrigation water use, despite covering ~2.2% of global arable land. This challenges the common narrative that cotton is a disproportionately water-intensive crop.
- Rainwater (green water) is a natural and non-extractive source, while the report's core focus is on blue water (irrigation), often subject to public scrutiny.
- Challenges remain in obtaining accurate and harmonized data on applied irrigation volumes, especially due to variability in national sources and weather conditions.

Action Points

- ICAC Chief Scientist will finalize and publish the ICAC Water Use Position Paper by end of June.
- ICAC Secretariat will develop a communication package with key messages and infographics targeting non-technical audiences.

4. Regenerative Agriculture (RA) in Cotton – Guide & Matrix Update (Kater Hake)

Dr. Kater Hake presented proposed updates to the RA Matrix, originally published in November 2024. The updated version will:

- Map a broader range of actors contributing to regenerative agriculture, including:
 - Software and satellite verification firms
 - Carbon market participants
 - Certification standards
 - Biological input providers and RA tool developers
- Provide a structured, transparent validation process for the information gathered, companies will be invited to review and confirm the data included in their entries.

Action Points

- Dr. Hake to update the Matrix and circulate draft for feedback and transparency.
- Members to suggest additional actors or sectors for inclusion in the updated RA mapping.



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5. Update to the Regenerative Agriculture Cotton Guide

Dr. Hake outlined his plan to revise the 18-page RA Guide to reflect new science and developments:

- Expansion of sections related to carbon sequestration, including:
 - Biochar and Bokashi integration
 - Basalt applications
 - Monitoring technologies
 - Inclusion of new findings on biological inputs
- Enhanced focus on accessibility for non-technical audiences, particularly brands and retailers.
- The guide should also address impacts of nitrogen fertilizers and hazardous pesticides on soil health and regenerative systems.
- The economic viability of RA certifications and their potential linkage to carbon finance.

Action Points

- First draft of the updated Guide due end of June, final version by end of July.
- Include analysis of synthetic inputs (e.g., nitrogen, pesticides) and their impact on regenerative practices.
- Coordinate with ICAC Secretariat to adapt the final report for advocacy and outreach.

6. Strategic Focus: SEEP and Carbon Sequestration

Mr. Allan Williams initiated a discussion on SEEP's role in supporting carbon sequestration efforts in large-scale cotton systems. Key points included:

- While models for smallholders (e.g., biochar, Bokashi) are advancing, there is a need to define scalable models for mechanized systems.
- Carbon finance could serve as an incentive for adopting RA practices that lower water use and input costs.

Members flagged concerns around:

- Contractual complexity in carbon markets (e.g., land ownership, payment rights)
- The fragmented nature of national systems
- Need for harmonized guidance for the cotton sector



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Action Points

- Map carbon certification approaches in the U.S., Brazil, and Australia.
- Assess SEEP's potential to guide or coordinate standardized approaches to carbon credit frameworks.
- Plan a focused session on large-scale sequestration models at the next SEEP meeting.

7. Other Matters

Mr. Jens Soth proposed revisiting the Sustainability Indicators developed by SEEP in light of advances in remote sensing and geospatial monitoring. He suggested a future breakout session on this topic at the Plenary.

Ms Elke Hortmeyer raised the importance of ensuring Kater and Keshav's technical reports are transformed into accessible communication products.

Action Points

- Explore a Plenary breakout on new monitoring technologies and sustainability metrics.
- Continue adapting technical SEEP outputs into concise, visual materials for public and policy engagement.

8. Next Steps and Closing

Mr. Allan Williams thanked all participants for their active engagement. The meeting concluded with agreement to:

- Hold a follow-up SEEP meeting in July to review the updated RA Guide draft.
- Align future discussions with ICAC's preparations for the Plenary Meeting in Tanzania (November 2025).