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ABR Program Handbook Social and community development

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Introduction





The **Responsible Brazilian Cotton program (Programa Algodão Brasileiro Responsável – ABR)** is publishing a series of handbooks on how its new material topics relate to sustainability.

This edition highlights **ABR's Social and Community Development (SCD) pillar**, which comprises the principles and social practices directed to the care of rural workers, thus promoting decent work, safety, respect, and wellbeing for everyone involved in cotton farming.

Enjoy your reading!





Social and community development (SCD)

The social action pillar is the **DNA of the ABR Program**. This is a key theme since the early days of the certification; it guides decisions, priorities, and continuous improvement practices at cotton farms.



A photograph of a man wearing a straw hat with 'CANADA CLOTHING' on it, sunglasses, and a green button-down shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor field with some blue barrels visible in the distance.

How is the pillar structured?

This pillar sets requirements and practices that ensure **decent work conditions, respect for human rights, and the promotion of safer, more inclusive, and responsible work environments**. It considers the impact of cotton farming on workers, families, and producing regions in rural areas in its entirety to guarantee that the industry develops fairly and in alignment with international standards.

By guiding practices that **decrease the number of accidents, increase worker qualifications, and strengthen the rural work environment**, the Social and Community Development Pillar contributes to a more competitive, responsible sector that is prepared to meet the needs of increasingly demanding markets.



Connection with ABR's other pillars

ABR is organized atop three complementary pillars – **Social and Community Development, Environmental Management, and Best Governance Practices** – that create an integrated ESG vision of sustainability within Brazil's cotton farming.

The **pillar featured** in this handbook ensures that the sector advances while **respecting people, valuing communities, and protecting fundamental rights**.

There cannot be environmentally responsible production and sustainable economic development without human dignity, equity, and ethical labor relations.



Values



ABR's new positioning reinforces the program's commitment to a production model that focuses on people. It is guided by five key values.

Transparency

Assurance of clear information, auditable practices, and traceable actions; it strengthens the certification's reliability.

Inclusion

Promotion of work environments that value diversity, fight inequalities, and create more opportunities for all.

Ethics

The foundation for all decisions and relations within the supply chain; it ensures that processes are conducted with integrity and responsibility.

Respect

Dignified treatment, with the prohibition of child and forced labor, and humane conditions throughout all stages of agricultural activity; it acknowledges rights, differences, and specific needs.

Shared responsibility

Understanding that social development relies on the collaboration between farmers, workers, communities, associations, and the whole cotton chain.



Labor rights assurance

The protocol comprises a robust set of standards that stress **compliance with Brazilian legislation, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s conventions, and decent work principles**, all translated into clear criteria that are auditable and applicable to the day-to-day of agricultural activities.

The following criteria reflect challenging topics for farming, especially due to the seasonal nature of operations and diversity of worker profiles involved throughout the agricultural cycle. ABR supports farmers by **turning these requirements into a set of clear, trackable guidelines**.



Labor rights in the ABR protocol

ABR incorporates requirements that are aligned with **Brazil's consolidated labor laws (CLT)** and **industry-specific standards for the rural sector**, especially the **Regulatory Standard 31 (NR-31)**, which regulates health, safety, and welfare conditions in agriculture. The protocol includes key rights such as:

Supplying adequate PPE; mandatory training; risk management; accident prevention measures; safe and sanitary housing and living areas when provided by the employer.

Safe transportation of workers using authorized vehicles and following the necessary precautions as required by law.

Employment registration and formalization, ensuring signed contracts, signed employment record books, and documentation in compliance with labor laws.

Providing hired contractors with the same work, training, and safety conditions as employees.

Access to clean drinking water, restrooms, and rest areas, thus meeting the technical parameters of NR-31.

Adequate work hours, rest periods, and compensation, in line with the CLT, including rest breaks, properly recorded overtime, and payment, in accordance with collective bargaining agreements or applicable legislation.

[Read more on NR-31 here.](#)



Legislation compliance

In addition to ensuring compliance with local labor laws, ABR also adopts principles from **ILO's international conventions**, especially those relating to:

Decent work

Safe, sanitary conditions

Equal opportunities

Ending forced labor

Ending child labor

These commitments are translated into practical requirements to **prevent risks, improve people management, and promote fairer, more transparent labor relations.**



Verification and monitoring mechanisms



ABR's credibility is directly connected to its ability to verify whether labor rights are actually being enforced. For that purpose, the program uses the following **auditing mechanisms**:

Independent audits performed by accredited conformity assessment bodies, which verify documentation and actual on-farm conditions.

Documented evidence such as work contracts, PPE files, training records, pay slips, technical reports, Technical Responsibility Annotations (ARTs), and other legal documents.

Field inspections, which include the assessment of machinery, support structures, housing, and safety practices.

Interviews with workers and managers conducted with enough privacy to ensure freedom of expression and identify instances of non-conformity.

Assessment of hiring workflows, especially during the crop season, when there is a larger influx of temporary workers.





These guidelines allow ABR to follow up on requirements and the day-to-day of operations, identifying **improvement opportunities** and preventing non-conformities from continuing to happen throughout the production cycle.





Prevention and elimination of child and forced labor

The ABR protocol **strictly forbids**:

Child labor, in compliance with Brazilian legislation and ILO Convention 138, which sets the minimum age for employment.

Forced labor, which includes any form of compulsory labor, debt bondage, degrading conditions, or grueling working hours, as mandated by the Brazilian Penal Code and ILO Convention 29.

Whenever an instance of such non-conformity is either suspected or identified, auditors will apply formal reporting, disclosure, and referral protocols, thus ensuring accountability and immediate correction.

[Find ILO Convention 138 \(minimum age for employment\) here.](#)

[Find ILO Convention 29 \(forced labor\) here.](#)





Occupational health, safety, and environment (OHSE)

This is one of the pillars of ABR's social action. Protecting life on farms and ensuring that work environments are safe goes beyond a legal requirement – it **demonstrates respect, appreciation, and commitment to workers**, who are the driving force of Brazilian cotton farming.



The importance of OHSE for cotton farming



Cotton production involves mechanized operations, use of agrochemicals, and activities that are conducted in large areas, frequently under adverse climate conditions. Thus, **adopting robust OHSE practices** is crucial to:

Prevent occupational accidents and diseases.

Ensure adequate, decent, and healthy work environments.

Increase productivity and efficiency within teams, with trained and protected staff.

Guarantee legal compliance and positive reputation among markets that require social-environmental traceability.

Promote welfare, motivation, and retention among rural workers.

The **most common risks associated with cotton farming** include:

Exposure to dust, heat, and solar radiation.

Accidents related to agricultural equipment and implements.

Falls while working at heights (such as due to machine and structural maintenance).

Poisoning or accidents involving the handling and application of pesticides.

Repetitive strain and inadequate ergonomics.

Incidents involving internal vehicle traffic and worker transportation.



Minimal infrastructure to ensure health and safety

In line with Regulatory Standard 31 (NR-31) and verification criteria, the ABR Program sets the essential conditions that every farm should satisfy to ensure **the protection of its workers** and meet compliance requirements.

Living areas and sanitary facilities

Adequate restrooms, clean and organized dining areas, and housing areas in good hygiene, ventilation, and safety conditions.

Safe transportation

Worker transportation should be conducted in adequate, compliant vehicles driven by licensed drivers, avoiding makeshift solutions and hazardous situations.

Rural CIPA (Internal Committee for Prevention of Accidents and Harassment)

Farms that are subject to legislation should establish a Rural CIPA (Internal Committee for Prevention of Accidents and Harassment) with meetings, records, and prevention activities. Where Rural CIPA is not required it is recommended that risk management mechanisms are put in place.

[Find more information and materials on rural OHSE here.](#)



Machinery and equipment

Operator training, regular machine maintenance, and the provision and use of protection and safety devices are mandatory, along with the correct use of PPE.

Working at heights

Activities performed at heights above 2 meters (6 ft. 5.5 in.) require specific training, adequate equipment (harness, lanyard, anchorage), and qualified supervision.

Pesticide handling

Pesticide storage must be safe and clearly labeled, and personnel applying it must be trained, wear full PPE, and have access to technical information as well as decontamination facilities after the application.

Mandatory training

All workers should receive initial guidance on occupational hazards and participate in periodic training related to their activities.



Community relations

Relations with **neighboring communities, workers, local suppliers, and public institutions** are within the purview of Production Units (Unidades Produtivas – UPs) and Processing Plants (Usinas de Beneficiamento – UBAs). That is why ABR incorporates guidelines on harmonious coexistence, dialogue, and contribution to local development into the Social and Community Development pillar.







Culture of continuous improvement

ABR was structured to promote best practices progressively and permanently. The goal is to not only certify farms but also to **foster constant evolution**, strengthening social, environmental, and management standards that directly impact quality of production and the development of teams.





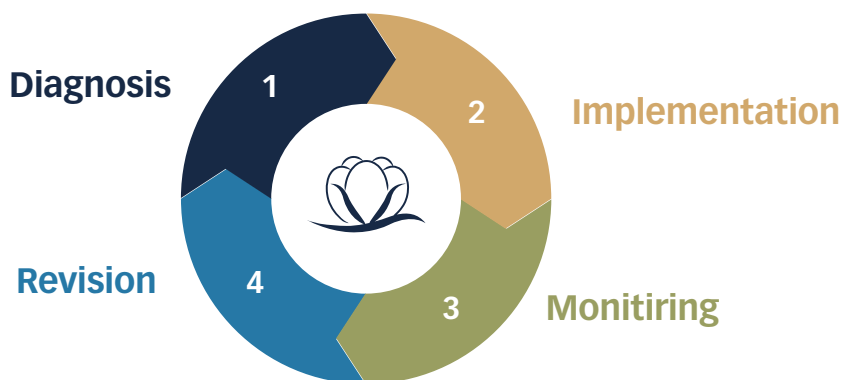
An evolving program



ABR regularly updates its criteria, following legislation changes, lessons learned from audits, and industry requirements. This keeps the program current, clearer, and increasingly **aligned with best practices**.

Continuous improvement cycle

The progress of farms follows a simple, structured cycle:

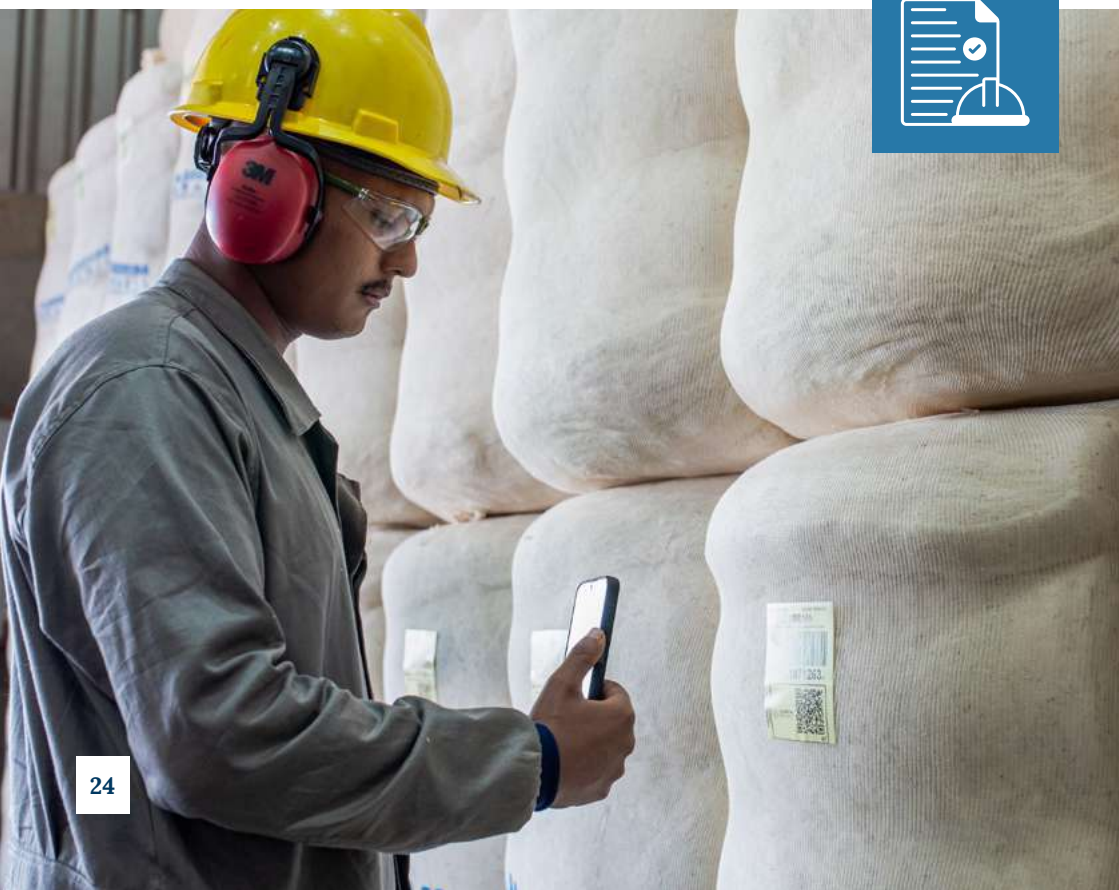


This continuous movement helps to identify failures, correct directions, and consolidate new work standards each crop season.



Checklist as a progress tool

The checklist guides farms on what is adequate and what needs to be improved. It organizes priorities, makes following up on actions easier, and allows gradual, consistent evolution every year.



Noted social improvements



The continuous adoption of **best practices has been generating important social results**, such as:



Increase in training and qualification programs.



Better organization and communication within teams.



Safer work environments.



Clearer people management processes.



Increase in regional partnerships and projects.



Decrease in occupational and operational risks.



Social and environmental integration

Responsible production of Brazilian cotton is based on the union between **people and the environment**. For ABR, these two pillars complement each other; **stronger social practices** support **better environmental results**, and **good environmental management** improves **quality of work and team safety**.





Responsible production: people + the environment

ABR believes that no environmental practice is effective without skilled teams, safe structures, and ethical relations. There is no full social protection without a healthy environment, correct management of resources, and impact prevention. The sum of both pillars gives way to **more efficient, safer, and more valuable production.**





Interdependencies in practice

Social and environmental integration shows in the day-to-day of farms:

Safe work conditions – correct pesticide application – decreased environmental risk.

Trained, protected workers use products and equipment with more precision, decreasing waste, contamination, and incidents.

Regional projects developed – greater adoption of sustainable practices.

Initiatives developed in the context of local realities improve the quality of rural activities and encourage the continuous adoption of responsible, sustainable practices.





Joint work.

For the development of regional conservation and social progress projects.

Structured people management – better execution of environmental actions.

Teams that receive guidance and are valued and well distributed will conduct better-quality agricultural management.

Personnel training – greater environmental efficiency.

Training related to organization, safety, rights, and work routines improves operational discipline, decreases errors, and favors the responsible use of resources.





Benefits of an integrated social-environmental approach

The combination of the two pillars strengthens the whole production system:

It improves the reputation of Brazilian cotton.

It expands access to markets that require ESG criteria.

It reduces operational, legal, and environmental risks.

It boosts traceability and credibility within the cotton chain.

It increases the sector's global competitiveness.







Requirements of the social and community development pillar

The **social requirements of the ABR Program** establish the necessary practices to ensure safe, fair work environments that abide by human rights. **Six criteria** make up the basis of the social agenda and structure the main requirements that guide responsible rural development. In the following pages, we detail what each criterion pertains to and the part it plays in strengthening work relations at certified farms.





Requirement 1

Work Contract

It comprises key conditions to formalize and register work relations, including legal hiring, correct documentation, compensation, time tracking, paid leave, 13th salary bonus, and mandatory contributions.

Requirement 2

Occupational Health and Safety

It consists of practices that protect the life and well-being of workers, in line with NR-31: adequate use of PPEs, mandatory training, risk prevention, sanitary conditions at housing and living areas, safe transportation, and equipment upkeep.

Requirement 3

Equality and Non-discrimination

It ensures that all workers have access to the same opportunities without any kind of discrimination. It includes equal pay for equivalent roles, clear criteria for promotions, and respect for diversity.

Requirement 4

Transparency, Disclosures, and Whistleblowing Mechanisms

It comprises requirements regarding access to information and secure channels so that workers can submit inquiries, file complaints, and report inappropriate situations. It also addresses the availability of mandatory documents such as the Work and Social Security Booklet (CTPS), Length-of-Service Guarantee Fund (FGTS) statements, termination information, and pay slips. The goal is to strengthen dialogue, ensure traceability, and promote fairer, more transparent environments.

Requirement 5

Complementary Labor Rights and Decent Work Conditions

It includes rules on additional pay (hazardous or unhealthy work premiums), work hour limits, breaks, overtime pay, weekly paid leave, and other legally provided guarantees. It ensures that the work routine occurs with quality, safety, and compliance with legislation, thus reducing occupational risks and strengthening people management.

Requirement 6

Training and Qualification

It assesses the provision of training, safety guidance, and qualification, as well as how prepared teams are to act with quality and responsibility. This criterion promotes continuous development and more efficient, safer operations.



Would you like to learn more...

About the ABR Program?

Go to ABR's website and learn about how the Responsible Brazilian Cotton program empowers cotton farming and farming sustainability.

<https://abrcotton.com/>

About the International Labour Organization (ILO)?

<https://www.ilo.org/>



Embrapa

<https://www.embrapa.br/>

UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

<https://www.fao.org/home/en/>

Ethos Institute – Human Rights and Rural Labor

<https://www.ethos.org.br/>

SEDEX / SMETA – Social Best Practices in the Production Chain

<https://www.sedex.com/>

IDH – The Sustainable Trade Initiative

<https://idh.org/>

CNA / SENAR – Education, qualification, and quality of life in rural areas

<https://cnabrazil.org.br/senar>



The Responsible Brazilian Cotton program acknowledges that rural sustainability is only complete when people are at the center. ABR's Social and Community Development pillar comprises practices that strengthen rights, promote fair work conditions, and advance regional development.

From safe work environments to continuous training, compliance with legislation and respect for workers' welfare, the social action pillar ensures that Brazilian cotton production evolves with responsibility, ethics, and care.

By appreciating those who sow, harvest, and move the entire production chain, ABR emphasizes its commitment to promoting farming that is more decent, humane, and inclusive.





ABR Program: Planting the seed of a more sustainable future and cultivating the pride of being Brazilian.





ALGODÃO BRASILEIRO RESPONSÁVEL
RESPONSIBLE BRAZILIAN COTTON

