AUSTRALIAN COTTON SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK
PLANET. PEOPLE. PADDOCK.

WORKPLACE agriculture sustainability indicator harmonisation

Summary

We're working with industry experts and agriculture sustainability frameworks to accelerate harmonisation of farm workplace indicators. This will form part of a new approach to measure impact.
As a component of a bigger project to revamp the Australian cotton sustainability data framework, we've applied a dependency and impact lens to farm workplace indicators. This gives us a much crisper view of what really matters and how it can be measured: it puts the "so what" into agriculture social sustainability.

The Australian Agriculture Sustainability Framework (AASF) has asked the Australian cotton industry to contribute its thinking to support AASF work to harmonise indicators across industries. Key milestones for workplace indicator harmonisation have been:

SHARE: Online workshop with agriculture sustainability frameworks reviewed the suggested approach and mapped existing workplace indicators across industries.

ITERATE: Expert meeting in Canberra critically reviewed the refined list of indicators resulting from the May workshop.

SHARE: this document is the output of work to date. It will be discussed further at an AASF ag framework meeting in late October, where steps to agree indicators and data collection will be sought.

This process gives us a logical set of indicators to measure what farm workplaces depend on, so we can seek cross-sector agreement on consistent terms and indicators.
We have identified three logical workplace objectives farmers depend on (Keep farmers and core employees; Attract casual and contract labour when needed; Keep everyone safe and appropriately skilled), and the key drivers that impact these dependencies. This has led to a set of 49 dependency and impact indicators to measure what matters.

We know some industries may not want to measure or disclose all these indicators, or may want to have additional indicators unique to their industry. That's OK. Whether an industry chooses to use 10% or 100% of these indicators, the aim of this work is to have everyone talking the same language if they do measure any of these aspects of farm workplaces.

This process gives us a starting point for data collection, so we can coordinate across sectors.
We've identified potential data sources for each indicator. There may be better existing datasets from government agencies or other sources. The aim of this work is to have agreed cross-sector indicators, so that a coordinated approach to cross-sector investment in data collection, and a coordinated approach to discuss data provision with ABS, ABARES and other agencies, can be made. We want all sectors to be measuring the same thing, as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible.

This process gives us a framework to plan data coordination with certainty.
This paper includes an eight-year roadmap to show how data collection could be a mix of:

- Annual data, mainly free, and largely from industry documents or regulators
- New coordinated cross-sector investment in common data collection systems? every three years
- Existing, free, Census data every five years.

This suggests the major, or only investment made by agriculture industries is every three years. It also suggests most of this data could be collected by a single cross-sector survey which would significantly reduce farmer survey fatigue.

The intended outcome of the AASF meeting on 29 October is agreed steps to finalise workplace indicators and to collaborate on cross-sector data collection for common indicators.

WORKPLACE agriculture sustainability indicator harmonisation

Detail

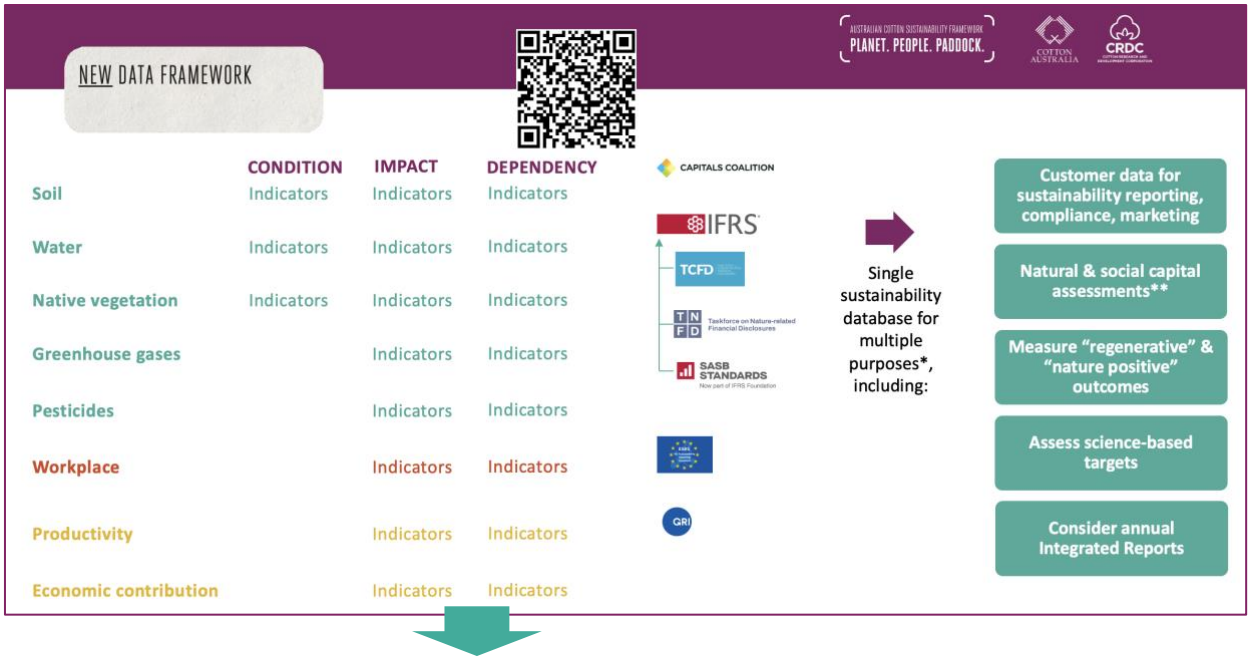
These workplace indicators are part of a new approach to measuring impact

The Australian cotton industry is halfway through a two-year project to revamp its sustainability data framework to more closely align with the methods we think customers of Australian food and fibre are most likely to use. Our new sustainability data framework is now structured into condition, dependency, impact, plus risk and opportunity indicators expected in new reporting frameworks or standards.

This project is being designed as a proof-of-concept for other Australian agricultural sustainability frameworks and agribusinesses to adopt. An aim is to avoid duplication and inconsistency. It is supported by the Australian Government's National Agriculture Traceability Grants Program.

The intended outcome of this work is a single sustainability data framework that can be used for multiple tasks. One of the most important outcomes is to make Australian agriculture the single, preferred source of sustainability disclosure data for customers of and investors in, Australian agriculture.

- If we don't provide this data, multiple other actors will provide customers and investors with data that is often inaccurate, expensive and biased against agriculture. If this happens, this data will inform decisions that will be bad for customers, investors, farmers, nature and society.



A dependency and impact perspective puts the "so what" into farm workplace indicators.

Social indicators are an essential part of any sustainability program, but can feel like they're being included because they are expected to be there. The hard-nosed value of measuring social and human capital is not always obvious.

Drawing on previous industry research, we have identified three logical workplace objectives farmers depend on:

1. Keep farmers and core employees
2. Attract casual and contract labour when needed
3. Keep everyone safe and appropriately skilled.

We have also drawn on the advice of experts to identify what impacts these dependencies and selected indicators to measure these dependencies and impacts. By looking at farm workplace sustainability from this perspective, we get a clearer and targeted view of what really matters, and how it can be measured.[1]

This process gives us a logical set of indicators to measure what farm workplaces depend on and what impacts those dependencies.

There are two important points to note with the indicators in this paper.

1. **At first glance, there are a lot of indicators here.** This list should be regarded as the maximum number of indicators to measure what matters in farm workplaces. Some industries may not want to measure them all, and even if they do, they may not want to disclose them; eg, an industry may want to know the frequency of worker safety consultation to see if it has a problem to address. However, they may not publicly disclose this figure if it shows some farmers don't consult at all and are therefore, technically breaking the law.
    - The aim of this work is to have agreement on consistent terms, indicators and metrics across sectors. Regardless of whether an industry chooses to use 10% of them or 100% of them, we want everyone to be talking the same language if they measure any of these aspects of farm workplaces.

2. **The suggested data sources are a starting point only.** There may be better existing datasets (eg from ABS, Jobs and Skills Australia, regulators etc). More work is needed to identify these sources, and for industry to then decide on the pros and cons of secondary data (reduces survey fatigue but may not be accurate) and primary data (more accurate but potentially ongoing reliance on surveys – which may be mitigated by having a single cross-sector survey, eg Regional Wellbeing Survey)
    - The aim of this work is to have agreed cross-sector indicators, so that a coordinated approach to investment in data collection and to discuss data provision with ABS, ABARES and other agencies, can be made.

Additional notes and comments from the researchers on indicators chosen are in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet.

[1] The Australian cotton sustainability framework's current boundary ends at the farmgate. Industry sustainability frameworks that go past the farmgate may have different impacts and dependencies for those workplaces.

Draft workplace indicators for cross-sector harmonisation. Blue shaded indicators are from Global Reporting Initiative.

Keep growers and core employees				
Dependencies	Suggested indicator	Suggested metric	Suggested data source	Frequency
Retention of growers and core employees	Number of farmers in (industry)	#	Agrifutures data project and/or ABS	3 years
	Number of permanent employees	#		3 years
	Annual retention of employees	%		3 years
	Work satisfaction	Satisfaction scale	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
Impact drivers				
Workplace culture	Employees: perceived organisational support	8 item score	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Employees: perceived psychological safety	5 item score	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Employers: attitudes to people management	6-item index	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Employers: Importance of employee satisfaction	7-item index	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
Water availability	Rainfall received	mm rainfall per year	BoM	Annual
General wellbeing	Global Life Satisfaction	Mean 0-100	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Access to social networks	Loneliness index	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Mobile connectivity	% access to telecommunications	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
Financial wellbeing	Farm financial wellbeing	Scale 1-7 perceived financial stress	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Household financial wellbeing	% self-reporting as reasonably comfortable, comfortable, prosperous	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Extent of off-farm income diversification options	TBC	ABS Census	5 years
Community liveability	Community liveability	Scale 1-7 perceived liveability index	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
Succession planning	Presence of agreed transition / succession plan	%	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years

Attract casual and contract employees				
Dependencies	Suggested indicator	Suggested metric	Suggested data source	Frequency
Human rights	Human rights policies and industry communication/ education in place	Links to policies, description of education actions or programs	Industry documents	Annual
Timely attraction of employees	TBC: Actual or perceived shortfall of employees	TBC	ABS	3 years
Impact drivers				
Environmental responsibility	Community trust in (industry)	% trust	Community Trust in Rural Industries research	Annual
Human rights				
Diversity and inclusion	Age breakdown of the workforce	Proportion <18 years; 18-29 years; 30-49 years; >50 years	ABS Census	5 years
	Percentage of women in the workforce	%	ABS Census	5 years
	Percentage of Indigenous in the workforce	%	ABS Census	5 years
	Percentage of the workforce with a disability	% activities requiring core assistance	ABS Census	5 years
	Percentage of non-English-speaking background in the workforce	% "uses other language"	ABS Census	5 years
	Diversity of governance bodies by gender and age	%	Industry calculation	Annual
	**Incidents of discrimination breaches	# of breaches (not claims)	Fair Work Commission	Annual
Fair pay	**Ratio of basic salary & remuneration of women : men	%	Workplace Gender Equality Agency,	5 years
	**Living wage paid cf to other industries, others locally	TBC	ABS	5 years
Absence of child labour	Risk of child labour	Description of industry policies and actions to communicate them	Industry documents	Annual
	**Incidents of child labour	#	Fair Work Ombudsman or state regulators	Annual
Absence of forced / compulsory labour	Risk of forced or compulsory labour	Description of industry policies and actions to communicate them	Industry documents	Annual
	**Incidents of forced labour or exploitation	#	Fair Work Ombudsman, Australian Human Rights Commission, Australian Federal Police, Home Affairs Department	Annual
Freedom of association	The right to freedom of association and collective bargaining is present.	Common description of industrial relations system and legislation	NFF, Fair Work Ombudsman, DEWR	Annual

**For these workplace law-related indicators, it is suggested AASF:

1. Engages with assurance frameworks and social compliance auditing bodies (e.g. AUS QUAL, Fair Farms) to explore if their existing data can be used instead of seeking this in surveys
2. Benchmarks existing social compliance schemes / standards and harmonising these indicators across compliance schemes and across industry sustainability frameworks to avoid inconsistency and confusion, and to make better use of processes and data within existing workplace framework schemes/standards.

Keep all employees safe and skilled				
Dependencies	Suggested indicator	Suggested metric	Suggested data source	Frequency
Improvement in physical and mental safety	Work-related fatalities	Total in five-year period (or rolling five-year average, if data available)	## Rural Safety and Health Alliance	Annual
	Serious injuries (5+ days of lost work)	Total annual serious injuries		Annual
	Economic cost of serious injuries	$ per year		Annual
	Main types of work-related fatalities and injuries	Description and % cause of fatality/injury, and type of injury		Annual
	Positive mental health	Score 6-30 (optimal score < 18) Kessler 6 psychological distress scale	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
Farmers and core employees have the adaptive capacity to be future ready	Programs for upgrading employee skills and transition assistance programs	Description of type and scope of programs (including on-farm, informal etc)	Industry documents	Annual
	Percentage of industry workforce with a higher education qualification	% post-school qualifications	ABS census, per 5 years	5 years
Impact drivers				
Physical and mental health and safety systems are in place	**Proportion of farms with a documented occupational health and safety management system	%	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Hazard identification, risk assessment, & incident investigation systems are operational	Description of processes	Industry documents	3 years
	**Frequency that workplace hazards are reviewed	% weekly, monthly, six-monthly, annually, never	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	Worker participation, consultation, and communication on occupational health and safety	Description of processes	Industry documents	3 years
	**Frequency that workers are consulted	% weekly, monthly, six-monthly, annually, never	Regional Wellbeing Survey	3 years
	**Near misses reported	Total annual reported near misses	Regional Wellbeing Survey	Annual
Skills and knowledge training is provided and encouraged	Training per person	Average # training events per person, by employee category & gender	Industry calculation	Annual
	Work related health and safety risks	Risk perception scale	Regional Wellbeing Survey.	3 years
	Satisfaction of career development support	% weekly, monthly, 6-monthly, annual, never	Grower survey or RWS	3 years
	Investment in extension	$ levy investment per year in farm safety extension	Industry documents	Annual

RSHA is currently collecting this data and from 2024 providing an annual report to funding industries (Agrifutures, grains, pork, cotton, wool). Can other industries support RSHA as well for consistency and coordination?

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2. Benchmarks existing social compliance schemes / standards and harmonising these indicators across compliance schemes and across industry sustainability frameworks to avoid inconsistency and confusion, and to make better use of processes and data within existing workplace framework schemes/standards.

This process gives us a framework to plan data coordination with certainty

Data collection can take place on differing frequencies to match data availability, the importance of the indicator and the likelihood of annual change. A suggested frequency across the next eight years is below, showing how investment in workplace data can be planned and coordinated across industries with a mix of:

- Annual data, mainly free, and largely from industry documents or regulators
- New coordinated cross-sector investment in common data collection systems every three years
- Existing, free, Census data every five years.

This suggests the major, or only, investment made by agriculture industries is every three years. It also suggests most of this data could be collected by a single cross-sector survey which would significantly reduce farmer survey fatigue.

Data source	Frequency	Industry investment
Census	5 years	Nil
Regional Wellbeing Survey (RWS)	3 years	Shared investment in RWS per 3 years
Australian Bureau of Statistics or AgriFutures (AF)	3 years	Shared investment per 3 years
Industry documentation	Annual	Nil
Community Trust in Agriculture (CT in Ag) survey	Annual	Continued investment
Fair Work Commission (FWC)	Annual	Potentially nil; opportunity to engage to seek accurate data with the tribunal and regulator
Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO)	Annual	
Bureau of Meteorology	Annual	Nil, apart from time to collate data

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Keep farmers and core employees							
# farmers & employees	ABS / AF			ABS / AF			ABS / AF
Work satisfaction	RWS			RWS			RWS
Culture – employee perspective	RWS			RWS			RWS
Culture – employer perspective	EoC			EoC			EoC
Water variability	BoM	BoM	BoM	BoM	BoM	BoM	BoM
General wellbeing	RWS			RWS			RWS
Financial wellbeing	RWS			RWS			RWS
Economic diversification		Census					Census
Community liveability	RWS			RWS			RWS
Succession planning	RWS			RWS			RWS
Attract casual and contract labour							
Human rights policy & comms	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry
Timely attraction	ABS?			ABS?			ABS?
Environmental responsibility	CT in Ag	CT in Ag	CT in Ag	CT in Ag	CT in Ag	CT in Ag	CT in Ag
Workplace diversity		Census					Census
Governance body diversity	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry
Discrimination breaches	FWC?	FWC?	FWC?	FWC?	FWC?	FWC?	FWC?
Fair pay	ABS?			ABS?			ABS?
Child labour policy & comms	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry
Chile labour breaches	FWO?	FWO?	FWO?	FWO?	FWO?	FWO?	FWO?
Freedom of association policy	NFF	NFF	NFF	NFF	NFF	NFF	NFF
Keep everyone safe and skilled							
Physical safety	RSHA	RSHA	RSHA	RSHA	RSHA	RSHA	RSHA
Mental health	RWS			RWS			RWS
Industry skill programs	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry
Post-school qualifications		Census					Census
Phys & mental health systems	RWS			RWS			RWS
Training per person	RWS			RWS			RWS
Career support and satisfaction	RWS			RWS			RWS
Perceived work related risks	RWS			RWS			RWS
Investment in extension	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry	Industry