

Request for Proposals: Pilot of Isotope Testing to Support the Yarn Ethically and Sustainably Sourced (YESS) Standards

Posted: November 23, 2022

Responses Due: 5pm EST December 9, 2022

Contractor Selection: December 16, 2022

Start Date: January 2, 2023

End Date: June 30, 2023

Location: India

Key Contact: Rachel Matheson; rmatheson@verite.org

Note: Please also see Addendum #1 to this RfP, posted on December 2, 2022 at www.verite.org/careers.

1. Description

[Verité](#) is an award-winning non-profit organization that illuminates and addresses serious human rights and labor rights violations in factories, farms, and other workplaces around the world. We serve private sector and public-sector clients by building their internal understanding of the labor rights issues they face in their supply chains and operations, and their skills to solve those problems.

[Responsible Sourcing Network \(RSN\)](#) is dedicated to ending human rights abuses and forced labor associated with the raw materials found in products we use every day. RSN builds responsible supply chain coalitions of diverse stakeholders including investors, companies, and human rights advocates. RSN is spearheading the initiative [YESS: Yarn Ethically & Sustainably Sourced](#) to drive modern slavery out of cotton production by identifying and addressing forced labor involved in cotton harvesting, and encouraging the use of ethical and sustainable cotton.

2. Background

Verite is currently implementing the [Supply Chain Tracing and Engagement Methodologies \(STREAMS\)](#) project, which supports the use of traceability tools to combat labor abuse in global supply chains. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, this project is being conducted in collaboration with core partners including the [Responsible Sourcing Network's Initiative Yarn Ethically & Sustainably Sourced \(RSN/YESS\)](#) and [Better Cotton](#).

STREAMS is conducting a set of pilots of traceability technologies combined with a due diligence and sustainability approach in extended garment/apparel supply chains in India. Several traceability technologies are being tested, both by Better Cotton and RSN/YESS, in partnership with Verité. Learnings will be used in the development of public facing resources and tools for garment/apparel sector stakeholders.

This RFP is for a STREAMS pilot of isotope testing technology, specifically by Verité and RSN/YESS.

3. Pilot Objectives

Isotope testing is potentially valuable for facilities aiming to be conformant with the [YESS Standards for Spinning and Fabric Mills](#). It can provide independent proof that cotton bales or the cotton contained in a product did originate—or did not originate—from a specific country or region within a country. This information can be paired with information about labor conditions in cotton production for a specific location in order to demonstrate due diligence to avoid forced labor risk. This added layer of assurance could be particularly valuable to screen sourcing practices in cases in which a specific supplier of cotton inputs is not well-known to a spinning or fabric mill, has not been subject to a full due diligence assessment, or is located in a region known to have a high risk of forced labor associated with cotton production. It could also be valuable as a way of conducting risk mitigation in cases where an initial risk assessment identified a supplier as requiring additional assurance. Isotope testing evidence could be made available during a YESS conformance assessment as an additional layer of assurance, to test the outcome of a YESS assessment, or be provided directly to a client that requests it.

Verité and RSN/YESS wish to evaluate the use of isotope testing as a ‘spot check’ for YESS-implementing spinning and fabric mills. Mills will participate in an exercise to identify specific batches of cotton, yarn and fabric to prioritize for isotope testing. The technology will be applied to confirm sourcing origins and to identify where gaps in visibility may exist that would require further due diligence.

Note this will be a pilot proof-of-concept of the application of isotope testing technology to support YESS implementation and conformance. There is no guarantee of future work beyond the scope of this exercise. While the specific findings yielded from application of the isotope technology will be kept confidential to participating suppliers, broader insight on the ways in which isotope technology can add value for YESS implementation will be shared in a public report.

4. Scope Requirements

[Origin Verification for Cotton Inputs](#)

The isotope testing provider should describe a process by which isotope testing would be applied to a sample of the following (all containing cotton): 1) inbound cotton lint and outbound

yarn at 2 spinning mills; and 2) inbound yarn and outbound fabric at 2 fabric mills; to verify 1) the origin of the cotton at the level of country and state or region within India, and 2) the absence of sourcing from a set of predetermined high-risk cotton origins, to include XUAR, Turkmenistan and 1-2 other countries.

Proposals should list the countries and Indian states available for inclusion in the isotope fingerprint reference library for the process described above. Preference will be given to service providers with isotopic reference fingerprints available for countries and regions of India of most relevance for the STREAMS project and the YESS initiative.

Number and Location of Participating Suppliers

Testing will be conducted at 2 spinning mills and 2 fabric mills. The mills may or may not be vertically integrated, this is yet to be confirmed. Final locations of participating spinning and fabric mills is also to be confirmed and may include: Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, or Tamil Nadu.

Supplier Volumes & Sourcing Footprints

Exact volumes and sourcing footprints of participating spinning mills and fabric mills are yet to be clarified. For spinning mills, sourcing is anticipated to include regular sourcing from India-based gins, as well as procurement of Indian-origin cotton from traders and the Cotton Corporation of India, and some international sourcing. For fabric mills, sourcing is anticipated to entail a mix of sourcing from vertically integrated spinning units as well as external suppliers located in India and abroad.

Please delineate sampling methodology and associated confidence interval and costs by discrete volume/production bands, as per sampling approach for your solution.

Testing Rounds

Two to three rounds of testing for inbound and outbound cotton-containing products at each of the four facilities is envisaged.

Coordination

The isotope testing firm will coordinate and facilitate the expected work under supervision of STREAMS and RSN/YESS project staff. The service will require occasional interaction with other supply chain stakeholders. STREAMS staff will coordinate visits to nominated facilities.

Implementation Timing

January 2, 2023 – June 30, 2023

Testing and Verification

Please include details on the following in your proposal:

- Sampling strategy, to include a recommended approach or approaches for identifying specific batches of cotton, yarn and fabric to prioritize for isotope testing based on volume and other considerations
- Number of samples necessary to establish a reasonable level of confidence in results
- Level of error associated with the solution
- Interferences associated with cotton production and manufacturing that might impact results (for example, implications of processing (i.e., dyeing of yarn), commingling with cotton of other origins, blending with non-cotton fibers)
- Information on independent confirmation of the performance of the proposed solution

5. Proposal Requirements

Applications should include the following:

- Narrative proposal responding to above requirements; and
- Cost proposal including cost breakdown for activities and deliverables. Costs should be specified for access to reference library for specific countries and states of India; methodological design and support; collection of samples & shipping; analysis; provision of reports of findings for each nominated supplier; and project management. As this is an exploratory pilot, please allot for at least 2 meetings per supplier, and several generative and ongoing project management meetings with Verité and RSN YESS Staff. All cost proposals should be in USD.

6. Review Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated understanding of scope of work and approach to project
- Availability of required isotopic reference library for cotton origins listed above
- Relevant past performance
- Knowledge/experience/ capacity in India and with its cotton, yarn and fabric/textile industries
- Cost
- Capacity to complete project within budget and on schedule

7. Proposal Submission

Please submit your proposal in pdf format to Rachel Matheson, at rmatheson@verite.org. For any questions or additional information that would be helpful in the preparation of a proposal, please direct your questions to Rachel Matheson. Proposals are due 5pm EST, December 9, 2022.