

OPPORTUNITY:

CERES/WWF AGWATER CHALLENGE

Exploring opportunities for how projects enrolled in Field to Market's Continuous Improvement Accelerator can meet the requirements of the 2020 AgWater Challenge. This guide details opportunities for how to qualify for recognition from Ceres and WWF for water stewardship efforts.

A shared focus on improving sustainable agriculture's water outcomes

What is the AgWater Challenge?

The primary objective of the AgWater Challenge, which was initially launched in 2016, is to engage companies with a significant agricultural supply chain to provide examples of leadership — and encourage stronger, more transparent commitments to better steward freshwater resources.

What is new about the 2020 AgWater Challenge?

Launching a new focus, the 2020 AgWater Challenge places an emphasis on locally-relevant sustainable agriculture principles that are tied to water outcomes. This revised version is tailor-made for companies to work effectively across the supply chain by implementing practices that improve soil health and manage nutrients in high risk watersheds. Not only will companies work to develop new or strengthened goals, they will also provide technical and financial support to bolster farmer adoption and promote collective watershed action in order to achieve the desired water outcomes.

What does this mean for projects enrolled in Field to Market's Continuous Improvement Accelerator?

Guided by Field to Market's process-based standard, projects in the Continuous Improvement Accelerator are uniquely positioned to demonstrate time-bound, measureable continuous improvement goals for both water quality and irrigation water use efficiency. Innovation Projects that have set clear and measureable continuous improvement objectives to increase adoption of locally-relevant practices to improve water-related outcomes for key commodity crops meet many of the requirements of the 2020 AgWater Challenge. Specifically, the requirement for Innovation Projects to provide value-added incentives to accelerate adoption of locally-relevant conservation practices through technical and/or financial assistance clearly meets the requirements of the new challenge.



**SAMPLE
INNOVATION
PROJECT**

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Partnering together to deliver improved sustainability outcomes for the Mississippi River Basin, Acme Rice has convened supply chain partners and trusted advisers to engage 75 farmers in optimizing irrigation water use efficiency, improving water quality outcomes and reducing greenhouse gas emissions for Arkansas rice production.

GOAL: Improve irrigation water use efficiency and water quality outcomes while reducing rice methane emissions.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVE: By 2021, engage 60,000 acres (equivalent to 75% of rice volume sourced) to analyze continuous improvement in sustainability outcomes and benchmark their performance against their peers.

ADOPTION OBJECTIVE: By 2025, drive a 30% increase in the number of participating farmers in our projects that implement alternate wetting and drying, advanced nutrient management and irrigation water management.

IMPACT OBJECTIVE: By 2025, support participating farmers in reducing total project rice methane emissions by 10%.

2020 AgWater Challenge Commitment Requirements

Amount of new acres across key agricultural commodities

Companies must demonstrate the amount of new acres represents a significant portion of total agricultural commodities sourced by the company involved.

The Continuous Improvement Plan required for all projects enrolled in the Accelerator enables companies to establish a time-bound and measurable engagement objective that would clearly establish the acreage engaged to achieve equivalent sourcing volumes.

High risk watersheds

Address areas where company sources ingredients that are flagged through recognized water risk tools (e.g., WRI Aqueduct, WWF Water Risk Filter, WBCSD Global Water Tool) as being high to extremely or very high-risk with respect to either water stress/scarcity and quality/impairment.

In establishing the overarching goal for Continuous Improvement Projects, Field to Market asks members to first identify natural resource concerns where their project is located and consider specific ways to support farmers in implementing specific management practices in the region would lead to improved outcomes to address the natural resource concern.

Projects can again demonstrate an approach to managing water risk in the their project's Continuous Improvement Goal following use of water risk tools to better understand natural resource concerns of key sourcing regions. The Continuous Improvement Goal of the example project highlights an understanding of Acme Rice's Arkansas supply shed's impact on the Mississippi River Basin, which faces water quality and impairment issues that contribute to hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

Locally-relevant sustainable agriculture principles, with a focus on soil health and nutrient management practices

Companies must support and collaborate with farmers to establish relevant practices for the watersheds that the company has identified as high-risk.

Field to Market's Process-Based Standard for Accelerating Continuous Improvement requires all projects enrolled in the Continuous Improvement Accelerator to develop at least one timebound, measurable objective and establish a corresponding baseline against which the project will evaluate progress in achieving its intended outcome.

All projects are asked to set an engagement objective, which sets targets for the number of growers and acreage the project seeks to engage over its lifetime, which meets the first requirement of the AgWater Challenge.

Additional continuous improvement objectives could be added to demonstrate the specific strategy your project will utilize to accelerate continuous improvement. For instance, all Innovation Projects should plan to communicate either an Adoption or Impact objective in addition to the required Engagement objective to clarify how you will accelerate adoption of a suite of locally-relevant conservation practices to improve the targeted sustainability outcome(s) your project has identified.



INNOVATION PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORTING

Each Continuous Improvement Project is asked to report annually the progress achieved against their continuous improvement objectives and share the strategies used to achieve progress.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVE: By 2021, engage 60,000 acres (equivalent to 75% of rice volume sourced) to analyze continuous improvement in sustainability outcomes and benchmark their performance against their peers.

In 2020, we enrolled 35,000 acres on a pathway to benchmark and improve sustainability performance of irrigation water management, water quality and reduce methane emissions. Farmers were provided individual one-on-one consultations on their Fieldprint Analysis and a customized suite of recommendations for practices that can improve their results.

ADOPTION OBJECTIVE: By 2025, drive a 30% increase in the number of participating farmers in our projects that implement alternate wetting and drying, advanced nutrient management and irrigation water management.

In 2020, to scale adoption of the identified practices we are providing technical assistance for producers to implement new practices by funding 50% FTE of a local conservation district staff.

2020 AgWater Challenge Commitment Requirements

Implementation Support

Companies should specify how they plan to support farmers and suppliers in implementing the overarching goal and provide details about the scale of this work. Companies will be encouraged to publicly disclose at least 2 of the below implementation metrics along with their high-level commitment.

Technical Support

- # or % of farmers that receive educational support (and clarification on the extent of that support)
- # or % of farmers that receive agronomic support (and clarification on the extent of that support)
- # or % of farmers that receive in-kind or staff secondment support (and clarification on the extent of that support)
- # of farmers or % that are provided free access to an online platform for tracking environmental performance/practice adoption relative to peers/neighbors

Financial Support

- # or % of farmers that receive financial support or \$ of financial support that company provides to farmers (either directly or indirectly - via a third party) each year.
- Invest \$X in cost-share programs by X date.
- Establish long term contracts with producers who adopt cover crops
- Pay farmer X\$ premium/bushel or lb of commodity
- \$ of financial or education support provided to local conservation districts and/or NGO before going to farmers
- Facilitate and support efforts to access state/regional/fed funds (e.g., cutting red tape, letters of support for loans)

The annual report for an Innovation Project can update interested stakeholders on the progress in achieving time-bound, measureable continuous improvement strategies and the types of strategies utilized to realize those milestones. By making project reporting publicly available on the [Accelerator's Project Directory](#), the AgWater Challenge can easily track and evaluate your progress.

Collective Watershed Action

Companies should actively undertake and invest in collective watershed protection projects with relevant stakeholders that improve governance, address local water supply challenges, and promote the adoption of best practices that reduce water use and increase replenishment.

All Continuous Improvement Projects are encouraged to consider and implement a stakeholder engagement strategy to determine how project efforts can leverage and combine with the efforts of other actors in a supply shed or watershed. Clearly identifying these strategies in your project's Continuous Improvement Plan can demonstrate your commitment to Collective Watershed Action.

Who decides whether my company can participate in the AgWater Challenge?

A group of agriculture, water, and communications experts from Ceres and WWF will work with interested companies to determine eligibility, develop and assess commitments, evaluate progress, and publicize commitments, appropriately.

Will there be an acknowledgement of existing corporate actions and commitments on agricultural water stewardship?

Yes. While the intent of the AgWater Challenge is to spur improvement and further actions and commitments, there is a desire to also reward first movers who have already made significant progress to address water risks in their agriculture supply chains. This could include current AgWater Challenge participants (should existing goals still be in progress or aligned with new Challenge focus) along with other companies with existing soil health commitments that are interested in expanding on those commitments by, for example,

increasing the acreage or number of farmers engaged. Participants may already be engaged in projects through other platforms, like Field to Market's Continuous Improvement Accelerator. Within the structure of the AgWater Challenge, these platforms and projects are viewed as the implementation pathways for a company to meet its AgWater Challenge commitments.

Who can I contact for more information?

To learn more about the AgWater Challenge and how you can engage, contact: Beth Hooker, bhooker@ceres.org or Daniel Brizuela, Daniel.Brizuela@wwfus.org.

For support on how to tailor your Innovation Project to meet the requirements of the AgWater Challenge, contact Lexi Clark, lclark@fieldtomarket.org.

