

An Introduction to Organic Certification for Farmers and Growers

Organic requirements are in addition to other statutory requirements
Statutory information is for guidance only and is correct at time of going to print

Whilst there is plenty of information available to assist farmers in converting their land and managing it organically, the process of getting it inspected and certified often seems quite complicated and confusing. This leaflet answers some of the common questions asked about conversion, inspection and certification.

Why do I have to become certified?

The labelling and marketing of organic food and feed products are controlled by EC Regulations (EC) No. 834/2007 and (EC) No. 889/2008. Any person or organisation intending to produce or process these organic products must be subject to an inspection and certification procedure by an approved inspection body. Anyone contravening these Regulations could be subject to prosecution by Trading Standards.

What categories of production or processing need to be certified?

The following operations must be subject to the inspection and certification process:

- Farm production including all arable and horticultural crops and livestock producing food intended for human consumption.
- Processing involving food preparation, prepacking and storage. This includes on-farm processing such as dairy products, butchers shops, etc.
- Organic products imported from countries outside the European Union, known as third countries;
- Animal feeds production;
- The re-labelling of products at any stage of the distribution chain.

Who or what has to be certified?

Farm Production

Each farm production unit has to be registered and inspected. The area of land is specified down to the individual fields, OS/RLR numbers and areas. Only products from those fields may be marketed as organic. Each production enterprise, such as cereals, dairy cattle and milk or vegetables is licensed and only products from those enterprises may be marketed as organic. A named individual has to be responsible for the management of the organic unit.

Farm Processing

Where the processing of products takes place on the farm, these must be included in the inspection and certification process.

Where the farm's products are stored or processed by contractors or on other farms, the premises used must also be inspected. This can include the drying or storage of organic cereals on another farm or grain store and the cold storage and washing of potatoes or carrots off site.

How do I convert my farm?

At present, it is not necessary for the whole farm to be converted to organic production, only an area sufficiently large to achieve a sustainable organic unit.

During the conversion process, only those materials and practices permitted in the standards may be used. An organic system will operate successfully by using those materials and practices that are permitted. The majority of soluble fertilisers and synthetic pesticides are not permitted.

Where fertilisers have been extensively used in the past, their cessation is likely to result in a drop in yield until the organic system starts to take effect. This has to be allowed for and, to spread the loss of yield or income, it may be advisable to convert the farm in stages rather than all at once.

How to convert to organic

The conversion period is normally 2 years but this can be reduced to 20 months if records and a visual inspection prove that there has been no use of artificial inputs for the 4 months prior to the date of application.

Conversion can be done in stages or the whole farm can be converted at the same time. Many farms, particularly mixed farms have successfully converted the whole farm from the start. Alternatively staged conversion over a period of perhaps three or four years has the advantage of providing time to learn new techniques, finding out which system suits the farm best and spreading risks by testing the market slowly.

How are livestock converted?

Livestock can either be converted at the same time as the land used to feed them (known as simultaneous conversion or simcon) or can start conversion once the land has completed its conversion. For livestock in simcon their offspring, born during the conversion period, can be traded as organic after the land has completed conversion, subject to the appropriate conversion periods as detailed below.

Dairy cattle must undergo a 6-month conversion period before the milk can be sold as organic. This must include all management, e.g. feed and veterinary treatments.

Beef cattle must be managed to the standards for 12 weeks before their offspring can qualify as organic.

Sows served after the land has become organic and been managed in accordance with the standards from then on for the weaners to be marketed as organic pigs.

A flock of laying birds introduced before the land has become organic must be managed in accordance with the standards for 6 weeks before the eggs can be sold as organic.

Table birds must be introduced at less than 3 days old onto an organic unit, and be managed in accordance with the standards until slaughter.

Livestock can not be sold as 'in-conversion' but can be sold as in 'simultaneous conversion' if we have approved this.

How do I sell my crops during the conversion period?

During the first 12 months of the conversion period, all crops must be sold as non-organic.

Crops harvested after the first 12 months of the conversion period may be marketed under the label - 'Produced under conversion to organic farming'.

There is a strong market for conversion cereals and legumes for stock feed and a developing market for conversion fruit and vegetables. Farm shops can also sell the produce of the farm under this label.

The organic label may only be applied to crops that were sown or planted into land that has achieved organic status.

Where can I get advice about conversion?

Region	Tel.No	Scheme Name and Comments
England	0800 980 0048	The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) information pack will provide information about sources of advice, farm walks and publications. For further information go to the following website www.naturalengland.org.uk/planning/farming-wildlife/ocis/default.htm
Wales	01970 622100	The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) (run by Organic Centre Wales) provides free organic farming information for farmers interested in conversion and for those who are already farming organically.
Scotland	01224 711072	The Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) provides free advice by phone and organises farm walks and seminars. There are 23 SAC offices, throughout Scotland and all have staff trained to advise on organic agriculture.
N. Ireland	028 9442 6642 Manus McHenry	The C.A.F.R.E. Organic Advisory team provides free advice to new and established organic farmers.

Are there any grants to assist the conversion?

Region	Tel.No	Scheme Name and Comments
England	0300 060 1113	Defra Organic Entry Level Scheme (OELS) This must be applied for during the first year of conversion. (or no conversion grant for 1st, 2nd or, in the case of top fruit, the third year) Grants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £175/ha/year for first 2 years of conversion Organic maintenance grant is £60/ha/year (paid in addition to the conversion grant) applicants must generate 60 points per hectare - 30 from environmental management options as for ELS and 30 from possession of a valid certificate of registration.

Wales	01970 622 100	Information on the The Welsh Organic Farming Scheme be found at http://www.organiccentrewales.org.uk or contact your local divisional office of the Welsh Assembly Government.
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Scotland	0131 556 8400	New grants are now available under the Scottish Rural Development Programme - http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Rural/SRDP/RuralPriorities/Options/conandmainoforganicfarmin A minimum payment of £500 per annum per IACS business for conversion applies.
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Organic conversion payment rates

Land Type	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Arable	£220	£220	£60	£60	£60
Improved Grassland	£105	£105	£50	£50	£50
Fruit and Vegetable	£300	£300	£60	£60	£60
Unimproved grassland/rough grazing	£5	£5	£5	£5	£5

Organic maintenance payment rates

Land Type	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Arable	£60	£60	£60	£60	£60
Improved Grassland	£50	£50	£50	£50	£50
Fruit and Vegetable	£60	£60	£60	£60	£60
Unimproved grassland/rough grazing	£5	£5	£5	£5	£5

N. Ireland	Adrian Saunders 028 9442 6765	The Northern Ireland Organic Farming Scheme is open for applications from all farmers and land managers with a Business Identification Number (Business ID) and at least 1 hectare of horticultural land or at least 3 hectares of arable, improved and semi-improved land - http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/rural-development/rdp-campaign/rdp-campaign-development-funding-schemes-and-programmes/rdp-campaign-development-environment/rdp_campaign-organic_farming_scheme.htm . The payment rates / ha (spread over 5 years) are: Horticulture and Top Fruit £670, Arable £570 and Improved and semi Improved Grassland £470.
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An Introduction to Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd.

Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd (OF&G) is a registered company, limited by shares, that was originally established in 1973 to assist producers and processors to market their organic products. It no longer has an active role in marketing but has helped to develop, and has links with, a number of marketing initiatives in the fresh produce, cereal, meat and dairy sectors.

As its main service, the company operates an Inspection and Certification Scheme to carry out the work required under the EC Regulations (EC) No. 834/2007 and (EC) No. 889/2008. The Scheme is accredited with Defra and UKAS and operates to the Defra Compendium of Organic Standards and inspection requirements.

OF&G Ltd. inspects UK production, processing and importing operations and also certifies a number of overseas production and processing facilities.

How do I become registered with Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd.

Request an Application pack

Contact the telephone number given below to obtain an application pack. This contains a letter of introduction from the chairman, information on advisory services for organic farmers and growers, the fees sheet and a producer application form.

Send in your Application Form

Return your completed application form with the appropriate fee. OF&G will then send you a conversion plan form along with a copy of the OF&G Control Manual of standards.

Complete the Conversion Plan

The next stage in the process is to complete the conversion plan forms and send them back to the certification office. The relevant standards must also be studied and understood before an application is made. If you have any questions, contact the OF&G certification office on the telephone number below.

Undergo an Inspection

Following our assessment of your conversion plan, an inspector will contact you and arrange to visit the farm and carry out the inspection. This will take from two hours for small operations, up to a full day for large complex operations.

Agree to any conditions set by the Certification Office

The inspector will write a report, which is evaluated by the certification office.

Where it is felt necessary, conditions may be imposed to bring the system into line with the standards. These are issued on a Compliance Notice that you are expected to agree to by signing and returning to the Certification Officer. Additional information may also be requested where necessary. Where no problems occur, the Compliance Notice will be used to notify you of the decision but it will not have to be signed and returned.

Be issued with a Certificate of Compliance

Once all the above stages have been completed, the farm will be registered as a Licensee and a Certificate of Compliance will be issued along with a Schedule to the Certificate.

The Certificate can be displayed to demonstrate to customers that the operation is registered. Customers frequently ask for a copy of the current Certificate to confirm that the farm is licensed to produce the organic products it is supplying, so a copy should also be kept on file.

The Schedule specifies the fields, which have been certified, their OS/RLR reference numbers and areas, whether in conversion or remaining under conventional management and the date the conversion began.

Once the farm has become registered as an OF&G Licensee, Defra will be notified that the process has been completed and the farm will be entered onto the National Register.

How to contact us

For advice and further information call the OF&G certification office

T: 01939 291800 or local rate 0845 330 5122 E: info@organicfarmers.org.uk
F: 01939 291250 or local rate 0845 330 5123 W: www.organicfarmers.org.uk