

An Introduction to Organic Certification for Farmers and Growers

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

Why does the farm have to become certified?

The labelling and marketing of organic food and feed products is controlled by EC Regulation's (EC) No. 834/2007 and (EC) No. 889/2008. Any person or organisation intending to produce or process organic products must be subject to an inspection and certification procedure by an approved Control 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 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 production unit has to be registered and inspected. The area of land to be converted is specified down to the individual fields. Only products from certified fields may be marketed as organic. Each production enterprise, such as cereals, dairy cattle and milk, vegetables etc. must be 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 at other premises, the premises used must also be inspected. This can include the drying or storage of organic cereals at another farm or grain store and the cold storage and washing of potatoes 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 is land converted?

The conversion period is normally 2 years (or 3 years for perennial crops other than grassland) but this can be reduced by up to 4 months (giving a 20 or 32 month conversion period) if records and a visual inspection prove that there has been no use of prohibited inputs during the 4 month period 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 in one go. 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, known as simultaneous conversion (sim-con) or can start organic management once the land has completed its conversion, known as sequential conversion.

For livestock in sim-con, cattle born 12 weeks after the start of conversion and lambs born to ewes tupped on in-conversion land can be traded as organic after the land has completed conversion.

For livestock kept on land in sequential conversion the conversion periods as detailed below apply;

- Dairy cattle must be managed to the organic standards for 6 months before the milk can be sold as organic. The milk can not be sold as organic before the land achieves organic status;
- Beef cattle must be managed to the standards for 12 weeks once the land completes conversion, calves born after this period will have organic status;
- Ewes and Sows must be tupped/mated on organic land for their offspring to have organic status;
- Flocks of laying birds on farm before the land became organic must be managed to the standards for 6 weeks from the day the land became organic before the eggs have organic status;
- Table birds introduced at less than 3 days old onto an organic unit must undergo 10 weeks of organic management before qualifying as organic.

Livestock cannot be sold as 'in-conversion' but can be sold as 'simultaneous conversion' when approved to do so by the certification office.

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.

When are my crops organic?

- Crops that were sown or planted into land that has achieved organic status can be sold as organic;
- Grazing and forage crops harvested after the land becomes organic can be sold as organic;
- Perennial crops can be sold as organic after the plant has been through 36 months (or 32 months if the conversion period has been reduced) of conversion.

Are there any grants to assist the conversion?

Region	Telephone	
England	0300 060 1113	The Natural England Organic scheme is currently under review. For information about the proposed scheme please see the following website: https://www.gov.uk/cap-reform
Wales	Organic Centre Wales 01970 622248 Rural Payments Wales 0300 062 5004	The Glastir Organic scheme supports farmers converting to organic production and also existing organic farmers who meet the eligibility criteria. Details of the scheme are available on the website: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/farming/schemes/glastir/glastir-organic/?lang=en http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/farming/schemes/glastir/glastir-organic/?skip=1&lang=cy Applications can only be made on-line through the Rural Payments Wales website: http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/rpwnonline/?lang=en
Scotland	Contact your local Scottish Government office or SOPA	Information on grants available under the Scottish Rural Development Programme can be found at: http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Rural/SRDP/RuralPriorities/Options/conandmainoforganicfarmin SOPA - www.sopa.org.uk
Northern Ireland	0300 200 7843	Support measures for organic farmers will open for applications in autumn 2016 as part of the Environmental Farming Scheme. Further details will be available in due course.

How do I become registered with OF&G?

Request an Application pack

Contact OF&G on the telephone number given overleaf to obtain an application pack. This contains a letter of introduction from the chairman, information on organic advisory services, the fees sheet and a producer application form. Alternatively, visit our website www.ofgorganic.org

Send in your Application Form

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

Complete the Conversion Plan

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

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. The inspection 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

An Introduction to OF&G

Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) 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 approved by Defra (GB-ORG-02) and accredited by UKAS.

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

Where can I get advice about conversion?

There are a number of organisations and/or individuals that are able to offer advice through paid consultants. OF&G Technical Leaflet TL102 provides contact details for advisors, geographical areas covered and area of expertise.

system into line with the standards. These conditions are notified on a Compliance Notice that you are expected to agree to by signing and returning OF&G along with any requested documentation. 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, your business 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 your business is registered as organic or in-conversion (Farming). Businesses are often asked for a copy of the current Certificate to confirm that they are certified to produce the organic products being supplied, a copy can be kept on file. The Schedule for farms specifies the products produced and the fields that are under organic management, with their field numbers and areas, and whether organic, in-conversion or remaining under non-organic management, and the date the conversion began. Once your business has become registered as an OF&G Licensee, Defra will be notified that the process has been completed and the business will be entered onto the National Register. bioC will also list all organic businesses/certified operators within the UK.

Organic requirements are in addition to other statutory requirements

Statutory information is for guidance only and is correct at time of going to print