

Introduction to Organic Certification for Processors (including Importers, Abattoirs, Packers and Retailers)

Who needs a Certificate to sell Organic products?

Under UK law, any company processing, packing or selling organic food, animal feed or seeds, or importing these from outside the EU, must have their systems inspected and certified by a Defra-approved organic control body. Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) was the first independent organic control body to be approved by Defra.

Why choose OF&G?

OF&G has a practical approach to certification and has built a reputation for responsible, efficient and consistent service. We work hard to make organic standards clear and to apply them in a practical, professional manner. A flat rate fee structure is applied, payable annually, based on total turnover of the company or site. The fee is based on total turnover as all processing carried out on site must be assessed for any potential challenges to organic integrity. Upon application to OF&G a Certification Officer will be assigned, and he/she remains the main point of contact for all enquiries. OF&G inspects to the EU organic regulations, as interpreted by Defra. In addition, our contracted Inspection Company, Acoura, can offer combined inspections for BRC and other Assurance Schemes.

Where do the organic standards come from?

The OF&G Organic Standards and Certification Manual (OSCM) is based on EC Regulations (EC) No. 834/2007, (EC) No. 889/2008 and (EC) No. 1235/2008. These are available on the website: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/organic/eu-policy/legislation_en. This also incorporates additional OF&G Standards where further clarification is required.

For food processors the organic standards define:

- the ingredients that may be used in organic foods;
- the level of separation, in store and during processing, that needs to be maintained to ensure the integrity of organic products;
- systems and recording that need to be in place to ensure the integrity of organic products;
- labelling and claims that can be used to declare organic status;
- cleaning and pest control methods that can be used during organic processing.

What do I need to do to achieve organic certification?

1. Buy certified organic ingredients.

Ingredients should only be sourced from suppliers holding valid certification from an approved organic control body.

2. Check your recipe.

Agricultural ingredients (e.g. meat, flour, oils, sugars etc) must be organic (unless they are from the short list of agricultural ingredients that are not currently available in organic form. See Section 10 of the OF&G OSCM. Items from this list may be used but must not exceed more than 5% of the agricultural ingredients in the recipe). Any non-agricultural ingredients and processing aids used must also be from approved lists in the OSCM. (Visit our website: www.ofgorganic.org)

3. Segregate organic ingredients.

Upon verification that incoming organic ingredients are certified and have not been contaminated in transit, they must be segregated and clearly labelled as organic. Segregation needs to be maintained throughout intake, storage, processing and packing. In situations where cleaning cannot be carried out between production batches, (e.g. in feed mills), a bleed run, with approved material, is normally required before organic production to maintain organic integrity.

4. Prevent contamination.

It is necessary to put systems in place to prevent organic product becoming contaminated with cleaning products, non-organic ingredients and other substances. This is best done by means of good staff training, to ensure they understand and comply with organic requirements. A clean (potable) water rinse must be carried out after use of detergents or sanitisers and no spraying of chemicals for disinfection or pest control is permitted.

5. Packaging and labelling.

The product label must identify the body that has awarded organic certification. For products certified by OF&G this can be done using the statement 'GB-ORG-02'.

There are slightly different labelling requirements for Importers and these are explained in the relevant technical leaflets.

Packaging must also carry the Organic logo of the EU to comply with the labelling requirements of the organic regulation.



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All packaging and labels must be submitted to OF&G for checking against the organic requirements prior to use. When satisfied, OF&G will stamp the label proof and send a copy for your records.

What happens next?

Once the application form has been completed and returned to OF&G, a CD ROM of the OSCM will be sent. Accompanying this will be an invoice, product specification sheets for completion and details of further information available. Once the invoice has been paid and the information requested has been returned to OF&G, together with the signed declaration form (RD90), an inspection will be arranged at an agreed time by Acoura, our contracted inspection company.

At the inspection the Acoura organic inspector will review the 5 areas listed above to ensure the organic integrity of the organic products/processes. At the end of the inspection, the inspector will clarify any non-compliances found and time scales will be agreed for corrective actions. The Inspection Summary Report is then completed and signed to confirm agreement to resolve the non-compliances found.

The inspection report is returned to OF&G by the inspector and will be assessed when evidence of actions taken to resolve any non-compliances has been supplied, as detailed in the Inspection Summary Report. Occasionally, during assessment of the Report by the OF&G Certification Officer, further non-compliances may be raised. The Certification Officer will advise of these in writing and set out timescales for corrective action.

Once appropriate evidence has been received, to confirm that any corrective actions required have been completed, a Certificate of Compliance can be issued, the registered products marketed as organic and the OF&G statement 'GB-ORG-02' and logo used.

Certificates and their importance

Once the certificate has been issued the organic product(s) listed on the certificate may be sold as long as the certificate remains valid. OF&G Certificates are normally valid for 12 months. It is the responsibility of the company named on the certificate to keep OF&G informed of any changes to registered organic products, processes or labels.

A new specification sheet from Section 14 of the OSCM should be completed for any new products and any other changes should be discussed with the Processor Certification Officer. Where a new product involves use of a process or area of the site that has not previously been inspected, there may be a need for a further inspection

Annual inspections

The company is re-inspected annually to check compliance with the OF&G Standards. The inspection month on the certificate is the month when the operation was first inspected and the month in which we aim to re-inspect on an annual basis.

Acoura may be able to combine the inspection with other types of inspections. Please contact OF&G or Acoura to find out more.

OF&G aims to invoice for the annual inspection two months before the nominated inspection month and inspect during that month. The inspection date may vary to allow the inspection to take place at a mutually convenient time and to make sure that organic processing operations are seen. The extra two months are to allow for this movement, for any non-compliances to be corrected and the evidence of these corrections to be supplied to OF&G.

OF&G charges

The OF&G Processor Certification fees are for:

- The collection and verification of information, which takes the form of the application and an inspection.
- The assessment of the inspection report and actions taken to resolve non-compliances with the OF&G Standards.
- Clarification of the standards throughout the year.
- Consultation with standard setting bodies on standards changes.

Please note payment does not guarantee the issuing of a certificate.

Extra inspections

As part of ensuring organic integrity OF&G re-inspects 10% of clients each year. Some clients are chosen randomly and some are 'directed' re-inspections. Directed re-inspections may be charged to the client and usually result from repeated non-compliances.

UKAS re-inspects a small proportion of OF&G's clients each year to ensure that OF&G is operating to its satisfaction. (There is no charge made to the client for this inspection.)

E-mail Groups

OF&G uses e-mail groups to consult clients about potential standard changes and issues in the organic sector.

OF&G Organic Standards

OF&G Standards are initially issued on CD ROM and updates are issued by e-mail where possible. This is to make searching for appropriate standards quick and easy. OF&G advises that one complete copy of the OF&G OSCM is printed and kept up to date and available for all personnel involved in organic processing. Extra copies, for training and induction sessions can then be printed when necessary.

Technical Newsletters

These are sent out every 2 months, to all registered OF&G operators and are a useful way of keeping up to date with legislation and other changes in the organic sector.

Organic requirements are in addition to other statutory requirements

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