

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 an EC Regulation (EC) No. 2092/91. 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 this Regulation could be subject to prosecution by the Trading Standards Officers.

What categories of production or processing are involved?

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

- Farm production including all arable and horticultural crops and livestock producing food intended for human consumption.
- Processing involving food preparation and prepacking out of sight of the final consumer. 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;
- 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 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 on the farm takes place, these will 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.

What is the conversion period?

Arable and horticultural land and grassland have to undergo a 24 month monitored conversion period under organic management from the date of application to the date when organic status is achieved for the land. Land with perennial crops such as fruit bushes and fruit trees must undergo a 36 month conversion period.

In exceptional cases, such as where land has been under an environmental management agreement that specifically prohibits fertilisers and herbicides, a case can be made for reducing the conversion period. Additionally land intended for non-herbivores (pigs and poultry) may be eligible for a reduced conversion period of up to 12 months.

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 9-month conversion period before the milk can be sold as organic. The final 6 months of which must be in accordance with the full feeding standards. This usually means grazing the cows on organic pasture for six months before the milk can be sold as organic.

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

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

A flock of laying birds can be introduced after the land has become organic and 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 organic land, 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?

DEFRA is funding a Help Line and advisory service called the Organic Conversion Information Scheme (OCIS) to assist farmers who are considering converting to organic production. The OCIS information pack will provide information about other sources of advice, farm walks and publications.

For further information phone:

England: 0117 922 7707
Wales: 01970 622100
Scotland: 01224 711072

Northern Ireland:
Beef & Sheep – 028 9442 6752
Dairy & Pigs – 028 9442 6614
Horticulture & Crops – 028 9442 6765

Once connected with the system through the help line, you are able to have one half day followed by a full day of free advice on the farm from an OCIS advisor (this does not apply in Scotland). The aim of the visits is to help you decide if you should convert to organic and to explain the standards, the infrastructure of the organic movement and help prepare you for completing the applications for the Organic Farming Scheme and for registration with your selected inspection body.

Are there any grants to assist the conversion?

DEFRA has provided a grant called the Organic Entry Level Stewardship (OELS) which is designed to support a farm through the conversion period and for a time afterwards.

Further information about the Organic Entry Level Stewardship can be obtained by contacting your regional DEFRA Office or on the DEFRA website at www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/els/default.htm

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 Regulation 2092/91. The Scheme is accredited with Defra 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 Information Pack

Contact the telephone number given below to obtain an information pack. This contains a letter of introduction from the Chairman, information on advisory services for organic farmers and growers, the charges sheet and a publications and services information sheet plus order form.

Request an Application Pack

This consists of the OF&G Control Manual, which includes the standards for organic production, the Application Forms and various technical leaflets

Complete the Application Forms

The next stage in the process is to complete the Application Forms and send them to the Certification Office with the appropriate inspection/certification fee. (Please refer to the scale of charges on RD16 OF&G Charges Sheet). 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 Application Form, 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/IACS 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: 01743 440512 or local rate 0845 330 5122

F: 01743 461441 or local rate 0845 330 5123

E: info@organicfarmers.org.uk

W: www.organicfarmers.org.uk