



# STEPS TO ORGANIC CONVERSION

## What is organic farming?

Organic farming is an overall system of farm management and food production that combines best environmental practices, a

high level of biodiversity, the preservation of natural resources, the application of high welfare standards, and a production

method in line with the preference of certain consumers for products produced using natural substances and processes.

## Step 1 – consider

### Is organic an option?

If you can answer yes to some or all of these questions, then you should consider switching to organic production.

### Crop systems:

1. Can you incorporate a grass/clover break into your rotation?
2. Do you have a source of farmyard manure/slurry/compost on or near your

own farm?

3. Can you see yourself farming without relying on pesticides and chemical fertilisers?

eligible for Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) payment.

### Is organic farming profitable?

Organic farming can be profitable, with some of the most profitable farmers in the country farming organically. Maintaining high-output levels, coupled with lower production costs, premium market prices, and a thorough knowledge of organic farming methods contribute to higher margins.

## Step 2 – investigate

1. Get acquainted with the adjustments required by attending farm walks, talking to other organic farmers, and/or contacting a local advisor.
2. Familiarise yourself with organic regulations and standards.

A major factor distinguishing organic farming from other approaches to sustainable farming is the existence of internationally acknowledged standards and certification procedures. These standards have been developed to provide organic producers with consistent, clear rules as to how organic food should be produced. A two-year conversion

period is required before a farm is given organic status. Some of the main requirements are listed below.

### Fertilisers and chemicals

1. Soluble mineral fertilisers are prohibited, but some inputs such as lime and rock phosphate are permitted.
2. Clover and other legumes supply N. The balance between fertility-building crops, such as a grass/clover ley and exploitative crops, such as cereals and potatoes, is critical in a tillage rotation.
3. Most manufactured agro-chemicals (e.g., herbicides) are prohibited.

### Animal welfare

1. The highest standards of animal welfare are obligatory. Permission to carry out mutilations, i.e., dehorning and castration, and the provision of bedding and generous floor space are required for housed animals.
2. Ruminant stock must be fed a diet which is predominantly grass fodder based (grass, silage, hay). Tillage crops should be considered as a cost-effective alternative to buying in concentrates and bedding.
3. Routine preventative treatment of healthy animals is not allowed, with a focus on prevention rather than cure.

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## Step 3 – assess the market

Markets exist for the majority of organic products. It is important that prospective organic farmers make contact with processors to ensure that a market is in place.

Many organic producers also like to sell directly through farmers' markets, box schemes and farm shops. Extra research is required for these options.



## Step 5 – complete a QQI course in organic production

A 25-hour Organic Farming Principles course must be completed before acceptance into the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS). For information and booking details on courses held nationwide go to:  
<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/training/>

## Step 4 – choose an organic certification body and get an application pack

The organic certification bodies (OCBs) provide an inspection and certification service for all organic production units in Ireland. They have been designated and are regulated by the Organic Unit of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM), and are responsible for upholding the organic standards as defined by the EU. The OCB sends an information pack on request. The pack is tailored to the producer's needs and will contain information on the application and conversion process, an

application form, and a guide to the Organic Standards. Once the application and conversion plan are received and assessed, an initial inspection will be arranged.

The OCBs carry out annual inspections of every organic enterprise. Further information can be sourced from these certification bodies:

- ▶ Irish Organic Association (IOA),  
13 Inish Carraig, Golden Island, Athlone, Co. Westmeath N37 N1W4.  
Tel: 090-6433680 Email: [info@irishoa.ie](mailto:info@irishoa.ie)  
[www.irishorganicassociation.ie](http://www.irishorganicassociation.ie)
- ▶ Organic Trust, Unit M4, Naas Town Centre, Dublin Road, Naas, Co. Kildare W91 F7X3.  
Tel: 045-882 377 [www.organictrust.ie](http://www.organictrust.ie)  
Email: [info@organictrust.ie](mailto:info@organictrust.ie)

## Step 6 – Make an application – OFS and grant aid

**Organic Farming Scheme (OFS):** consult with the DAFM regarding the Scheme opening period:  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d46aec-organic-farming-scheme/>

**Grant-aid:** the Organic Capital Investment Scheme and Scheme of Grant Aid for the Development of the Organic Processing Industry – off farm:  
[www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/organicfarming](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/farmingsectors/organicfarming).

## Step 7 – the conversion process

When the initial inspection has been carried out, the application approved and the in-conversion licence granted, a period of conversion begins. Normally two years in

duration, this period allows time for the land and producer to adjust to organic methods. During the conversion period, the enterprise must adhere to all the Organic Standards concerning animal welfare, annual veterinary treatments and farm inputs. The changes

proposed in the conversion plan must be implemented during this period. After the required conversion period expires, the inspection body issues organic status to the farmer which allows the farmer to sell his/her produce as organic.

### Further information

For further information contact your local Teagasc advisory office.

[www.teagasc.ie/about/farm-advisory/advisory-regions](http://www.teagasc.ie/about/farm-advisory/advisory-regions)

[www.teagasc.ie/organics](http://www.teagasc.ie/organics)

+353 (0)59-917 0200

[info@teagasc.ie](mailto:info@teagasc.ie)

Other useful fact sheets in this series:

▶ Organic Cattle and Sheep

▶ Organic Cereals

▶ Organic Poultry

▶ Organic Horticulture

▶ Organic Dairy Farming

[www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev](http://www.teagasc.ie/ruraldev)

