

INTRODUCTION

For most farmers, converting to organic farming involves two procedures:

- a) Registering with one of the approved organic certification bodies, which is a legal requirement;
- b) Application for Scottish Government financial support, which is voluntary, and which this form relates to.

The purpose of this Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS) Organic Viability Proposal (OVP) is to provide an outline of your proposed organic unit intended for conversion. It allows you to demonstrate to the Scottish Government that it will be technically viable in keeping with the Organic Production Standards in terms of grassland management crop rotation, stocking rates, livestock and soil health, by showing some evidence that you understand the main requirements of converting your holding to organic management and that you have had preliminary discussions with an Organic Certification Body.

You must submit this Proposal form to your chosen Certification Body for assessment. Once they have approved it they will sign the form. The signed form must then be submitted along with your AECS application. You must allow sufficient time for the Certification Body to review your completed OVP, discuss any queries with you and return it to you to for submission within the relevant AECS application window. This Organic Viability Proposal is an overview, not a detailed Farm Conversion Plan. You will still have to complete a detailed Conversion Plan and submit it to your Certification Body. Please note, despite SGRPID approval of your organic conversion funding application, your farm and enterprises will not be regarded as officially entering conversion until the details of your full conversion plan are approved by your chosen Organic Certification Body. In turn confirmation of these details need to be provided to SGRPID to support your annual organic conversion funding claim with each Single Application Form (SAF). If you wish, your conversion plan can be done after your AECS application has been approved.

GUIDANCE NOTES ON ORGANIC VIABILITY PROPOSAL QUESTIONS

Question 1. FARM DETAILS

You should complete your details, including any existing organic certification details or licensee / membership numbers. The details of the actual farm holding that the organic proposal relates to should also be completed, along with a telephone number to allow the Certification Body to contact you directly should they require any further information.

Question 2. ORGANIC STANDARDS

Converting to organic farming involves registering with one of the UK approved organic certification bodies and adhering to the standards published by that certification body. You cannot do this unless you have obtained a copy of its standards and have familiarised yourself with these standards. A list of approved certification bodies with their contact details is shown here Insert link

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/organic-certification-list-of-uk-approved-organic-control-bodies>

For further sources of information see **here**

Question 3. PROPOSED CONVERSION TIMETABLE

Your chosen Certification Body must formally approve your preferred date of conversion (although there is a time limit in which conversion needs to have started if you are successful in your application for AECS Organic Conversion Support) see below

Organic Farming: Conversion

You need to understand the implications of the choice of start date and type of conversion opted for in relation to when you will be eligible to sell your first full organic status crop and livestock. The conversion period is generally two years. For example, a full organic status crop is a crop which has been sown or planted into land which has completed its 24-month conversion period (please be aware for perennial crops (excluding grassland) the minimum conversion period is 36 months). It is strongly recommended that you seek advice when planning your conversion.

You can opt for either of two conversion types to follow in order for your holding and enterprises to gain organic status;

1 - Simultaneous conversion of land and livestock is a process, in which you undertake to follow the organic standards for both land and livestock from the date that you started converting the land. There is a significant advantage in this for cereal and beef producers since it allows the sale of organic beef and cereals in the optimal time period after the 24-month conversion period is completed. For a cereal crop to be eligible for organic status it must be sown once land fully organic and any cattle animal born at least three months after the start conversion period will be eligible to be sold as organic if still on farm when the two year conversion period is completed.

2 - Standard conversion is an option where you start the conversion of the land with management of livestock to the organic standards only commencing on the two-year anniversary of the conversion start date of the land.

The type of conversion you wish to undertake must be approved in advance by your certification body as part of your farm conversion plan.

This question also asks you to specify whether you intend to convert all of your planned organic unit in one go or whether you intend to undertake the conversion in stages. Although a staged conversion may be appropriate where the current farming system requires major changes (e.g. an existing all-arable farm), please note that simultaneous conversion will not be possible with a staged conversion.

The details of any non-organic enterprises located on farm should also be listed to allow the Certification Body to assess the risk of accidental cross contamination of organic and non-organic produce and parallel production.

Question 4. LAND AREA TO BE CONVERTED

Please indicate the total area of the organic unit which you propose to establish (in stages, if a staged conversion is planned), and the area of land in the remainder of the business which will not be converted. If you are applying to convert an additional area of land you should also detail the area of land that you already manage organically. The total field areas entered for conversion should be the total area of each field proposed to be converted and not confined to the eligible area for which AECS funding is sought.

Question 5. CROP ROTATION, PROPOSED ANNUAL CROPPING AND BREAKDOWN OF LAND TYPES

The crop rotation is crucially important to the viability of the overall unit and organic crop production in terms of generating fertility, and minimising weed, pest and disease problems. On rotational land, the certification body will expect you to have a balanced rotation, i.e. a balance between fertility-building, or nitrogen fixing, crops (i.e. legumes such as clover, peas, beans) and exploitative crops (i.e. non-legume crops, cereals, vegetables). The minimum proportion of legume crops, including grass/clover, in the rotation will vary with the quality of the soil, but a good rule of thumb is to assume that you need at least 50% legume crop in the rotation, and that the length of an arable phase should not extend beyond three years. Please insert in Question 5.1 what your proposed main crop rotation will be, once fully established (including the grass/clover ley). In future, from time to time, you may wish to make changes to the crops grown during the arable phase, but you should be extremely wary of making changes to the length of the fertility-building phase.

On the basis of how the proposed organic unit is broken down according to the three main land types (i.e. ploughable land to be put into rotation, permanent grassland and rough grazing), your proposed crop rotation, and the total area of land which you propose to put into organic rotation, you will be able to calculate the average size of the rotational blocks, and hence the annual area of each crop type grown on the farm (Question 5.2), including grassland.

Together with the information in Questions 4, this will be used in calculations to assess the viability of your proposed stocking rate.

Question 6. STOCKING ON PROPOSED ORGANIC UNIT

The certification body will use the information that you provide in this question, together with the land areas and details of good grass and forage (i.e. annual forage crops, grass/clover ley and good permanent grass), which you calculated in Questions 4 & 5, to assess whether your proposed stocking rate under organic management is feasible. When considering converting to organic production you should be thinking about how your unit can become as self-sustaining as possible. You will be unable to use artificial nitrogen fertiliser under organic management so your stocking rate will be limited to that which can be supported by the clover in your grassland. Grass/clover leys with good clover content will support a stocking rate of 1.6 Livestock Units per hectare (including the winter forage requirement), but if your swards are poorer in quality you will have to assume a lower stocking rate than this. Your replacement policy will also need some consideration in keeping with the Organic Standards. If you wish to make this calculation yourself, you can use the table below for both your existing system and your proposed organic system. Please note that this question and this calculation are not relevant for farms on which most of the land is rough grazing, where the stocking rate is already so low that it is unlikely to change following conversion.

The breeds of livestock should be named on the form to allow the Certification Body to assess their suitability as part of the overall farm proposal.

[Livestock calculator](#)

Question 7. ANIMAL HEALTH PLAN

Given your conversion proposal includes livestock a regularly reviewed and updated Animal Health Plan is an essential element of your organic certification. You may already be familiar with, and operating to, an Animal Health Plan. If not, you need to demonstrate that you are aware of how to set about preparing such a Plan. Once you begin to manage livestock organically their management and health planning must comply with the Organic Standards and your animals health plan must be approved by your certification body as part of the conversion process. It is important that your veterinary advisor is aware that you are converting your livestock to organic management.

Question 8. PROPOSED MARKETING STRATEGY

In the long term, an organic farm will only be viable if the farmer is aware of and producing what the market wants. This question allows you to outline what your main market outlet will be and to describe in detail the market research that you have carried out before starting the conversion. In the box in Question 8, you should list the contacts you have made (with dates) to research the market (e.g. advisers, processors, merchants, etc.).

Question 9. SIGNATURES

You must then sign and date the form once it is fully completed, and pass it to your chosen Certification Body for their assessment. On approval your certification body will return your OVP to you signed off by a Certification Officer.