

Supporting guidance for Organic Farming: Conversion and Organic Farming: Maintenance

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For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#).

The [Organic Farming: Conversion](#) option supports farmers and groups of farmers looking to convert land to organic status.

The [Organic Farming: Maintenance](#) option supports the maintenance of organic farming methods on land which is already registered as fully organic with a UK-approved organic certification body.

If your application is successful we will pay you for the duration of your contract on each eligible hectare of land entered into the relevant Organic Conversion and Organic Maintenance options. It is important that the land details are accurately entered in your application to ensure that payments are made correctly.

The description of land categories can be found below:

[Description of land categories](#)

Benefits of organic farming

Organic farming: maintaining or increasing the area of organically managed farmland in Scotland is recognised as a National Priority in terms of the delivery of AECS.

This form of farming seeks to work with natural processes using methods which are designed to achieve a sustainable production system and with limited use of external inputs.

These options provide support to farmers and groups of farmers to use organic farming methods and to encourage the expansion of organic production in Scotland to deliver environmental benefits.

Organic farming aims to:

- develop a healthy, fertile soil by growing and rotating a mixture of crops, adding organic matter such as compost or manure and using clover to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere
- develop biologically active soil to grow strong, healthy crops and encourage the biological control of pests and diseases to help reduce the use of chemical inputs
- produce a diversity of crops and livestock and rotate them around the farm. This mixed farming approach helps to break cycles of pests and disease and helps build natural fertility in the soil
- use preventative methods, like moving animals to clean grazing to reduce the use of wormers
- focus on animal welfare and allow a free-range life for livestock
- ensure that genetically modified (GM) crops and ingredients are not used

What's involved in being organic?

The labelling and selling of organic products is controlled by law. If you are growing organic products you will receive an annual inspection from a recognised organic certification body to confirm that your products are grown in accordance with their standards.

These standards are based on European standards. Your organic certification body will issue you with an organic certificate once you have completed the inspection process so that you can sell your produce as organic.

After you have started organic conversion you will only be able to use products approved for use in organic systems. You will also need to feed your livestock with organic feed, which will ideally be grown on your farm.

You may also need to review your animal health programme, to focus on promoting health rather than treating disease (e.g. use of clean grazing and faecal egg counts, instead of blanket drenching with a wormer) and you may need to apply longer withdrawal periods for veterinary medicines.

You will need to keep detailed records of all your purchased inputs and some aspects of production so that the inspector can check that you comply with the organic standards.

Conversion of the land

Ideally the whole farm should be entered into organic conversion and any land entered should form a viable production unit. We recommend you seek advice about the suitability of land and enterprises you plan to enter into organic conversion as early as possible.

You can choose to phase your land into conversion. This may benefit arable units where, for rotational purposes, it is useful to convert within the rotation, rather than aiming for all the land to gain full organic status at the same time. Where the land will be subject to a phased conversion years 1 & 2 of the contract can be on the same application. Any subsequent phases (years three onwards) should be applied for on a separate application.

Simultaneous conversion of livestock

In the majority of cases it will take two years to convert your land to full organic status (three years for perennial crops).

If you convert your land first, and then convert your livestock once the land is fully organic, it can take a long time before you have organic lambs or calves to sell (depending on the date you start conversion).

An alternative is to convert both land and livestock in tandem (simultaneous conversion). This means that you will need to manage and feed your livestock as if they are organic from the date that you start your two-year conversion, but you won't be able to sell any stock as 'organic' until the day the land reaches full organic status.

In most cases, and particularly if you have cattle, simultaneous conversion is a quicker way to receive your organic premium.

Conversion requirements

You must be registered with a UK approved organic certification body for the duration of the agreement. Organic certification bodies are independent organisations.

When you begin your Agri-Environment Climate Contract for organic conversion with the Scottish Government, remember that this is not the same as starting organic conversion with your chosen organic certification body.

Should the EU standards or the UK standards be revised, you will need to meet any additional requirements that may be introduced.

If you do not meet these standards and / or do not remain registered with an organic certification body you would be in breach of your contract with us and we will instigate breach procedures.

If you wish to register your land with a different organic certification body, you need to register with the new body before you de-register the land with your existing one, so that there is continuity of registration.

- Previously converted land since 01/01/2000 - lapsed registration

Land that has been previously converted to organic standards and subsequently lapsed or lost its organic registration for any reason cannot be represented for conversion support by the same business or persons as the previous conversion application.

Where the same land is being presented for conversion by the same business as the original conversion application, you must use the organic maintenance options per land category. An Organic Viability Proposal must be submitted in support of the application endorsed from a UK – approved Organic Certification Body.

Where land previously converted to organic standards and subsequently lapsed or lost its organic registration for any reason is re-presented by a different and unrelated business to the business to the

business that originally converted the land to organic. This is acceptable if you can demonstrate that you are a different business that is unrelated to the business that originally converted the land to organic. An OVP endorsed from a UK – approved Organic Certification Body would still be required to be submitted in support of the application.

Small Holdings/Horticultural Enterprises

To be eligible to apply for organic conversion as small unit or horticultural enterprise, the business must be registered with us and have a Business Reference Number (BRN).

The organic conversion option is land based and you must be converting a minimum of 0.01ha of eligible land in the application. That 0.01ha can include land under polytunnels producing crops but does not include crops grown in buildings.

The land will have to be registered and mapped on our Land Parcel Identification System as explained on the [Mapping page](#).

Further information

Further information regarding organic standards and a list of the approved certification bodies can be found at the [Defra](#) pages of the GOV.uk website.

Recent changes

Section	Change
Conversion of the land	Added text relating to where the land will be subject to a phased conversion
Conversion requirements	Added text covering eligibility requirements to apply for organic conversion as small unit or horticultural enterprise

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)

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