

Organic Farming



This booklet outlines the basic principles of organic farming and explains the process of conversion, including grants and other support that may be available. It has been produced by Organic Centre Wales, which coordinates the provision of advice and information to farmers throughout Wales.



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Organic

CONVERSION

INFORMATION

S E R V I C E

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Calls may be monitored for
training purposes

Cwmni Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu Gwledig:
Ewrop yn Bwtioeddi mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development
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Canolfan Organig Cymru
Organic Centre Wales



Uywodraeth Cymuned Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Organic farming is different from other farming systems because it is described by an EU Regulation, which defines produce that can be labelled as organic. If you are thinking of going organic, it is important to realise that standards evolve to bring organic farming systems closer to the principles outlined below.

The principles of organic farming

Organic farming is underpinned by a set of guiding principles, drawn up by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM). They are:

- *the principle of health:* Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal and human as one, indivisible whole. As the first step in this chain, ensuring the health of the soil is very important
- *the principle of ecology:* Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them and help sustain them. Food production is itself a component of the local ecology. The more in tune the production process is with that ecology, the smaller the chance of serious problems arising
- *the principle of fairness:* Organic agriculture should be built on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities. This principle recognizes human and social issues as well as environmental concerns
- *the principle of care:* Agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment. This requires thinking beyond the here and now.

Characteristics of organic farming systems

Organic farming systems are about putting these principles into practice. They rely more on local or farm generated renewable resources and less on external inputs. They also rely on ecological and biological processes to provide nutrition, to protect against pests and diseases, and ensure an appropriate financial return.

Soil management and fertility

Maintaining soil organic matter levels, encouraging soil biological activity, and using mechanical intervention

carefully to promote, maintain and enhance the long-term fertility is a fundamental aim of soil fertility management. The aim of an organic system is to be self-sustaining and fertility is generally provided by animal manures, leguminous nitrogen and green manures. These nutrients are made available to the plant by the action of soil micro-organisms, emphasizing the importance of a healthy, biologically active soil. Where you can demonstrate a fertility problem, the organic standards do allow the use of some fertilizers, which tend to be slow release formulations of P and K such as rock phosphate or soil amendments such as lime.

Rotations

A correctly designed and implemented crop rotation is at the heart of organic crop production, and has a number of functions including:

- providing sufficient crop nutrients and minimizing their losses
- providing nitrogen through leguminous crops
- maintaining the soil organic matter, microbial activity and structure
- managing weed, pest and disease problems
- providing a profitable output of organic cash crops and/or livestock products

On grassland farms, diversity can be achieved in permanent pasture and under semi-natural rough grazing, and therefore these can be seen as acceptable alternatives to rotations.

Crop protection

Pest, weed and disease control are achieved through rotations, choice of crop varieties, timing of cultivations and habitat management to encourage population of natural predators and parasites. Where these measures fail, a limited number of approved crop protection products may be used in a controlled manner.





Livestock

Livestock are an integral part of most organic farms, although there are some successful stockless systems. Organic livestock enterprises are supported from the farm's own resources as far as possible and are land-based. Systems are not permitted which rely on intensive housing, require a large proportion of the total feed to be bought in and/or take manures off the farm for disposal. Pigs and poultry must be free range and stocking rates are much lower than many conventional systems.

Organic standards for sheep and cattle require that the feed ration is 100% organic and that at least 60% of dry matter is from fresh or conserved forage. Pig and poultry producers can use a certain amount of non organic ingredients if they can show that organic supplies are not available and they have prior permission from their certification body. At present, a maximum of 10% of non organic feed is permitted for these enterprises, but this will be reduced in 2010. By 2012, all feed will have to be organic

All animals slaughtered for meat must be born and raised on an organic holding - calves or stores brought in from a conventional farm cannot be sold as organic.

Animal health

Animal health within organic systems relies on good husbandry and preventive management, and an animal health plan is a requirement of organic certification. The aim is to maintain closed flocks and herds, and to breed and rear all replacements where possible, but there are opportunities to purchase and sell store and breeding stock to other organic producers. Routine use of antibiotics, wormers and vaccines is not permitted although particular products are allowed on farms where there is a recognized problem. Conventional medicines can and must be used where it is necessary to prevent prolonged illness or suffering. Increased withdrawal periods for all medicines are required under organic standards and there are restrictions on the number of times conventional treatments may be used.

The benefits of organic farming

Organic systems seek to reduce the impact of the farming system on the wider environment and assist with the conservation of wildlife and natural habitats, specifically:

- increased biodiversity on farms and therefore in the landscape at large
- improved soil physical qualities
- lower levels of soil erosion
- reduced nitrate pollution
- restriction of pesticide use
- reduced emissions of ammonia, carbon dioxide and methane
- reduced levels of controlled waste
- increased energy efficiency
- improved animal welfare
- enhanced water efficiency and improvements to water quality.

Organic standards

The organic standards cover all aspects of organic production from soil treatments and animal feeds to health plans and manure management. Minimum standards are set by the European Union and interpreted by DEFRA under the guidance of the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS).

Organic certification bodies are private organizations, approved by DEFRA and are responsible for monitoring the standards at farm level. You must be registered with one of the certification bodies if you wish to sell produce as organic or claim organic support payments. See OCW Factsheet 9 for further information on certification.

Conversion

When you switch from a conventional to an organic system, there is a 'conversion period' during which the land is managed to organic standards, but you cannot yet sell your products as organic. This period is a minimum of two years. You will have to decide on a conversion strategy; either you can convert the land and stock at the same time which is known as simultaneous conversion, or alternatively you can convert the stock after the land has achieved organic status. It is a certification requirement that you prepare a written conversion plan, including detailed cropping plans, rotations and a livestock management plan.

Thinking of going organic?

Producers convert for many reasons, and the implications are different for each individual farming system. Follow these steps carefully to make sure you have a sound understanding of what is involved in conversion and you take full advantage of all the support available to help you decide.

Details and contacts of organisations and services mentioned are provided in the section at the back of the booklet.

1. Understand what's involved

The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) is a free service funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, which:

- helps you look at the implications of conversion for your farming system;
- provides a financial illustration to give you some idea of the economic impact of conversion;
- helps farmers who do decide to convert to prepare their applications to their chosen organic certification body.

OCIS includes access to a telephone helpline, an information pack and on-farm advisory visits. Call the Organic Centre Wales (OCW) helpline for more details.

2. Plan carefully

Farming Connect can pay part of the cost of preparing a Whole Farm Plan, which can be used to provide a detailed organic conversion plan covering the farming system and financial implications of conversion. The Farming Connect Whole Farm Plan Co-ordinators who are based at your local Divisional Office and OCW staff can help you decide on the scope and content of your plan and identify suitable mentors to carry out the work. Farming Connect also offers support to eligible businesses in meeting cross compliance requirements and environmental regulations. Farm visits together with specialist support and training from approved advisors can also provide confidential on farm advice.

3. Get out there!

There is no substitute for meeting experienced organic farmers and other producers who are also converting their systems. OCW delivers the Farming Connect Organic Development Programme, which includes demonstration farm and farmer discussion group events, conferences, seminars, workshops and other types of knowledge transfer activities. Many of these events are run in conjunction with the Grassland Development Centre (GDC).

Farming Connect has established a Skills Development Programme which enables eligible farmers and forestry businesses to claim 50% funding towards vocational and regulatory training. Agri-environment training (e.g. creating and maintaining on-farm habitats, landscape and water quality), is fully funded which is available to Tir Gofal agreement holders.

OCW co-ordinates an organic area at the Royal Welsh Show and the Winter Fair and has a presence at other major farming events and regional shows. The Organic Research Centre Elm Farm also runs a demonstration farm network in England, and the Soil Association has a network of organic farms open to the public in Wales and England.

4. Read all about it

A range of publications is available from OCW, including technical guides, fact sheets and information on all aspects of food and farming. Visit the website (www.organic.aber.ac.uk) for more details, free downloads and to subscribe to two free regular e-mail bulletins. The Soil Association also publishes a series of technical guides and a magazine, *Organic Farming*, which contains technical items and news. Organic Farmers and Growers also provide an information pack for farmers and regular newsletters. Other technical information is available from the Organic Research Centre, Elm Farm.



Farming Connect

Farming Connect aims to deliver a wide range of services to the farming community in Wales, helping farm businesses to make informed decisions about their future. Services available include:

- Part funding for the preparation of a Whole Farm Plan
- 50% funding towards vocational and regulatory training eligible farmers and forestry businesses. Agri-environment training, available to Tir Gofal agreement holders, is fully funded
- Access to the Farm Advisory Service, which offers support to eligible businesses in meeting cross compliance requirements and environmental regulations
- Knowledge transfer activities



The project has five development programmes: Organic; Dairy; Beef and Sheep; Land Use; and Climate Change. The organic programme is run by Organic Centre Wales and includes:

- A network of commercial demonstration farms and institutional development farms covering all the main organic enterprises
- A network of organic discussion groups
- Collation and dissemination of technical and marketing information and publications to organic farmers

It is essential that farm and forestry businesses are registered with Farming Connect before they apply for support towards the cost of these services. To access these services and to find out more information, please contact the Farming Connect Service Centre on 08456 000 813.

Organic Centre Wales

Organic Centre Wales (OCW), established in 2000, is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to be the focal point for information on organic food and farming in Wales. The Centre is operated by a partnership of three organisations: ADAS Wales; The Organic Research Centre, Elm Farm; and the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth University. In addition to services for producers described above, information is also on the OCW website about the following:



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Information and support for marketing and processing: ‘Better Organic Business Links’ – a 3 year project to build better links throughout the organic business community. Specific activities include a marketing e-bulletin, a Welsh organic trade directory and market intelligence reports.

Information for schools and consumers: Farm visits, gardening and local food in schools. Teaching materials and Growing the Future network for projects promoting organic in schools. Questions & answers on organic food; Local Organic Directories listing regional outlets for organic produce,

Information for policy-makers and support for Organic Strategy Group:

Support for Further and Higher Education courses in organic farming. Trainer accreditation (through Institute of Organic Training and Advice (IOTA)).

5. Apply for support from the Welsh Assembly Government

It is important that you find out if you can get support through Glastir *before* starting conversion. Contact your local Divisional Office for information.

6. Look at your marketing options

There are many opportunities for marketing Welsh organic produce through producer groups, cooperatives, supermarkets and direct sales. OCW offers marketing information through the Better Organic Business Links project (see above). The Food Fisheries and Market Development Division (FFMDD) of the Welsh Assembly Government offers support for the development of organic marketing and processing.

7. Get your farm certified

Certification is an entirely separate process from applying to the Welsh Assembly Government for support payments. However, payments are conditional on the land being certified, and remaining so, throughout the period of your agreement. Minimum organic standards are set by the European Union and interpreted by DEFRA under the guidance of the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS), and are implemented by a number of organic certification bodies. See OCW Factsheet 9.





Supply and demand of Welsh organic produce

The organic sector in Wales

There has been a 20-fold increase in organically managed land in the decade since the first Welsh organic action plan was produced in 1999. The land area under organic management in Wales looks set to exceed 114,000ha on about 1000 holdings in 2009.

Accessing the markets and likely trends

The development of production and demand in organic markets is often not well synchronised. For certain product categories, notably cereals, vegetables, salads and fruit, the UK supply has been consistently lower than demand, resulting in considerable proportions of imported organic products, despite efforts from governments, retailers, producer groups and producers aiming to increase the share of domestic production.

Following continued organic market growth through 2007, the impact of the credit crunch has meant that general consumer confidence is falling with an impact on general buying behaviour and uncertainty about how the organic market will respond.

Whether planning to produce beef, lamb, milk or fruit and vegetables, it is essential that potential converters discuss their intentions with producer groups or other potential outlets prior to commencing conversion.

Further marketing information

Market intelligence reports, a marketing e-bulletin, trade directories and other information produced as part of the 'Better Organic Business Links' project can be subscribed to or downloaded from the OCW website. Organic prices can also be found in the Soil Association's Organic Farming magazine. The Food Fisheries and Market Development Division (FFMDD) of the Welsh Assembly Government offers support and some grants for the development of organic marketing and processing.



General information and contact details:

General publications

- Blake, F. (1994) *Organic Farming and Growing*. Crowood Press; Marlborough, Wiltshire
- Davies, G., Turner, R. and Bond W. (2008) *Weed Management for Organic Farmers, Growers and Smallholders*. Crowood Press; Marlborough, Wiltshire
- Hopkins, A. (Ed.) (2004) *Organic Farming – Science and practice for profitable livestock and cropping*. BGS/AAB/COR 2004 Conference
- Lampkin, N. (1990) *Organic Farming*. Farming Press, Ipswich (ISBN 0 85236 191 2)
- Lampkin, N., Measures, M. and Padel, S. (2009) *Organic Farm Management Handbook*. 8th Edition. Published jointly by Aberystwyth University and the Organic Research Centre Elm Farm. Available from Organic Centre Wales
- Myers, A. (2005) *Organic Futures: the case for organic farming*. Green Books, Totnes, Devon
- Newton, J. (1995) *Profitable Organic Farming*. Blackwell Science, Oxford
- Wright, S. and McCrea, D. (2000) *Handbook of Organic Food Processing and Production*. Blackwell Science; Oxford

A publications list including the above books, other technical booklets and fact sheets are available from Organic Centre Wales. Regular monthly e bulletin and Organic Market Wales can be downloaded from the Organic Centre Wales website

Soil Association Technical Guides, Organic Farming magazine and a free book catalogue detailing many other publications relating to organic husbandry is available from the Soil Association
www.soilassociation.org.uk

Gwlad, a magazine produced by Welsh Assembly Government

Other articles in the farming press including Farmers' Weekly and Guardian and the Western Mail

Organic Inform Newsletter – more information at
www.organicinform.org

Organic Research Centre Bulletin – go to
www.organicresearchcentre.com

The Organic Grower – specific to horticulture, more information at www.newoga.org.uk

Enterprise specific publications

Arable

Briggs, S. (2008) Organic Cereal and Pulse Production. *Crowood Press; Marlborough, Wiltshire*
Home Grown Cereals Authority, Organic arable farming – conversion options, available from *Organic Centre Wales*.
Younie, D., Taylor, B. R., Welsh, J. P & Wilkinson, J. M (eds) (2002) Organic Cereals and Pulses. *Chalcombe Publications, Lincoln*

Horticulture

Bevan, J. (2001) Organic Strawberry Production – a grower's guide. *HDRA; Ryton (Technical guide)*
Bevan, J. and Knight, S. (2001) Organic Apple Production – pest and disease management. *HDRA; Ryton*
Davies, G. and Lennartsson, M. (Eds.) (2006) Organic Vegetable Production. *Crowood Press; Marlborough, Wiltshire*
Hall, J. and Tolhurst, I. (2006) Growing Green – Organic techniques for a sustainable future. *Vegan Organic Network*
Little, T; Frost, D (2008) A farmers guide to organic fruit and vegetable production *Organic Centre Wales*

Livestock

Frost, D et al 2009 Organic beef and sheep production in the uplands' *Organic Centre Wales*
Vaarst, M., Roderick, S., Lund, V. and Lockeretz, W. (Eds.) (2004) Animal Health and Welfare in Organic Agriculture. *CABI Publishing; Wallingford*
Weller, R; Jackson, A: (2009); Organic Dairy Production *Organic Centre Wales*
Younie, D. & Wilkinson, J. M (eds) (2001) Organic Livestock Farming. *Chalcombe Publications, Lincoln, (ISBN 0 948617 45 4)*

Certifying bodies

Biodynamic Agricultural Association

Demeter Scheme Coordinator, 25 Boswall Road, Edinburgh EH5 3RR
Tel: 0131 552 6565; Fax: 0131 552 6565
Email: demeter@biodynamic.org.uk
www.biodynamic.org.uk/

Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd

The Old Estate Yard, Albrighton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY4 3AG
Tel: 0845 330 5122 Fax: 0845 330 5123
Email: info@organicfarmers.org.uk
www.organicfarmers.org.uk

Organic Food Federation

31 Turbine Way, Eco Tech Business Park, Swaffham, Norfolk PE37 7XD
Tel: 01760 720444; Fax: 01760 720790
Email: info@orgfoodfed.com
www.orgfoodfed.com

Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd.

Gorseland, North Road, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2WB
Tel: 01970 636688, Fax 01970 624049
Email: qwfc@wfsagri.net

Soil Association Certification Ltd

South Plaza, Marlborough St., Bristol BS1 3NX
Tel: 0117 9142406
E-mail: goorganic@soilassociation.org

Consultancy companies

Abacus Organic Associates Ltd

61 Robey Park Road, Neston, South Wirral, Cheshire CH64 9SW.
Tel: 0151 336 2506
Email: gareth.jones@abacusorganic.co.uk
www.abacusorganic.co.uk

ADAS UK Ltd

ADAS Pwllpeiran, Cwmystwyth, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 4AB
Tel: 01974 282229
Email: sian.lloyd@adas.co.uk
www.adas.co.uk

AgriPlan Cymru,

Neuadd Mansion, Llanarth, Ceredigion, SA47 ORL
Tel: 01545 581130
Email: office@agriplancymru.co.uk
www.agriplancymru.com

Kite Consulting

Park Farm, Wrexham Road, Tarporley, Cheshire CW6 9SA
Tel: 01829 261700
Email: ainsley@bakerconsulting.fsnet.co.uk

Organic Advisory Service

Organic Research Centre Elm Farm
Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berks, RG20 0HR
Tel: 01488 658279; Fax: 01488 658503
Email: elmfarm@organicresearchcentre.com
www.organicresearchcentre.com

Organizations that support organic farmers

Biodynamic Agricultural Association

Demeter Scheme Coordinator, 25 Boswall Road, Edinburgh EH5 3RR
Tel: 0131 552 6565; Fax: 0131 552 6565
Email: demeter@biodynamic.org.uk
www.biodynamic.org.uk/

Organic Research Centre Elm Farm

Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berks, RG20 0HR
Tel: 01488 658279; Fax: 01488 658503
Email: elmfarm@organicresearchcentre.com
www.organicresearchcentre.com

Garden Organic

(Formerly Henry Doubleday Research Association)
Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry CV8 3LG
Tel: 024 7630 3517; Fax: 024 7663 9229
Email: enquiry@gardenorganic.org.uk
www.gardenorganic.org.uk/

Grassland Development Centre

IBERS, Plas Gogerddan, Aberystwyth SY23 3EB
Tel: 01970 823026
Email: hym@aber.ac.uk
www.grassdevcentre.co.uk



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Email: organic@aber.ac.uk
www.organic.aber.ac.uk

Organic Centre Wales Helpline

Tel: 01970 6222100
Email: organic-helpline@aber.ac.uk

Soil Association Food and Farming Department

South Plaza, Marlborough Street, Bristol BS1 3NX
Tel: 0117 914 2400; Fax: 0117 925 2504
Email: ff@soilassociation.org
www.soilassociation.org

Research and educational establishments

ADAS Pwllpeiran

Cwmystwyth, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 4AB
Tel: 01974 282229; Fax: 01974 282302
Email: Owen.Davies@adas.co.uk
www.adas.co.uk

Institute of Biological, Environmental Research Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS)

Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3AL
Tel: 01970 624471; Fax: 01970 611264
Email: ibers@aber.ac.uk;
www.aber.ac.uk/ibers

Welsh College of Horticulture

Northop, Mold, Flintshire CH7 6AA
Tel: 01352 841000; Fax: 01352 841031
Email: enquiries@wcoh.ac.uk
www.wcoh.ac.uk

Government agencies

Countryside Council for Wales

Plas Penrhos, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2LQ
Tel: 01248 370444; Fax: 01248 355782
www.ccw.gov.uk

Environment Agency

Call 0845 9333111 to be put through to your local office.
Email: enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Farming Connect

08456 000813
www.wales.gov.uk/farmingconnect

Welsh Assembly Government Divisional Offices

Caernarfon Divisional Office, Government Buildings,
Penrallt, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1EP
Tel: 01286 674144; Fax: 01286 677749
Email: agriculture.caernarfon@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Carmarthen Divisional Office, Government Buildings,
Picton Terrace, Carmarthen SA31 3BT
Tel: 01267 225300; Fax: 01267 235964
Email: agriculture.carmarthen@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Llandrindod Wells Divisional Office, Government Buildings,
Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5HA
Tel: 01597 823777; Fax: 01597 828304
Email: agriculture.llandrindod@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Welsh Assembly Government Food, Fisheries and Market Development Division (FFMDD)

Caryl Tudor Jones, Organic Sector Manager, Y Lanfa,
Trefechan Aberystwyth SY23 1AS
Tel: 01970 613216
Email: Caryl.tudorjones@cymru.gsi.gov.uk

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