



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

## Frequently Asked Questions re Organic Farming

### If you want to go organic, what do you need to consider?

First you must decide is Organics an option for you.

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 on or near your own farm?
3. Can you see yourself farming without relying on pesticides and synthetic fertilisers?

#### Animal systems

1. Is your current stocking rate below 2 livestock units per Ha?
2. Can your animal housing be modified to incorporate a bedded lying area?
3. Do you already use no or relatively low levels of synthetic fertiliser?

### What factors should I consider?

#### Conversion

Prospective organic farmers must undergo a conversion period of two years before their produce is allowed to be sold as organic. Costs associated with conversion to organic production include: output reduction due to changes in production practices, investment in machinery, certification and inspection costs etc.

#### Regulatory Requirements

Organic Production is governed by EU Regulation which covers all aspects of production, processing, distribution, marketing etc. When considering conversion to organic production, prospective organic farmers should identify and consider the potential changes required to their holding and farming practices specifically in relation to welfare and housing, production methods, veterinary and purchase of stock outlined hereunder.

### **Animal Welfare and Housing**

Under the scheme the permanent housing of all stock is not allowed, while the prolonged confining and tethering of animals is also prohibited.

Bedding materials that are preferably organic must be provided. Provided that 50% of the floor area is bedded, up to 50% of the floor area may be slatted.

Castration and dehorning are permitted where it is judged to be necessary for considerations of safety and welfare.

### **Production methods**

Synthetic chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides are all prohibited under organic farming. Organic material must be used as manure.

Planned rotations are regarded as an essential part of successful organic production as it helps to maintain soil fertility, reduce weeds, pests and disease, provide sufficient organic feed for stock and reduce risks by maximising the range of cash grown crops.

### **Veterinary and livestock nutrition**

Only where a known farm problem exists may specific drugs be administered. However strict identification procedures and withdrawal periods must be observed. Treatment of healthy animals and the routine use of prophylactic drugs is prohibited.

Antibiotics are not generally permitted and fertility drugs are not allowed. Only where a known dietary deficiency exists in home grown feeds is mineral supplementation permitted

### **Purchase of stock**

All purchased livestock should be sourced from organic producers. In practice, due to limited availability producers are permitted to buy in livestock from conventional sources and these animals must undergo a conversion period. The purchase of non-organic stock however is controlled by your Organic Control Body and may require a derogation from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as the Competent Authority.

### **How do I start the process?**

As a starting point, it is recommended that you discuss the organic option with your agricultural advisor. They may also advise you on the suitability of organic production to your holding, on the changes required to convert to organic production and assist you in drafting the conversion plan which you require. Alternatively, you may draw up this plan yourself.

All organic operators must be certified by an Organic Control Body. There are two Organic Control Bodies who certify land based organic operators. The two Organic Control Bodies are: Irish Organic Association ([info@irishoa.ie](mailto:info@irishoa.ie) – 090 6433680) and Organic Trust CLG ([info@organictrust.ie](mailto:info@organictrust.ie) – 045 882377)

Organic operators must also register as organic with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Registration with the Department is usually progressed through your respective Organic Control Body.

### **Conversion Plan**

Farmers interested in converting to organic must prepare a plan which involves a detailed description of: management practices on the farm, the changes required on the farm, soil and faecal analysis, livestock housing, animal health and a land/crop rotation plan. The plan can be drawn up by the farmer alone or with the help of a farm advisor. A template to assist in drawing up this plan is available from the Organic Control Bodies. A Step by Step guide to conversion will be published on the Teagasc website next week.

### **How does all that link to the Department's scheme?**

The Organic Farming Scheme is co-funded by the EU and supports conversion to and maintenance of commitment to organic farming through area-based payments.

In order to apply for the Organic Farming Scheme, you must have an organic licence from an Organic Control Body. You must also meet the Scheme conditions regarding minimum area and educational requirement. Payments under the Organic Farming Scheme are based on areas declared as inconversion and/or organic on your annual Basic Payment Scheme application. The annual submission of a BPS application is therefore a mandatory requirement.

### **Who the scheme is open to?**

The Organic Farming Scheme will be open to applications from all sectors. In the event that the Scheme is over-subscribed, successful applications will be determined by a ranking and selection process. Marks will be awarded for each sector with the aim of increasing the area under organic production, while prioritising areas deemed to be in deficit. The areas deemed to be in deficit by the Organic Strategy Group are dairy, tillage and horticulture.

Minister Hackett has stated that she wants to encourage young farmers to convert to organic farming so will be making provision in the selection process to achieve this. Furthermore Minister Hackett has said "I will also ensure that farmers who were not successful in gaining entry to the previous scheme but who have continued to farm organically, have their commitment acknowledged, through priority access."

While the ranking and selection process will prioritise the areas deemed to be in deficit, it is believed that the level of funding provided for this new Scheme will facilitate the entry of 400-500 new farmers into the organic farming system. This should allow successful applications from enterprises other than those deemed to be in deficit.

## What is the application process?

Applications must be submitted online through [agfood.ie](http://agfood.ie). Instructions for registration on [agfood.ie](http://agfood.ie) can be found online at [www.agfood.ie](http://www.agfood.ie) or you can contact agfood online services helpline in the Department's Portlaoise office on 0761 064424 or email [agfood@agriculture.gov.ie](mailto:agfood@agriculture.gov.ie). A guide to the application process for the OFS is available on the Departments website at <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d46aec-organic-farming-scheme/>.

## When will I know if my OFS application is successful?

The closing date for the Scheme is 30 April, 2021. The detail required to process your application is obtained from your Basic Payment Application. The closing date for BPS applications is Monday 17 May, 2021. Once administrative checks on BPS applications are finalised, the selection process in respect of OFS applications can commence. It is anticipated that it will be September or early October therefore before OFS applicants can be informed if their application is successful or not.

## Organic Farming Scheme Payment Rates

### a. Horticulture Holdings:

Organic horticulture producers, with an organic horticulture area of one hectare or more, are eligible for the following payments provided that at least 50% of the area eligible for organic payment is cropped<sup>1</sup> each year:

	Horticulture Area ≤ 6 hectares (ha)	Horticulture Area > 6ha and up to 60ha	Horticulture Area > 60 ha
In conversion	€300/ha	€220/ha	€60/ha
Full organic status	€200/ha	€170/ha	€30/ha

### b. Tillage Holdings:

Organic tillage producers, with an organic tillage area of six hectares or more, are eligible for the following payments:

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<sup>1</sup> When calculating the percentage of the area cropped, any area under green manures cannot be included in the calculation.

	<b>Tillage Area ≤ 20 hectares (ha)</b>	<b>Farmed Area &gt; 20ha and up to 60ha</b>	<b>Farmed Area &gt; 60 ha</b>
<b>In conversion</b>	€260/ha	€220/ha	€60/ha
<b>Full organic status</b>	€170/ha	€170/ha	€30/ha

**c. All Other Holdings:**

Applicants with 3 hectares or more of utilisable organic agricultural area are eligible for the following payments:

	<b>Farmed Area of ≥ 3ha up to 60ha</b>	<b>Farmed Area &gt; 60ha</b>
<b>In conversion</b>	€220/ha	€60/ha
<b>Full organic status</b>	€170/ha	€30/ha

**d. Additional Option:**

- In addition, a top-up of €30/ha per annum for red clover is included up to a maximum of 10 hectares. See Annex 6

**e. Livestock Production Payments:**

- Payment will be computed on the basis of a minimum stocking level of 0.5LU per hectare (32.5 KG Organic Nitrate per ha/per annum) of the forage area declared on your BPS application. 1 LU = 65kg Organic Nitrogen = 1 suckler cow. Farmers not reaching this level will receive payment on a pro rata basis to their level of production.

**f. Crop Production Payments:**

- In the case of stockless organic crop producers, payment will be made in full where at least 50% of the eligible area for organic payment is cropped each year or pro-rata where less than 50%.
- For farmers engaged in both arable crop and livestock production where less than 50% of the arable area is cropped, payment will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

**For further information: Department Contact Number - Lo Call 0761 06 4451**