

Soil Association organic standards

annex 1

exceptional permissions

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Introduction

This annex explains when we may grant you an exceptional permission, if you fulfil certain conditions, to use a practice or substance that we do not normally allow.

In the text that follows, we:

- list the standards against which we may grant an exceptional permission
- explain when we might consider doing this, and
- explain what you have to do to apply for an exceptional permission.

Please contact your certification officer for more information.

Ferric phosphate (iron III phosphate) for slug control

4.11.16

You must **not** use pesticides or fungicides that we do not allow.

Rationale

Slugs are one of the biggest pests for growers and the numbers are dependent on many factors such as soil type and profile, temperature, rainfall and effectiveness of physical controls. Iron III phosphate is not listed in Soil Association standards but it is listed in EU Regulation 889/2008. We may give you permission to use it if slugs are present in sufficient numbers to cause significant damage to your crop.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must demonstrate that you are:

- using cultural control techniques (please tell us how effective they are), and
- monitoring slug numbers. This may be in the form of a threshold of slug numbers per square metre, for example. The risk to the crop must have become significant.

Note – you must obtain our permission before each application.

Brassicas in the rotation

5.1.11

You must allow at least three seasons between returning the following outdoor crops to the same piece of land:

- alliums
- brassicas
- potatoes.

Note – you may grow successional crops of the same family in the same year.

5.1.12 | Revised

With our approval, you may grow two crops of the same family in following seasons if there is a gap of six seasons before cropping with that family again.

Rationale

Rotations are essential within organic farming to break disease cycles. This is particularly important with the more persistent soil-borne diseases. It may be possible to achieve this, and balance fertility, through careful rotation design with more frequent brassica crops than the precautionary approach that this standard requires.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

For rotations containing more brassica crops than we allow in this standard, you must demonstrate that you are able to:

- control diseases effectively, and
- at least maintain fertility during the rotation, by means of nutrient budgets and soil analysis.

Our inspector will review your rotation and assess fertility levels at your annual inspection. If the rotation changes for any reason, for example crop failure, you must send us your new rotation plan for approval.

Poultry beak tipping

20.5.4

You must **not**:

- clip primary flight feathers
- beak clip or tip
- caponise
- carry out any other mutilations.

Rationale

Beak tipping may be requested by producers who have feather pecking and cannibalism within their layer flocks. A number of factors can lead to feather pecking and cannibalism, including:

- use of an aggressive bird strain
- changes in feed or dietary deficiencies
- sudden stresses placed on the birds
- injury or bleeding in birds encouraging pecking from others in flock
- boredom or lack of exercise, and
- a problem within the housing (for example, bright sunlight coming through windows, crowding, inadequate ventilation, etc.)

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must:

- send us a revised management plan detailing the changes you will make to improve bird welfare and avoid these problems in the future, and
- send us a letter of recommendation from your vet that beak tipping is required.

Note – you must obtain our permission for each time you intend to beak tip your birds.

Poultry breeder flock size

21.1.18

The number of birds in each poultry house must **not** exceed 500 birds.

Rationale

The standard for breeder flock size requires lower bird numbers than that of commercial layers. This is because it is vitally important that bird health and welfare are kept to a consistently high standard to ensure the production of high quality, healthy chicks. Producers occasionally request to exceed the maximum flock size of 500 birds for operational reasons.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must send us a detailed and comprehensive livestock management plan that demonstrates how you will maintain:

- a consistently high level of bird health and welfare, and
- good environmental conditions, both inside the house and out on the range.

Note – we may give you permission on an on-going basis provided that you consistently fulfil the above criteria. If you do not keep welfare and environmental conditions within the flock at a consistently high standard we will ask you to reduce the flock size to 500 birds or less.

Poultry range exceeding 100m

20.7.16 | Revised

With our approval, you may have more than the number of birds per poultry house in standard 20.7.15, if we have approved it as part of your poultry management plan. We will only give you permission if: ►

- you can show us that you can maintain a high level of bird health and welfare
- you can maintain good environmental conditions inside the house and out on the range, and
- you can provide your birds with the area of range they need (see section 20.8 for maximum stocking densities) within the maximum ranging distances from the house:
 - i. layers, geese and guinea fowl: 100m
 - ii. table chickens, turkeys and ducks: 50m.

Rationale

Fields are not uniform shapes and sizes, which may mean that some producers are not able to provide the correct amount of range within the maximum distance from the house.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must:

- be able to demonstrate that the birds will make full use of the whole range area supplied, and
- provide detailed plans of the range area, showing housing and range dimensions and how you will enhance the area to encourage the birds to range further.

Note – if we give you permission our inspector will monitor your range management at your annual inspections.

Housing poultry for longer than twelve weeks

20.8.3

Your poultry must have continuous and easy daytime access to pasture, except in adverse weather conditions, for:

- all the laying life of laying poultry
- at least two thirds of the life of table poultry.

Rationale

A producer may have to permanently house their poultry and restrict their range due to avian influenza restrictions imposed by Defra. Producers in close proximity to affected areas may also wish to house their poultry for an extended length of time.

Defra say that if poultry need to be isolated for a period longer than twelve weeks then their organic status will be maintained. This is provided they have access to an area of netted range no less than half the size of the poultry house. Please note that avian influenza information from Defra is subject to change.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

- If you are in a Defra designated avian influenza risk area you may permanently house and restrict your poultry's range in line with Defra requirements.
- If you are outside a Defra designated avian influenza risk area you must:
 - i. send us details and justification for your request to permanently house your poultry, and
 - ii. send us an updated poultry management and health plan showing how you will provide the required netted range area (as specified by Defra) and the steps you will take to minimise any health and welfare implications.

Note – if we give you permission, it will be in conjunction with Defra imposed restrictions.

Resting pasture for poultry

20.8.4

You must rest your pasture from poultry production:

- to allow vegetation to grow back
- for health reasons, and
- to enable built-up fertility to be used.

20.8.5

For laying poultry you must rest your pasture for at least nine months between each batch, except if you have less than 50 birds which are not kept in runs but are free to roam.

20.8.6

For table poultry you must rest your pasture for two months per year plus one year in every three years, except:

- where the birds are on the land for less than one third of the year, or
- if you have less than 50 birds which are not kept in runs but are free to roam.

Rationale

New licensees with existing poultry houses unable to comply with range resting requirements may apply to Defra for permission to rest their pasture to alternative requirements.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must send us details of:

- your request to rest pasture less frequently, including range and housing dimensions
- how you will work towards complying with the resting periods in our standards, including a proposed timescale, and
- how you will monitor and maintain levels of health and welfare over a timescale that we agree with you.

Note – once you reach the date specified in your plan, you must comply with our pasture resting standards.

Aquaculture – using all female stock

30.4.4

You must **not** use:

- triploid stock
- genetically engineered stock, or
- all female stock.

Rationale

Organic fish farmers must use mixed-sex eggs/youngstock, ideally from an organic source, to produce organic table fish.

Salmon do achieve very acceptable weights from mixed-sex stock, due to late maturing strains. Consequently, mixed-sex salmon eggs/youngstock are readily available non-organically.

The same cannot be said of trout. There has been no significant success to date in developing a late maturing strain. Any trout produced from mixed-sex eggs/youngstock have to be slaughtered early therefore only producing small trout. Mixed-sex trout stock is consequently much harder to get as non-organically than salmon.

Current availability of organic eggs/youngstock is very limited, and most non-organic trout producers use all female stock.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must:

- be able to demonstrate that organic or mixed-sex non-organic trout eggs/youngstock are unavailable, and
- provide a plan detailing how you intend sourcing/producing organic eggs/youngstock for future batches.

Note – you must obtain prior permission on each occasion you wish to use all female stock.

Packaging

41.6.12

You must **not** use these materials in your packaging:

- unlacquered aluminium foils if the food is acidic (with a pH less than or equal to 4.5) or salty (containing more than 2% salt)
- coatings, dyes or inks that contain phthalates if they will be in direct contact with foodstuffs
- polyvinyl chloride (PVC)

Note – you may use other chlorinated plastics, such as PVdC.

- materials or substances that contain, have been derived from, or manufactured using, genetically modified organisms or genetically engineered enzymes
- synthetic coatings for cheese if they contain fungicides, or
- wood that has been treated with preservatives.

Note – this includes bulk bins but not transport pallets.

You must be able to prove to us that you have not used these materials, for example by having written confirmation from your supplier.

Rationale

Under normal circumstances you must not use polyvinyl chloride (PVC) in any product packaging. This standard is attainable for most types of packaging but there are two types where sourcing a PVC-free version is not widely available, these are:

- Metal jar lids or caps (e.g. for jams, sauces and baby food)
- Heat-formed trays (e.g. for bacon).

How you can apply for an exceptional permission

If you wish to use PVC-based versions of these two packaging materials, you must demonstrate that you cannot source PVC-free packaging, for example by providing evidence from your supplier. We will allow you to use PVC-based versions of this packaging whilst alternatives are being developed.

Note – we may change this exceptional permission when alternative packaging is available.

Pest control

41.9.13

With our permission, you may use synthetic pyrethroids, but only in sealed units such as electric motor housings, electronic panel cupboards, pipe ducts and ductwork.

Rationale

Pest control should aim to prevent infestation rather than treat it. You should ensure that pest control substances do not contaminate organic products or damage the environment and are used as little as possible. Under exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to use synthetic pyrethroids to control pests in areas other than in sealed units, where existing pest control strategies have been overwhelmed and synthetic pyrethroids are the least harmful option.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

To use synthetic pyrethroids to control pests, other than in sealed units, you must send us the following information:

- why your existing precautions failed to prevent this infestation
- where the infestation is and where organic products and production areas are (preferably by marking the areas on a plan)
- the product you intend to use and its active ingredients
- what precautions you will take to stop the infestation coming back, and
- what precautions you will take to prevent contamination of organic products with the pest control product.

Note – you must obtain permission on each occasion you wish to use a synthetic pyrethroid in this way.

Poultry neck pulling

42.8.14

You must only stun or kill poultry by the following methods:

- non-penetrative captive bolt, or
- electrocution:
 - i. dry electrodes, or
 - ii. waterbath stunner

42.8.15

You can only use neck dislocation to kill poultry in an emergency or as a back-up.

Rationale

Under normal circumstances poultry must be despatched using the methods described in standard 42.8.14 with neck dislocation being an emergency back up. We can only consider you despatching poultry solely using neck dislocation on a routine basis if you cannot source a suitable stunner.

How you can apply for exceptional permission

You must demonstrate that a suitable stunner is not available.

Note – the timescale for this permission will be limited. You will have to ensure a method of slaughter which complies with the standards is in place for when this permission expires.