



# Guide to Certification

## Do I need to be licensed

If you are processing or marketing an organic food or drink product, EU regulations require you to be licensed. The term 'processing' includes; manufacturing, packing or re-packing, storing, importing (from non-EU countries), wholesaling/trading, labelling organic products. Operations such as warehousing, storage and distribution will also need to be licensed if handling organic products.

## Why choose to certify with Soil Association Certification?

### Who are Soil Association Certification?

Soil Association Certification Ltd is the largest and most experienced organic certification body in the UK. As a not-for-profit business, any surplus income is gift aided to the Soil Association charity to raise awareness, develop and safeguard the organic sector.

Soil Association Certification certifies over 70% of organic products in the UK. This coupled with our years of experience in organic certification, means we are able to offer an unrivalled, high-quality and straightforward service to our licensees.

### What certification with us offers

- A designated certification officer to guide you through the certification process
- Use of the Soil Association symbol, the most trusted and recognised organic mark in the UK
- **Training & learning opportunities** – discounts for **events**, workshops & programmes
- Exclusive opportunities to **develop your supply chain** and reach new markets
- Free membership to the **Food For Life Supplier Scheme** (for processing licences, worth £995)
- Free sector specific print and digital **marketing materials** to support you in telling customers about organic
- The opportunity to get involved in our public facing campaign designed to increase awareness of organic and drive sales such as Organic September and the Organic Christmas Market
- Free copy of the **Organic Market Report** - the industry recognised publication (worth £100)
- Optional, additional services (see below)

## Additional food industry schemes

Along with organic certification, we also offer a range of optional schemes including:

- BRC and SALSA (applicable to annual audits)

To help sell your products into export markets, we offer the following certification:

- Bio Suisse, PWAB, JAS, NOP, COR and AB Logo

For further information on export and supporting your business, please see [our website](#).

Supplementary schemes may be subject to additional fees, please contact us for further information.

## Soil Association Certification Organic Standards

The Soil Association Certification Organic Standards cover the EU's organic regulations ([EC 834/2007](#) & [EC 889/2008](#)) and include some additional, higher standards in some key areas e.g. livestock production, GM, additives and packaging - this makes Soil Association Certification's standards recognised as amongst the highest in the world.

The Soil Association Certification Organic Standards can be accessed on our [website](#).

Due to our higher standards, if you want to use the SA symbol some products containing fish, meat, dairy, livestock, wine or cider these may be subject to additional checks to make sure they meet our standards. You can find details in the [annex](#) of the standards.

## Things to consider when applying for organic certification

Certification involves us making an assessment of your operation to check how you meet the SA standards, so it's important that you have read and are familiar with them. There are some key areas to consider:

### Suppliers (5.7.2)

Your direct suppliers (including wholesalers and traders that sell pre-packed certified goods) must hold their own organic certificate for the products they will sell to you.

If correctly certified, your supplier will be able to provide a valid organic certificate and product schedule listing the products they are certified for. The company name on the certificate should match your supplier's company name.

## Record Keeping (5.7)

You will need to implement records to show:

- Goods in – each incoming delivery needs to be recorded, including quantities and batch numbers, the organic status checked and a record of the check kept
- Production/packing records (if applicable) – including what's been made, quantities and batch numbers of ingredients and of finished products
- Goods out – including what was despatched, quantities and batch numbers
- Stock records – for raw materials and finished products

We have example record keeping templates on our [website](#).

## Labelling (5.8, 5.9, 5.10)

There are mandatory labelling criteria that must be met for organic products. This includes:

- The EU organic leaf logo
- The certification code of the final processor of the product (e.g. the Soil Association code is 'GB-ORG-05')
- A statement of agriculture to reflect the origin of the ingredients (e.g. 'Non-EU Agriculture')
- The Soil Association logo (if certified to Soil Association standards)
- If a multi-ingredient product, ingredients must be declared in descending order by weight and the ingredient declaration must indicate which ingredients are organic and which are non-organic

For more information, please see our [online labelling guide](#).

## Product Composition (6.3)

A product must contain at least 95% organic agricultural ingredients in order to be certified and labelled as organic. The 5% allowance can only be made up of certain approved ingredients as stipulated in the standards.

Salt and water cannot be organic, but are fine to use in organic products. These would not be included in the calculation. Most additives do not need to be included in the calculation, but some do. See the SA standards for full details.

For more information, please see our [online composition checklist](#) and standards section 6.3 of the [standards](#).

## Separation (6.1.4, 5.15.1)

If you intend to process, store, etc both organic and non-organic goods at your site, you will need to consider safeguards to prevent contamination such as:

- Dedicated storage areas/equipment
- Thorough clean downs between processing with records to demonstrate this
- Bleed runs or purges with organic material

## Importing from outside the EU (6.8)

You must be certified in order to import organic product from outside the EU. Not all certification bodies and standards are accepted, and specific electronic Certificates of Inspection (COI) must be in place for each consignment.

Importing without a licence in place risks the products losing their organic status and the goods being held at port, where holding fees are usually charged.

Guidance on importing and COIs can be found on our [website](#).

## How long does certification take?

We advise applicants to allow between 8 and 12 weeks from start to finish, but the more detail and more promptly you can respond the shorter the time it takes to complete the process.

Please let us know if you are working towards a specific deadline and we will do our best to help you meet it.

## Once your license is issued

### Changes to business set up

You will be issued with a certificate and product schedule detailing the company name, address, enterprises/activities and products that you are certified for.

If any of these are to change, you will need to inform us asap. If the site changes or you wish to add additional enterprises that we have not previously inspected (e.g. if you wanted to start packing organic product), an additional inspection may be required.

Products must be approved and added to your licence before marketing. You can add products to your licence at any point during the year through your Certification Officer and there is no additional cost for doing this.

### Annual inspections

Processing licensees will be inspected annually to ensure that organic standards are upheld.

Whilst we aim to inspect around the same time of year, this may change slightly due to when organic production runs happen, etc.

### Fees

For a list of our current fees, please go to the [Application page](#) on our website.

# The Application Process



**Please note:** you are not able to sell or make reference to organic or use the SA symbol until your licence has been issued.

## Contact us

If you have any queries or need any help, please get in touch with our Go Organic team and we will be happy to help.