



Guide to Certification - Farming

What is organic certification?

If you're a farmer or grower, and want to sell products as organic, you must hold a certificate of registration from an approved organic certification body, like Soil Association Certification. This is because organic food and farming is defined by law, so any product sold as 'organic' in the UK must comply with a set of production and processing standards.

Who are Soil Association Certification?

Soil Association Certification is the UK's most experienced organic certification body, certifying hundreds of organic farms and 70% of organic food on sale in the UK.

We help you to navigate the requirements of organic conversion and certification, inspect your business to organic standards, and provide you with an organic licence to sell your products with use of the Soil Association organic symbol. We're a not-for-profit business, and surplus income is gift aided to the Soil Association charity to develop, build and safeguard the organic sector. We certify all farm sizes and enterprises, and provide organic certification for on-farm processing and packing. Once certified, you'll have access to a great range of benefits that come with certification to help support your business. These benefits include:

- Dedicated and experienced certification and inspection teams that are there to support you during the conversion and certification process.
- Free access to Soil Association's Producer Membership (usually £78/year), including technical **advice** from the Soil Association's Producer Support team, free subscription to Organic Farming magazine, **technical guides**, and opportunities to join the Soil Association's award-winning farming programmes, **events and webinars**.
- Joint inspections with other schemes, such as Farm Assurance and Pasture For Life.
- Access to the Soil Association symbol, the UK's most recognised organic symbol, and **free marketing materials** to help communicate the benefits of organic to your customers; list your **farm shop** or **box scheme** on our website to attract new customers and get involved with our established and award winning campaigns, including Organic September and the Best of Organic Market (BOOM) Awards.

- Use our online **Organic Marketplace** to buy and sell products from other organic producers, such as livestock, forage and land, and access supply chain opportunities, such as our **Food For Life Supplier Scheme** (normally £1,100 per year).

Things to consider when applying for organic certification

Soil Association organic standards

A list of principles and rules - known as organic standards - guide organic farmers and growers on what they can and cannot do, with the aim of delivering the highest levels of animal welfare, protecting human and animal health, and safeguarding the environment.

The Soil Association organic standards cover the EU's organic regulations (EC 834/2007 & EC 889/2008) that have been retained by the UK for implementation in GB, and include some additional higher standards. This makes the Soil Association's standards recognised as among the highest in the world. You can familiarise yourself with the **Soil Association standards**, which set out the requirements for organic farming and growing, so you can produce and sell your products as organic using the Soil Association symbol - the most highly recognised and trusted organic symbol in the UK.

Organic conversion period

Before you can market land or sell animals or products as organic, farms must undergo a 'conversion period' where you manage your land, and any animals, to the organic standards for a required period. This provides time for you to start establishing organic management techniques, and build soil fertility and biological activity.

The conversion period for land is typically two years, although there is scope to reduce this, if you can demonstrate that you've managed the land according to organic standards before entering conversion. Perennials will also require a further twelve months on top of the standard two-year period before the crop can be harvested as organic. For more information on organic conversion, please view our **Crop Conversion guide** and **Livestock & Poultry Conversion guide**.

Financial support

In some UK countries, governmental funding is available for farmers to convert and manage their farms to organic standards. **Visit our financial support pages** to find out what funding is available.

We offer reduced conversion period fees for all farming licensees, and there is also a discount for small farmers and growers.

The certification process

1. Pre-application support

If you have further questions about the organic farm conversion and certification process, please get in touch with our expert Producer Certification team. They'll be happy to explain how the organic standards can fit with your farming system and enterprises. Call the Producer Certification team on **0117 914 2412** or email: goorganic@soilassociation.org

2. Application

- **Submit your application:** When you're ready to apply, send us your application form and completed certification contract. All these documents can be found in the application pack. Your conversion date can start when we receive your documents, or at a later date, if preferred. Please call us on 0117 914 2412 or email goorganic@soilassociation.org if you have any questions about filling in the forms. Please also include any farm maps and land rental agreements (if applicable).
- **Meet your Certification Officer:** Once your application has been processed, you'll be assigned a Certification Officer - they'll give you a welcome call, providing you with an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.
- **Your application inspection:** One of our Inspectors will contact you to arrange a convenient date to inspect your farm. When the inspection is complete, your Inspector will give you an Action Summary Form (ASF) outlining any areas where standards have yet to be met. You will need to resolve these with corrective actions and send details of these, along with your ASF, to your Certification Officer.
- **Your first certificate:** Once we've received any outstanding information, we'll undertake a final review of your application and issue your first annual certificate.

3. Annual inspections

We need to carry out a physical inspection of your farm at least once a year. We'll arrange your first annual inspection during your second year of conversion and you can contact us for support at any time.

4. Organic certification

After successfully completing the conversion period, your land and enterprises will have achieved organic status. We'll issue your organic certificate and you can start marketing your products using the Soil Association organic symbol. We'll continue to re-inspect your business annually and you'll benefit from ongoing support from your Certification Officer.

Fees

We offer reduced application and transfer fees. Please view our fees in your application pack or on the [Application pages on our website](#).

Contact us

If you have any queries or need any support, please get in touch with [our Producer Certification team](#) on **0117 914 2412** and we'll be happy to help.