

UK and GB legislation specifies a ‘conversion period’ whereby you must manage your land (and any animals) according to the organic standards for the required period of time, before you can market land or products as organic. The conversion period for land is generally 2 years. Conversion can start from the date we receive an application pack from you. You can convert your farm in stages, or you can convert the whole farm.

## Livestock and poultry conversion (Standard 3.1)

The timing of conversion will largely depend on your species of livestock. While your existing non-organic livestock can never be sold as ‘organic’, they can go on to produce youngstock eligible for organic status or produce milk/eggs/fibre after a ‘conversion period’ when you manage them to organic standards on your farm, so you don’t have to sell off your existing herd or flock.

- **Sheep, pigs and goats** bred for meat production must be managed to full organic standards from mating on certified organic land in order to produce organic lambs, kids and piglets. For, beef cattle, their dams, need to be managed to full standards for at least 12 weeks before giving birth for the calf to be eligible for organic status.

- **Dairy cows and sheep and goats** farmed for milk production must be managed to organic health and welfare standards, whilst only consuming organic feed for at least 6 months before the milk can be sold as organic.
- **Laying birds** must be managed to organic standards for 6 weeks before their eggs can be marketed as organic.
- **Table bird producers are required to purchase organic chicks where available, however,** we recognise there are currently not enough organically-bred chicks to supply the organic sector. Non-organic chicks can be bought in as day-old non-organic chicks, and are subject to a conversion period of 10 weeks for slow growing strains (for fast growing strains minimum slaughter ages will also apply).





# Conversion guide - livestock and poultry

There are typically two approaches for converting livestock enterprises to organic production:

1. **Standard conversion:** You begin managing your livestock according to organic standards towards the end of the two year land conversion period or after the land becomes fully organic. (So you can still feed non-organic non-GM feed to your animals before the start of the conversion period).
2. **Simultaneous conversion:** You convert your land and livestock at the same time over the two-year conversion period, and all land and livestock must be kept to full organic standards—including all bought-in feed throughout. The advantage is that any young stock born during the conversion period can be sold as organic once the land conversion period is complete.

Please note that there are further reduced conversion options for both Poultry and Pig enterprises, and our Producer Certification team can discuss the different conversion scenarios with you in greater detail to help you decide which one is right for you and your business.

## Housing livestock (Standards 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10)

Organic animals must have continuous access to organic pasture at all times. However, farmers can house their animals when weather and ground conditions demand (to ensure welfare and prevent poaching, for example).

The organic standards set out minimum space requirements and maximum stocking densities when housing each species. Housing should provide appropriate light, space, comfort and sufficient space to allow ample freedom of movement, and room for animals to conduct their natural behaviours. Good ventilation and drainage is essential to minimise disease risks. Sufficient dry, clean natural bedding (such as straw or sawdust from untreated wood) must always be provided at all times. Winter housing requirements are reviewed and approved by our certification team.



# Conversion guide - livestock and poultry

## Livestock feed (Standard 3.10)

Organic standards seek to ensure livestock are fed a natural, appropriate diet that meets the nutritional needs of the animals at every production stage.

Once you start converting your livestock enterprises you must feed only home-grown grazing, forage and certified organic feed. Pig and poultry farmers may be permitted to feed a small percentage of non-organic protein for welfare reasons where suitable organic protein is not available.

For ruminants, at least 60% of the diet must come from grazing, forage or fodder, calculated on a dry matter basis, so careful planning and management of grass and forage, cereals and fodder crops is critical. Pig and poultry farmers must ensure that at least 20% of the total diet comes from the holding, although you can also source feed from local organic farms/feed businesses providing that they always have access to roughage for rooting.

You can use minerals and feed licks composed from the ingredients listed in 3.10.14 or other organic feed materials if there is a demonstrated deficiency or welfare concern.

We can provide details of approved organic feed suppliers who can supply suitable bulk/compound feeds for all species.

## Breeding stock (Standard 3.2)

You should always try to source organic breeding replacements. A number of resources can help, such as our online Organic Marketplace, as well as organic marketing groups, online auctions and private sales. (You must always source stock for finishing from certified organic farms).

If you cannot find suitable organic livestock contact your Certification Officer to discuss the possible options. This might include permission to buy in a limited number of non-organic maiden female breeding stock. You will need to demonstrate that suitable organic animals are not available before buying any non-organic animals.

You can also bring in non-organic males (bulls, boars, rams, etc.) for breeding purposes, but you must keep them to full organic standards while on your holding.

You will not be able to sell non-organic bought in breeding stock as organic, but their offspring could be organic.



# Conversion guide - livestock and poultry

## Organic livestock management plan (Standard 1.4)

Organic livestock systems use high levels of husbandry and biosecurity measures to prevent and minimise health problems. Organic farmers are required to identify all known risks and prevention and treatment strategies in a livestock management plan.

As well as outlining the feed and housing, the plan should cover any known health issues on farm: how they are prevented, monitored and what would trigger veterinary intervention. The plan should also show how you intend to reduce reliance on veterinary treatments such as wormers using general management practices.

Your Certification Officer can provide guidance notes to help you write the plan. We also recommend you work with your vet when creating your animal management plan, although this is not a requirement.

## Veterinary treatments (Standard 3.4)

Livestock management on organic farms focuses on improving animal health and productivity by minimising the risk of pest and disease problems through prevention, detection and good husbandry practices.

However, prompt treatment is essential if an animal is injured or falls ill to minimise pain and suffering. Treatments can include licensed veterinary medicines. Antibiotics are allowed for treatment of individual animals, although certain classes of antibiotics are restricted.

Vaccines are permitted and targeted parasite treatments may be used.

Organic withdrawal periods for veterinary medicines are double the statutory withdrawal periods and can never be less than 48 hours. All veterinary treatments must be recorded and available at inspection.

## Grassland management (Standards 2.5 & 2.7)

Organic grass and forage seed must be used, wherever available. However, you can ask to use untreated non-organic seed if there are no suitable organic varieties available.

Herbicides are prohibited under organic standards, so organic grassland weed control is based on maintaining sward composition and health by appropriate grazing management to avoid overgrazing or poaching, encouraging good grass growth by ensuring good soil fertility through timely of farm yard manure and compost applications, and preventing weed spread by strategic grazing and topping, as well as reseeding and cultivations, where permitted.

Organic farmers can apply fertilisers and supplementary nutrients allowed under standard 2.5 where there are known deficiencies. Your Certification Officer can check the suitability of any products you intend to use and provide lists of approved fertility inputs.

