

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – GENERAL

What is organic conversion and how long does it take?

All farmers must undergo a two-year conversion period and farm to the Organic Standards in order to market their produce organically. Once a farmer has submitted their application form and conversion plan (prepared by an advisor or the farmer) the Irish Organic Association will inspect the holding, livestock and paperwork and then issue the farmer with a conversion licence for two years. Once you have your full organic licence you can then sell produce into the organic sector. Farmers undergo an inspection annually to ensure that they are in compliance with the Organic Standards

Do I have to convert all of my land?

Partial conversion is allowed, however, the organic area needs to be physically, financially and operationally separated from any non-organic land on the same holding. A partial organic conversion may be an option for some farmers who have different enterprises e.g., livestock and tillage or wish to convert separate enterprises on a phased basis.

Can I use fertilisers and plant protection plants?

All synthetic fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides and pesticides are prohibited from use in organic farming, with an emphasis on the recycling of slurry and farmyard manure and crop rotation. Contact the Irish Organic Association for a list of permitted substances.

Can I convert my existing livestock?

No, these animals will never become organic however following the appropriate conversion period they can produce organic stock and/or produce e.g., organic calves, lambs or organic milk. Current stock are generally retained for breeding, and producing eggs and dairy.

What stocking rates are allowed?

A stocking rate equivalent to 170kg N/ha can be made per year, over the entire holding. For most producers, this should not be of concern. It can be possible to achieve stocking rates of 1.0 to 1.6LU/ha on drystock organic farms depending on the soil type and grassland management. To be eligible for the Organic Farming Scheme farmers must maintain a minimum stocking rate – see Organic Farming Scheme terms and conditions.

What is simultaneous conversion?

Simultaneous land and livestock conversion is the normal method of conversion. This means as soon as organic status is awarded to the land (after two years), animals born three months after the initial conversion period started receive full organic status and can be sold as organic.

Can I have organic and non-organic livestock on my holding?

Organic and non-organic stock of the same species cannot be present on the same holding or production unit. However, where no livestock are not present on the farm (e.g., stockless tillage) or are not of the same species non-organic livestock can graze on the same holding for up to 120 days a year under a [grazing agreement](#). The land must continue to be managed according to the Organic Standards during that period. If organic livestock are grazed on non-organic farmland, they lose their organic status.

Can I buy in non-organic replacements?

In most cases the answer is no, however, there are some exemptions made for breeding stock, contact the Irish Organic Association for more information. Most farmers breed their own replacements.

Do I have to use 100% organic feed?

Yes. For all ruminants, a minimum of 60% of the DMI must either be fresh green food or unmilled forage grown to Organic Standards and produced from the holding or linked holdings. Genetically modified feed or ingredients are not allowed in any format either in feed or minerals.

Where can I buy organic animals?

There are some dedicated organic marts regionally, see our [marts section](#) of our website for more details. Many farmers purchase direct from other organic farmers. There is also a section on the Irish Organic Association website for [trading organic stock](#).

What restrictions are there on manure applications in organic farming?

To be compliant with Nitrates Directive your stocking rate should not exceed 170kg/N/ha/yr. Organic farmers are subject to the same application opening/closing dates under Nitrates. This is not an issue for the majority of organic farmers. Farmyard manure and slurry are the main organic manures used as synthetic fertiliser is not allowed. Farmers can work with other farmers to import/export organic manures.

How do organic farmers maintain grassland productivity?

Grasslands are regularly soil sampled to monitor nutrients. Nitrogen-fixing legumes, such as red and white clover are used to build nitrogen. Multi-species swards are also widely used. Regular soil sampling, liming and application of organic slurry and farmyard manure and other approved products are encouraged to ensure adequate pH and nutrient levels are maintained.

Do you need to use organic seeds?

Producers are required to source certified organic seed where available, if seed is not available derogations may be granted before sowing. Seed companies in Ireland supply a range of organic seeds and suppliers in the UK and mainland Europe can also ship seeds to Ireland.