

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – TILLAGE AND HORTICULTURE

TILLAGE

How do you manage soil fertility when growing organic cereals?

Regular soil sampling is recommended to keep an eye on nutrient levels. Rotations are critical in organic cereal production ensuring that nutrients are not depleted and that weed and diseases are kept to a minimum. Organic manures such as farmyard manure and slurry are permitted for use, organic tillage farmers can bring in manure from other non-organic farmers. However, manure cannot be sourced from animals that are permanently housed e.g., pigs or poultry. Additional approved fertilisers can be used, please contact the Irish Organic Association for more information. Note that soil analysis is recommended to justify use of nutrients.

Why is rotation and crop planning so important?

As organic farmers cannot use synthetic fertilisers and plant protection products crop rotation and crop planning is extremely important to build fertility and ease disease and weed pressure. Typically, an organic grower will have 2 to 4 years of grass clover ley to build fertility followed by a rotation of 3 or 4 years of crop production. As well as market requirements crop sequencing is based on fertility needs, with crops with high requirements, like wheat, sown at the start of the rotation and crops with lower fertility requirements like oats in the middle. Crop species and varieties are also selected for disease resistance or ability to suppress weeds.

Is stockless tillage an option in organic farming?

Yes, arable farmers can run stockless operations with good crop planning and rotations including legume plants which form the basis for nutrient supply and weed control. Mixed enterprises of crops and livestock are common in organic farming in Ireland.

What crops are grown for the organic market?

Organic oats are widely grown for three large processors who purchase organic oats. Farmers grow combi-crop for animal feed which can be any combination of oats, peas, wheat and barley. A small amount of milling wheat is grown, and barley is grown on contract for a distiller. Farmers grow organic cereals to sell to organic dairy, poultry and livestock farmers. It is essential to work with the land you have and pick crops that suit your soil type and location.

HORTICULTURE

Where do organic vegetable growers sell their produce?

Growers sell organic vegetables into all retail markets including supermarkets, independent shops, online and via box scheme and farm shops.

How do you manage weeds in organic vegetable production?

Growers use a variety of methods including stale-seed beds, flame burning, biodegradable mulches, and undersowing crops with fertility building crops to reduce weeds. Having a good

rotation will assist in weed management, field scale growers use specific machine for weeding.

How are pests and disease managed organically?

Prevention is key in organic production so ensuring good hygiene in crop production is important. Biological and cultural methods are used to control pests in organic crops. Some approved products can be used to minimise disease. Good rotations will ensure that pest and disease burdens are managed.

I do not have livestock on my holding can I import manures?

Yes, manure can be imported as long as it does not originate from animals that are permanently housed such as pigs and poultry. It is recommended that manure be composted for three months before use. Products certified for use under the Irish Organic Association Certified Products scheme may also be used based on soil analysis.