



Demeter UK and BDA Certification



Guidance note – Farm Conversion FAQ

CONVERTING YOUR FARM TO ORGANIC & BIODYNAMIC

Converting your farm to Organic or Demeter is a bold and courageous move. You'll need to feel confident that you understand the organic requirements, and how they will impact on your farming system.



ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

The conversion period to Organic is **2-years**. You need to apply to an organic control body who will register your holding with Defra. Organic production and certification is governed by UK and EU legislation.

See BDA [Organic Production Standards](#). To help with frequently asked questions see our [guidance notes](#)

As an organic farmer or grower you must keep detailed records of all feed, livestock, vet treatments, seeds, soil amendments and sales. The holding is inspected at least once each year by your control body.

Any processing, labelling or storage that takes place on the farm, or that is carried out on behalf of the farm, must also be certified if the products are to be sold as organic.

See BDA [Organic processing & importing standards](#)



DEMETER CERTIFICATION

The conversion period to Demeter is **3-years**. Two years to Organic, plus an additional year to Demeter.

Demeter certification is governed by the [Biodynamic Federation – Demeter International](#).

Meeting the requirements of the Organic standards is a prerequisite of the Demeter standards.

See [Demeter Labelling, Production and Processing Standards](#)

HOW TO APPLY FOR CONVERSION

In order to put your holding in to conversion you need to register with an organic control body. To register with BDA Certification, you'll need to complete our application form, which you can find here <http://bdcertification.org.uk/>

We are also really happy to talk through any questions you might have about conversion, standards and certification. We have a **discounted annual certification fee** for holdings in conversion.

Your conversion usually starts from the date we receive your application. We review your application and send you an application report. Sometimes we may need to ask you for more information or point out areas where you'll need to make changes. Once any outstanding questions are resolved, and you have paid the one off application fee, we will register you with Defra and send you an in-conversion certificate.

We will allocate an inspector to you and you will usually have your first inspection visit within a couple of months. The inspector will want to see your land, crops and any livestock, ask about your farming systems, and check your record keeping. The inspection is also an opportunity for you to share your good practice and to ask questions.

The inspector will write up a report from his or her visit, and send this to your certification officer to review. Your certification officer will return the report to you, highlighting any non-compliances and how these can be resolved. Once any outstanding issues are resolved, your certification is confirmed for the year.

THE CONVERSION PROCESS

The holding must go through a conversion period before you can sell any crops or products as organic or Demeter. You have to manage your land (and any livestock) according to the standards from day one of your conversion period. The conversion period can be seen as a transition allowing time to establish organic management systems.

The conversion period starts when your application is accepted by the BDA. The application form will serve as your conversion plan; this plan can be used to apply for grants and stewardship schemes.

From the day you start conversion you can only use the materials and processes permitted in the standards. Most soluble fertilisers and synthetic pesticides, and all herbicides, are prohibited. Particularly if you have been relying heavily on these inputs, you will need to consider carefully how you will manage fertility, pests and diseases, and weed control. Crop rotations that build fertility and break pest and disease cycles are an important part of organic systems.

CAN I GET REDUCED CONVERSION?

Where there is evidence that no prohibited inputs have been used prior to starting conversion, it may be possible to reduce the conversion period by four months, and in exceptional cases by up to 12 months.

DOES THE WHOLE FARM NEED TO BE CONVERTED?

It is possible to convert your whole farm in one go, or to convert the holding in stages over a few years. Both approaches can be successful. A one-step conversion may be simpler to manage, but a staged conversion can spread the risk and allow more time for learning.

When converting to Organic you **do not** have to put the whole farm or holding into conversion; it is possible to convert only a part of the holding, so long as you can keep the organic and non-organic areas and enterprises clearly separated.

When converting to Demeter **you do** need to put the whole farm into conversion because the principle of a farm as a self-sustaining closed cycle unit is central in Biodynamic standards.

WHEN ARE CROPS ORGANIC?

It usually takes two years to convert your land to organic.

- Crops harvested after the first year can be sold or labelled as ‘in conversion’
- Crops sown after the two-year conversion have full organic status.
- Pasture and grazing has full organic status after the two year conversion is complete, so hay or silage harvested after the two years has full organic status
- An additional year is required for crops to be Demeter.

See our [guidance notes](#) on converting arable and horticultural enterprises for more details

DO LIVESTOCK CONVERT AT THE SAME TIME AS THE LAND?

Livestock can be converted at the same time as the land (simultaneous conversion) or you can start conversion of the livestock later but by the end of the conversion of the land (non-simultaneous conversion). Simultaneous conversion may be simpler to manage and means that you achieve organic status of the livestock and their products sooner. Non-simultaneous conversion allows you to use non-organic feed (so long as it is gm-free) and to freely bring in non-organic livestock before the livestock conversion begins.

Simultaneous conversion

- calves born on the farm at least 12 weeks after the start of conversion can have full organic status once the land has completed conversion
- lambs and piglets conceived on organic or in-conversion land can have full organic status once the land has completed conversion
- livestock on the farm before the start of the conversion can never have full organic status, but their milk and wool can have full organic status once the land has completed organic conversion

Non-simultaneous conversion

- Dairy cows must be managed to the organic standards for 6 months before their milk can be organic. The 6 month milk conversion can start immediately the land conversion is completed, or earlier, but the milk cannot be organic before the land is fully organic.

- Beef calves can be organic if their mother has been managed to organic standards since at least 12 weeks before their birth.
- Piglets and lambs can be organic if their mother has been managed to organic standards since their conception.
- Laying birds must be managed to the organic standards for 6 weeks before their eggs can be organic. The 6 weeks conversion can start immediately the land conversion is completed, or earlier, but the eggs cannot be organic before the land is fully organic.

See our [guidance notes](#) on converting livestock

SELLING AND LABELLING YOUR PRODUCE

- Produce from the first year of conversion cannot be sold or labelled as organic.
- Produce from the second year of conversion can be labelled as ‘in-conversion to organic’.
- Grazing and forage crops harvested after the land conversion is complete can be sold as organic.
- Crops planted after the land conversion is complete can be sold as fully organic.
- Livestock in simultaneous conversion can be sold as in-simultaneous conversion. They can then achieve full organic status once both the supplier and the buyer have full organic status.

PREPARING FOR CONVERSION

Before you start conversion it’s a good idea to be as clear as possible about how going organic or Demter will affect your holding, your farming systems and your markets. There are lots of useful resources available online, including conversion guides and farm case studies. We are also really happy to talk with you about how the organic standards could impact your unique holding, and to discuss any questions or concerns you might have.

Meeting other farmers or growers who have been through conversion and are running successful organic businesses can be invaluable. Attending conferences, workshops and farm visits can be a good way to explore ideas and make connections, but informal conversation with neighbours or contacts are just as important.

Do be sure to check out what grants you may be able to apply for, including application deadlines and any additional requirements. Support available is likely to be different in each of the four nations of the UK, and there may be a distinction between conversion support and maintenance support. ([links here](#))

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-payments-and-grants>

It is worth considering the timing of your conversion. Starting your conversion before the date you sow the majority of your crops will mean you’ll have an organic harvest as soon as possible, and starting conversion of your cattle at least 12 weeks before your main calving block will mean you have organic beef as soon as possible. Making sure you’re ready to take advantage of grants and subsidies could make a significant difference to your finances.