



BDA Certification



Guidance note – converting from organic to Demeter

If you are already organic certified, it is possible to convert to full Demeter (biodynamic) status in as little as one year. What would need to change on your holding in order to achieve Demeter certification?

Many organic farmers and growers will already be working fairly close the Demeter Standards, and others might have a bigger step to take. Biodynamics is always a journey; good biodynamic farmers and growers are always learning, and they develop their systems and practice over time. Likewise, the Demeter standards evolve through an annual international democratic process.

Here we outline some of the key areas you may need to consider in converting from organic to Demeter.

Bear in mind that the organic standards underpin the Demeter standards, and still apply to Demeter holdings.

Whole farm conversion

The entire holding must convert to Demeter status, including all enterprises and all land. It is possible to carry out a staged conversion of the whole holding over a number of years, in agreement with Demeter UK. The holding should be seen as an organism, with the aim to move towards closed loop systems. You cannot manage a conventional holding whilst managing a Demeter holding.

Demeter Standards – 7.3.12 Conversion of a farm

Use of the biodynamic preparations

A set of special plant and animal based ‘preparations’ are key to biodynamics. The two field sprays are used to strengthen and enliven the soil and plants, and the compost preparations are used to guide the decomposition process in muck heaps, compost heaps, slurry and so on. It is a requirement of the Demeter standards that the entire holding is sprayed once each year with each of the field sprays, and that all compost, FYM, slurry etc is treated with the compost preparations. In addition, the entire holding must receive the compost preparations in some form at least once during the conversion period.

Demeter Standards – 7.2 Biodynamic Preparations, and Appendix 9 Biodynamic Preparations

Livestock on the holding

Livestock are seen as a valuable component of a whole farm system. All farms must have some livestock. This requirement does not apply to market gardens, and smaller orchards and vineyards.

Demeter Standards 7.3.2 Requirements to have livestock

Plant protection products

The Demeter standards are slightly more stringent on permitted plant protection products. For example, use of copper as a fungicide is limited to 3kg/ha/year rather than 6kg/ha/year.

Demeter Standards – Appendix 5 Allowed materials and methods for plant care and protection

Hybrid cereals and CMS-bred vegetable varieties

Vegetable varieties bred using CMS cell fusion techniques are prohibited under the Demeter standards as this is considered a form of genetic engineering. Only brassica and chicory varieties are affected, and we can provide a positive list of cell-fusion free varieties. Hybrid (F1) varieties are prohibited for all cereals, except maize.

Demeter Standards 7.1.2 Seed and propagation materials

Use of manures and fertilisers

- The maximum nitrogen use on a farm is 112kg/ha per year, but can be raised to 170kgN/ha for market gardens and is lower (96kg/ha) for orchards.
- There are limits as to how much nitrogen can be supplied by commercial fertilisers (as opposed to FYM, slurry and compost).
- Market gardens without livestock should bring in FYM to the equivalent of 10kg N/ha/year.
- The list of permitted fertilisers and use of soil amendments is also slightly more restricted – for example, guano is not allowed, and a derogation is required before use of rock phosphate or trace elements.

Demeter Standards – 7.1.3.1 Amount of manure; 7.1.5.1 Manures, soils and potting mixes; Appendix 4 Permitted/restricted fertilisers and soil conditioners

Biodiversity

At least 10% of the holding should consist of areas that support wildlife, such as headlands, undisturbed woodland, streams, rivers and ponds, hedges, dry stone walls, agroforestry, and pasture cut or grazed after flowering.

Demeter Standards – 7.1.8 Biodiversity reserve

Livestock feeds

The aim is to feed your livestock from your holding as far as possible.

- At least 60% of livestock feed and forage must be produced on the farm (or in co-operation with another Demeter farmer locally).
- At least 70% of livestock feed and forage must be fully Demeter certified (can be reduced to 50% for pigs and poultry).
- Over winter, cattle and other ruminants should, as far as possible, be fed hay in preference to silage.
- For poultry at least 20% of the fodder must be in the form of whole grains

Demeter Standards – 7.3.6 Feeding of animals

Cattle, sheep and goats with horns

Horns are considered to be important to the well being of cattle, sheep and goats. Disbudding is not generally permitted and dehorned animals should not be brought in. In very well justified cases disbudding can be carried out with permission in advance from the Demeter office. Naturally polled breeds cannot be used for dairy production. If your existing herd is disbudded or naturally polled the individual animals can still go through conversion but you must stop disbudding and start breeding for horned animals.

Demeter Standards – 7.3.7.1 Cattle management

Poultry management

- The Demeter standards require a lower stocking density for layer hens, at a maximum of 4.4 birds per m² in static housing and 5 birds per m² in mobile housing.
- Two cockerels should be kept for every 100 layer hens.
- Where more than 100 birds are kept, the outside run for poultry in fixed housing must have at least 40% perennial cover or shelter (bushes, trees, artificial shelter).

Demeter Standards – 7.3.7.4 and 7.3.7.5 Management of poultry – general and larger flocks

Veterinary treatments

Ivermectin/avermectin type treatments are not permitted for internal parasites and are restricted to one treatment per year for external parasites.

Demeter Standards – 7.3.8.1 Use of remedies for large and small ruminants

Social responsibility

As part of your Demeter certification you have to sign a declaration of social responsibility, confirming that workers are treated fairly, human rights are respected and that everyone enjoys equality of opportunity.

Demeter Standards - 3.3 Principles of social responsibility

Cleaning, packing, labelling and processing

There are some restrictions and requirements on cleaning products and packaging materials, and on ingredients and processing techniques. This will be particularly relevant if you carry out any processing or packing on your holding – for example veg box scheme, slaughter, butchery, juicing, jam making, milk bottling.

Demeter Standards – 4.2 Processing methods; 6 Pest control and cleaning; 8.1 Packaging; 8 Product standards for specific product types

If you have any questions or concerns about conversion and the Demeter standards, please do get in touch. We are really happy to talk things through with you and point you in the direction of useful resources and potential support.