

# Organic Conversion Step by Step Guide



National Advice Hub  
T: 0300 323 0161  
E: [advice@fas.scot](mailto:advice@fas.scot)  
W: [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot)

This guide aims to provide a step by step guide to farmers and crofters considering

1. List your reasons why you want to convert to organic farming
2. Use these reasons as a key focal point for your objectives of converting to organic
3. Research/gather information about:
  - What organic farming involves
  - What market demand is there for the produce you intend to grow/rear
  - What support is there available (e.g. grants)
  - How suitable is your land & buildings for conversion
4. Discuss your situation with a range of Organic certification bodies (e.g. Soil Association, SOPA, Organic Farmers & Growers, Biodynamic) to learn about them and how any differences between them may affect your future farming system. A discussion with an independent organic farming consultant may help here too.
5. Obtain & read a copy of chosen certification body standards
6. Assess own mindset & skills.
  - Organic farming can be rewarding, but challenging, due to restrictions on management practices and increased paperwork (e.g. annual audits).
  - Are you up for the challenge?
  - Do you have the skills, knowledge & desire to overcome the hurdles?
7. Decide which farm unit/area/fields are to be converted
8. Based on the suitability of your field/area/farm for conversion, and the demand for your produce develop a suitable enterprise mix for the converted land.
9. Decide on an ideal crop rotation to meet the demands
  - Ensure that there is a good balance between cash crops & fertility building crops
  - There may be more than one rotation covering fields based on land capability (e.g. arable cropping, occasional arable cropping & permanent grassland).
10. Assess each field individually
  - Review cropping histories & fertility
  - Use soil analyses & correct deficiencies of pH and P & K before conversion
  - If arable crops previously, a fertility building phase will be needed
  - What is clover content in grassland fields
  - How old are grass swards (and are sown species still there?)
    - Weed problems – Best to spray & control prior to conversion



11. Assess farm infrastructure for chosen enterprises & consider changes/investments that are required.  
For example:
- Livestock housing & fencing (cattle/sheep/deer proof)
  - Space requirements, feeding/trough space & lying areas
  - Flooring (slats/cubicles/bedded court)
  - Type of bedding (straw/sawdust/woodchips/sand)
  - Manure storage capacity and handling facilities
  - Machinery requirements ( e.g. seed drills/ harrows/ manure spreaders)
  - Crop/Feed handling requirements (e.g drier, dresser, storage space)
12. Assess existing Livestock systems
- Mix of enterprises (Cattle, Sheep, Pig, Poultry & Others)
  - Breeding vs Finishing stock
  - Breeds – Are they well adapted to environment?  
Are they easy care?  
Well adapted to forage/free range systems
  - Sources of replacement stock (homebred or bought in)
  - Calving/Lambing/Farrowing – Does it co-inside with spring
  - Grassland management  
Set stocked vs rotational vs mob grazed  
Stocking rates & N Fertiliser use  
Clean grazing strategies  
Management for early bite  
Forage Production – Silage/Hay/Haylage
  - Feeding system  
Proportion of forage to concentrates in rations  
Proportion of bought in feeds  
Prohibited feeds (e.g. urea)
  - Health & Welfare  
Closed herd/flock  
Use of anthelmintics & other veterinary products  
Current disease status and problems  
Staffing/stockmanship skill set
13. Consider applying to Scottish Government for grant aid to convert to organics
- Applications for funding require to be approved prior to start of conversion so this needs to be factored into conversion timing.
  - Ensure any conversion scheme contract is signed before starting conversion with your certification body

14 . Prepare conversion plan including crop and livestock management plans

- Provide map with list of fields entering conversion (e.g. an up to date IACS map)
- Timing for start of conversion
- Conversion of Land
  - This is very important to enable crops to get premiums in third year
  - For winter/spring crops – can only grow 1<sup>st</sup> Organic crop 24mths after conversion
- Conversion of Livestock – Standard or Simultaneous?
  - Simultaneous offers a faster method to sell organic livestock off the holding providing livestock managed organically during conversion (good for whole farm conversions)
  - Beef cows need to be managed organically 3mths prior to birth for progeny to qualify as organic under simultaneous conversion, otherwise stock need to be conceived on organic/in-conversion land.
  - Simultaneous conversion allows stock to be sold as organic after 24mth conversion
  - Also need to start conversion prior to cut of hay/silage for fodder
- Soil & Nutrient Management
  - Cultivation techniques (Ploughing vs Min till ?)
  - Crop history & forward plans ( 5yr crop history & 5yr forward )
  - Nutrient supply
    - Sources of allowable Phosphate & Potash to be used
    - Manure management – what crops intend to receive FYM/Slurry?
  - Whole farm nutrient budget
  - Livestock Management (for each enterprise)
    - Breeds of choice, Breeding plan & source of replacement stock
    - Housing & any changes to be implemented
    - Feeding regimes
    - Animal health plans – Ideally created in consultation with farm vet
  - Crop Management
    - Crop Rotations and explain why potential varieties of crops used
    - Weed, pest and disease control methods to be used
    - Grassland Management regime (e.g stocking rates, clean grazing)
    - Grass mixtures/species to be used & why
  - Environmental and conservation measures to maintain & encourage biodiversity
    - Highlight habitats on farm and how they are managed
  - Marketing plans
    - Detail how you intend to market your produce, and initial outlets of choice

15 Complete and return application form to Certification Body

- Commence organic management
- Expect Inspector's visit