



ORGANIC TRUST CLG

Organic Cereal production – what you need to consider prior to entering organics?

Organic cereals are in great demand, both as livestock feed and for the human food chain. Only a small percentage of the organically certified land area in Ireland is in cereals. Organic Beef and Sheep farmers require 100% organic feed and with many entering the suckler welfare scheme those who never fed organic feed will now be required to do so. The increased demand for poultry feed and porridge oats means that more organic cereal farmers are required to reduce imports.

Some large non-livestock farmers produce a large range of cereals for sale and use organic poultry manure for fertility. The majority of farmers, who have local contractors, grow small areas of one or two crops for their own use, as part of a mixed farming enterprise.

Rotations: There is no blueprint for rotations as each farm is unique and each farmer's requirement is different. Generally, rotations are 3 years cereals followed by a fertility building stage of 2-3 years, usually silage or grazing on a mixed farm. Rotations may be longer if including field scale vegetables.

Crop Choices: Triticale and oats appear to be the easiest organic crops to grow. Wheat is successful if grown as the first crop after a fertility building stage. Barley has proven challenging in organic rotations and is not widely grown



(except by very experienced organic growers). Protein crops are grown but care must be taken to address weed problems and volunteers in the next crop.

Winter Vs Spring Crops: Winter cereals yield more and are harvested earlier. Spring sown cereals have a lower nutrient demand and are less exposed to weed competition because of their shorter growing period.

Weeds: Weed seed banks vary from farm to farm and many organic farmers who carefully plan their cereal rotations and crops choices carefully do not appear to have significant problems for the first 5 years. Many of these farmers sow their crops and close the gate and only go back at harvest time. A tall variety is required for this to be successful. However, others have used the organic grant-aid scheme to get funding for inter-row cultivators. These farmers use wider rows and weed between the rows. A higher density of seeds in the row means that yield is not reduced.

: Organic crops are not prone to the same level of disease as conventional crops as they have a more stable growth pattern.



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Yields: Yields vary from farm to farm and depend on crop choice. However a low yield of 1.7 ton/ha is considered the break-even point for most cereals, based on full contractor prices and the cost of organic seed. However, most organic farms should manage between 3-8 tons/ha, providing the grower with significant returns.

Storage: Some farmers have converted old cow sheds to store grain for their own use. Larger growers have built dedicated sheds with flexible storage. The Organic Grant Aid scheme has provided many with 40% aid towards buildings, augers, rollers and dryers.

Prior to entering: Any weed problems on the farm should be addressed prior to entering conversion, especially wild oats and docks. Your date of entry is important as any crop **harvested** after the date of your first anniversary, can be sold as in-conversion grain to organic farmers and will attract premium (i.e. if you enter conversion on May 1st in any year, then cereals harvested **AFTER** May 1st the following year qualify for in-conversion status). Only cereals **SOWN** in the ground after the date of the awarding of organic status to the farm qualify for organic status, i.e. if you entered conversion on May 1st 2014, then only cereals **sown after** May 1st 2016 will qualify for organic status.

Partial conversion: Partial conversion has been permitted to date on tillage farms whereby large farms can convert part of their farm to organic production, however strict rules apply. It is unclear if partial conversion will continue to be permitted in the Organic Farming Scheme, therefore, operators are advised to ensure that they consult the up to date rules of this scheme which can be found on the website of the Department of Agriculture, Food & The Marine – www.agriculture.gov.ie



Training in Organic Production

If you are interested in attending a course regarding the

requirements of any particular aspect of organic production,



simply email the Organic Trust with your requirements and we will endeavour to assist you. Remember, if you intend to make application for payment under the Organic Farming Scheme, it is mandatory to undertake a basic course in organic management – please contact the Organic Trust office (01 8530271) for details of the current courses. Details of such courses are also regularly posted on the Organic Trust website.

The Organic Trust conduct such courses in Tullamore, Co Offaly on several dates during the course of the calendar year – please phone Eveline Gill on 086 3824042 for details.

Organic Advisory Service

If you need assistance in having the compulsory Conversion Plan drawn up, the Organic Trust can provide you with the names of Organic Advisors who will draw up the necessary plan. Rates for this service vary from Advisor to Advisor, however, the Organic Trust can provide you with a listing of Advisors, together with their contact details, so that quotations can be obtained.

Cereal Producer Profiles

The Organic Trust have profiled many cereal producers in our magazine Clover – if you would like copies of these profiles, simply phone the office and they will be despatched to you immediately. These profiles give a detailed overview of how organic cereal production operates at farm level.

Further information is available from the Organic Trust office at 01 8530271 or www.organictrust.ie



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