



ORGANIC TRUST CLG

Organic Dairy Production Fact Sheet

Becoming an Organic Dairy Producer: Farmers wishing to convert their operation to organic production must firstly consider whether to convert the land and livestock simultaneously or to start the conversion of the land prior to the conversion of the livestock. Most dairy producers convert the land firstly and then convert the cows in the final 6 months of the two year conversion period. This allows dairy producers to continue to produce non-organic milk during the conversion period thereby maintaining their income during this transitional period.

Where only the land starts conversion, the land is awarded organic status 2 years later. However, during the conversion period, the stock is subject to the requirements of the organic standards with the exception of the feed (all feed used must be guaranteed GM-free). These animals will then be required to start conversion 6 months before the land achieves organic status. Milk produced on the farm can be sold as organic when the land is awarded organic status and the stock have completed a 6 month conversion period – during this last six month period all feed used must be certified organic feed only. Any calves born on the holding 3 months after the stock have commenced conversion will achieve organic status when the land is awarded organic status.

Breed Selection and Replacement Stock: In the choice of breeds, high yielding Friesian animals at the expense of quality calves for meat productions versus more traditional dual-purpose breeds that have been bred for both milk and meat production are some of the more obvious considerations. The capacity of animals to adapt to local conditions, their vitality and their resistance to disease are important factors which should also be considered.

If your current stock is not suitable or up to the spec you require, it is a good idea to build up a quality dairy herd prior to entering organics. Once in the system you are generally only allowed to buy 10% of your adult herd numbers each year as non-organic nulliparous replacement heifers (they must not have produced a calf) and only if you can't source them organically. For farmers who are already in organic production who wish to establish a dairy herd and your current breed of stock is not suitable for dairy production, you may be allowed by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to buy in up to 40% of your current adult herd numbers as non-organic replacement heifers. It is important that you make an application to the Organic Trust for this derogation and obtain permission to buy in non-organic replacement heifers prior to culling any of your existing adult stock (adult cattle is any animal over 2 years old).

There are no restrictions on buying in non-organic breeding bulls. Artificial insemination is permitted. The key to success in this area is forward planning – breed your own replacements as far as possible. Be aware that you may need to look at the option of winter milking or split calving to provide the processor with milk all year round. This might require significant changes to your farm.

Housing: Each dairy cow requires 6m² housing. Half of this area must be of solid floor construction and requires bedding (generally non-organic straw or untreated wood shavings) but 50% of the area could be slatted. Cubicles must be 3m², clean and dry and sufficiently well bedded to give comfortable conditions. Cow mats are allowed in cubicles but must also have an additional layer of loose bedding on top.

Calves up to 100kg require 1.5m² of housing but generally other cattle require 1m² of housing per 100kg of live weight. The breeding bull requires 10m² of housing and an open-air exercise area.

Feed: As 100% of the feed must be organic you should aim to produce your entire forage requirements on your holding. The daily ration for cows should consist of at least 60% roughage, fresh or dried fodder, or silage. So you cannot feed in excess of 40% concentrates in the cow's daily ration. Key to controlling costs is to establish and maintain good quality grass/clover swards.

Cattle should have access to pasture for grazing whenever conditions allow. Farmers using or intending to use robotic milking machines should bear this in mind. Currently Teagasc is researching pasture grazing systems using robotic milking machines.



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If you intend holding onto calves until they are weaned, they must be fed natural organic milk (preferably maternal milk) and the calf must be at least 10 weeks old before weaning. Milk replacer (despite some such products being marketed as organically certified) cannot be used except in cases of emergency and in such cases to a maximum of 72 hours).

Veterinary Treatments: Protecting animal health is the most important objective of the organic livestock farmer and the veterinary surgeon is an important advisor on your farm. He can provide you with valuable advice on how to reduce dependence on veterinary inputs by maintaining the herd in the optimum condition e.g. correct procedure to reduce problems with mastitis when drying off cows, fencing wet areas, reducing parasite burdens and so forth. If, however, there is a breakdown in the system, you treat the animal as you would have done as a conventional farmer and record the event, the legal withdrawal period of the product; and the organic withdrawal period – the organic withdrawal period is not less than 14 days for milk or 3 times the legal withdrawal period for mastitis treatment (whichever is greater). For dairy mastitis control two full courses of antibiotics in a 12 month period is allowed. A breeding animal is allowed two full courses of antibiotics in a 12 month period - See Section 4.10 of the standards manual for the detailed requirements. The most important thing to remember is that all veterinary inputs must be in consultation with a prescribing veterinary surgeon.

At the application stage, an **Animal Health Plan** must be drawn up in conjunction with your veterinary surgeon. This should state the issues endemic on your farm (e.g. Blackleg) and also other issues which can arise for which veterinary inputs may be required. All veterinary inputs can only be used in consultation with the prescribing veterinary surgeon. The Animal Health Plan must be signed by the veterinary surgeon and submitted with your application documentation. The Organic Trust provides a template for the Animal Health Plan for ease of use – please apply to the office for this template. The Animal Health Plan must then be updated annually via the annual renewal form provided to each Organic Trust Member at renewal date.

Getting Certified: The Organic Trust is a recognised leader in all areas of organic certification. All of our inspectors are highly qualified for the sectors they inspect and have consistently received excellent reviews from external auditors. The Organic Trust was among the first certification bodies in Ireland to obtain ISO 17065 accreditation which assesses amongst other things: confidentiality, transparency, conflicts of interest, performance of the inspectorate and so forth.

Application Pack: A comprehensive application pack is available from the Organic Trust setting out all the information a new entrant into the organic sector will require to pursue organic certification. This pack includes a copy of the Organic Food and Farming Standards in Ireland and a very straightforward Application Form.

Apart from the application pack, the Organic Trust is on hand to directly discuss the requirements for certification with all potential applicants to clarify any outstanding points.

Inspection: At present all organic operators are inspected at least once every year. Initial inspections are organised for a time that suits the applicant. The inspection programme consists of a physical audit of the farm followed by the completion of a standard inspection questionnaire.

Certification: From the physical and documentary review carried out at the inspection, the Inspector produces a summary report of their findings which is reviewed by the Certification Panel. This panel is made up of organic stakeholder experts from within the Organic Trust who assess the inspector's report against the requirements of the standards.

The decision of the Certification Panel is communicated to each applicant who has an inspection report reviewed. Each applicant is issued with a Confidential Application Number which is the only identifying item on the summary report reviewed by the Certification Panel. The name, location or other identifying information of the applicant does not appear in the summary report – this ensures the transparency and anonymity of the certification process and ensures that no bias whatsoever can influence the certification of any entity.

Licence: Applicants who receive approval from the Certification Panel will receive a Licence/Schedule detailing the scope of enterprises covered by their in-conversion/organic operation. Organic Trust Licences are recognised throughout the EU as the Organic Trust is approved by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine; by DEFRA (UK) and by the EU Commission.

Step-by-Step Process to Obtaining an Organic Producer Licence:

- Obtain an application pack from the Organic Trust by phoning 01 8530271 or emailing organic@iol.ie
- Complete the application form and return it to the Organic Trust office, together with the documentation and other requirements specified on a point-by-point basis on the final page of the form – telephone the Organic Trust office if any clarifications are required.
- The Organic Trust will agree a mutually satisfactory date and time for the physical inspection of your unit
- Your inspection report will be reviewed by the Organic Trust Certification Panel (on an anonymous basis)
- Your in-conversion/organic licence will be issued.



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