

Organic Crop Production - FAQs

Prepared by: **John Hollinger**

MAFRI Business Development Specialist - Organic

What is the definition of an organic product?

An organic product is that which is raised, grown, or processed without the use of synthetically produced chemicals or fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, or any other pesticides, growth hormones, growth regulators or genetically modified organisms.

What does “certified organic” mean?

A product with this label will have an audit trail showing that it has complied with the stringent production and processing standards of the Canadian Organic Products Regulations, as verified by an independent third party.

How does a field become organic?

- Prohibited substances have not been used on the field for at least three years prior to the crop harvest; the field must be inspected in **both** year #2 and year #3.
- A certifying agency **may** reduce the required conversion period if the producer can document that organic practices have been followed on a field for at least two years prior to seeking certification. Fields that have grown forages for many years often fall into this category.

Does organic seed have to be used?

Yes. Organic seed, bulbs, tubers, cuttings, annual seedlings, transplants and other propagules must be used to produce an organic crop. Genetically modified plant sources are prohibited from use.

Can a farm grow both organic and conventional wheat in the same year?

Parallel production, where the products of the organic and non-organic systems are indistinguishable, is not allowed.

Does the entire farm have to be organic?

No. There may be both conventional and organic land on a farm, but the producer must have a plan to convert the entire operation to organic production within 10 years (or 5 years in some jurisdictions). The organic plan for a farm operation must outline the details of transition, production, preparation, handling and management practices. The plan must be updated annually.

Are buffer zones required between organic and non-organic fields?

A minimum buffer of 8 metres (25 feet) is required. If this buffer is in the organic field, all products grown in the buffer area will be considered to be non-organic.

What type of manure can be applied to organic land?

Any type of livestock manure can be used, but it generally has to be composted for a minimum period of six frost-free months. This requirement may vary according to specific circumstances and certifying agencies. Sewage sludge in any form is prohibited.

How much does it cost to become certified organic?

The cost of annual certification is in the range of \$600-\$1500, depending on the type of farm, the number of acres and the certifying agency being used.

Are there any commercial synthetic products that may be used?

Yes, but they must be on the Permitted Substances List (PSL) included in the Canadian Organic Products Regulations.

Do processing facilities such as seed plants and flour mills have to be certified?

Yes. Any facilities that handle organic food products must be inspected by an independent third party acting on behalf of a certifying agency.

What about transportation and storage of organic grain and processed products?

Commingling of organic and conventional products (raw or processed) is prohibited. Organic grain must be physically identifiable and segregated from non-organic grain. Cleaning methods must only use products on the PSL.

Is a farmer allowed to switch back and forth between organic and conventional production?

No. Production units cannot be rotated in and out of organic production.

Are there organic rules for greenhouses or honey production?

The Canadian Organic Products Regulations specify production requirements for crops, livestock, apiculture, maple syrup, mushrooms, sprouts, greenhouses and wild crops.

How much of a premium can an organic producer get from the marketplace?

Although production costs can often be higher in organic operations, gross returns are generally 30-50% more than those earned from conventional products.

What resources are available?

The *Organiculture* page on the MAFRI website lists several helpful links:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/organic/>

The “*Organic Field Crop Handbook*” published by the Canadian Organic Growers is a good printed resource. It is available at www.cog.ca

“*Organic Farming*” by Nicolas Lampkin has been used as a textbook in several organic courses. New and used editions are available at www.amazon.ca