



ORGANIC FACT SHEET

TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION

QUICK FACTS

- Farms will usually have a transition period before they can be certified.
- Before you begin your transition to organic; research your market options.
- Food processors, restaurants, distributors, and retailers do not have a required transition period if they are not growing their own food or fiber (purchasing all ingredients).



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ORGANIC IS AN OPPORTUNITY

The organic food industry has grown substantially over the past 30 years, from only \$1 billion in sales in 1990, to \$57.5 billion in 2021. Organic now represents about 6% of all food sold in the United States. Nearly all retailers report that consumers are demanding even more organic options. The market continues to grow, so more organic farms and processors are needed to meet this demand. The future is bright for organic food production!

Consumers are willing to pay a premium price for organic foods. A recent analysis shows that organic foods sell for 20% to 60% higher prices than conventional foods. This price premium helps with greater economic returns for organic farmers and processors.

Before you begin your transition to organic; research your market options. Contact organic buyers and processors in your area to determine the need and the potential market. You should approach organic production like any other business enterprise. Good research and planning will help you make sound decisions.

MAKING THE TRANSITION FOR FOOD PROCESSORS AND HANDLERS

Food processors, restaurants, distributors, and retailers do not have a required transition period if they are not growing their own food or fiber (purchasing all ingredients). If you do have your own production, that land and/or those animals will have to follow the same transition requirements as farmers (producers).

MAKING THE TRANSITION FOR FARMERS – LAND

By law, all land that is used to produce organic foods or fiber must be free of prohibited materials for 36 months prior to the first harvest. Farms cannot be certified until at least one part of the operation qualifies for organic production.

Land that is currently being farmed with prohibited fertilizers and pesticides will have to undergo a full 36-month transition. If the land has never been farmed, or it has been some time since the last application of a prohibited material, it may immediately qualify, or take less time to transition. To determine how long each field will take to transition, simply determine the last date a prohibited material was applied and then move forward 36 months. That is the date when that field can be certifiable as organic.

There is a common misconception that the entire farm must be certified. Certification can be done on a “field by field” basis with certified fields, transitional fields and conventional fields all on the same farm. You can certify part, or all of your farm, depending upon your needs.

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PROHIBITED MATERIALS

During the transition, you need to manage that land as if it were organic. Only materials that are listed as “approved” can be used. If a prohibited material is applied intentionally, or by accident, your transition date for that field will be reset to 36 months. It is critical to understand and follow the National Organic Standards during the transition period to prevent costly mistakes. We strongly recommend that you contact us for a copy of the [National Organic Standards](#) and for a copy of the [National List of Approved and Prohibited Substances](#).

In general, most synthetic inputs are prohibited. This includes most chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Most natural inputs are allowed, but a few are prohibited due to toxicity or other negative impacts. Reference the [National List](#) and the [OMRI Materials List](#) for details, or call MOSA. Never apply an input when you are not sure of the status. Also note that all genetically modified seeds, and products made with genetically modified ingredients, are prohibited.

Special Note: Manure from conventional farms is not a prohibited input, provided it has not been treated with or mixed with prohibited materials.

SEEDS

The National Organic Standards require certified operations to use certified organic seeds if commercially available. Farms in transition do not have to use certified organic seeds, but any seeds used must be non-GMO and untreated. As with prohibited materials, GMO or treated seeds will reset your transition time to 36 months. If you plant a crop during the transition, but intend to harvest that crop as organic, those seeds must be certified organic (if commercially available). Certified organic seeds are available for most crops.



MAKING THE TRANSITION – LIVESTOCK

Dairy animals can be transitioned to organic production, but only one transition is allowed per operation. The official rule is one year of organic management before dairy products can be certified organic. During that year, the animals must be fed 100% organic feed (or 3rd year transitional), and must be managed without prohibited materials, such as antibiotics, hormones or parasiticides not on the National List, and most other synthetic health inputs.

For organic meat, and for organic fiber, mammalian animals must be raised organically from at least the last third of gestation. During that time the mothers must be fed 100% certified organic feed and managed without prohibited materials. The mothers do not have to be organic stock, but can never be sold for organic meat.

Poultry must be raised organically from the 2nd day of life for eggs and meat to be sold as organic. For more information about livestock, see our Fact Sheet “Organic Livestock Certification.”

OTHER PREPARATIONS

Outdoor access is required year round for all organic livestock. All organic ruminant animals are required to have an average minimum of 30% Dry Matter Intake (DMI) from pasture during the regional grazing season (not less than 120 days).

If you do not currently have enough pasture to meet the rule, or if your facilities do not allow outdoor access, you should begin converting some fields to pasture, researching rotational grazing, and modifying your infrastructure so you are prepared for transition to organic certification.

MOSA'S TRANSITIONAL VERIFICATION

To make your transition to organic certification easier, you may want to take advantage of MOSA's Transitional Verification Program. For \$300 per year, we will review your records and paperwork to verify that your inputs, seeds, and recordkeeping are compliant with the National Organic Standards.

After our internal review, you will receive a Transitional Verification Letter that will outline areas of compliance and noncompliance, and identify the transition completion dates for your farm fields and livestock. This annual process will give you peace of mind and a better understanding of the records you must keep and submit when you request organic certification in the future.

No on-farm inspection is required during Transitional Verification, only an office review, which keeps your costs down.

In addition, you'll get ongoing support from our Certification Customer Service Team, who can help with input review and provide assistance to keep you on the right track.

RESOURCES:

MOSES Guidebook for Certification: <https://mosaorganic.org/images/documents/MOSES-Guidebook.pdf>

USDA “Is Organic an Option for Me” <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/organic-certification/is-it-an-option>