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# Organic Transition Kit

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Information to assist  
farmers interested in  
transitioning to  
organics.

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# THE ORGANIC ADVANTAGE

**CONSUMERS ARE  
HUNGRY FOR  
ORGANICS**

Since 2006, the Canadian organic food market has tripled in value. With more than 20 million consumers purchasing organics weekly, it's clear that consumers are serious about investing in a healthier, more sustainable lifestyle.

As an organic farmer, you'll rely on energy-efficient and cost-effective feeds, fertilizers and pesticides, such as forages, manure and legumes. And when it comes to harvest time, your crops and livestock will be worth much more than their conventional counterparts. Combine these lowered costs and price premiums, and you uncover a healthier bottom line.

*Source: Organic Advantage, Field Crops, Organic Value Chain Roundtable.*



**\$ 2.8 BN**

in annual Canadian  
organic food sales



**\$ 458 BN**

in annual Canadian  
organic exports



**58 %**

of Canadian consumers buy  
organic products every week.

Demand for organic products has been growing at 20% per year without a corresponding increase in the number of organic farmers.



**CONSUMER  
DEMAND FOR  
ORGANICS  
EXCEEDS  
SUPPLY**

## 5 REASONS WHY TRANSITIONING TO ORGANICS MAKES BUSINESS SENSE

*Lower costs,  
increased profitability.*



[Download the full Beef report](#)

[Download the full Field Crops report](#)

[Download the full Vegetable Crops report](#)

1. Inputs like synthetic fertilizer and pesticides are not relied upon.
2. Less investment per acre to grow an organic crop.
3. 30% and 50% less energy is required per acre when all energy sources are accounted for.
4. High quality organic crops and livestock receive premium prices (generally 1.5-3.0 times higher than those for conventional).
5. Combining lower costs with price premiums results in a healthier bottom line.

*Source:  
Organic Advantage, Grain Production.  
Organic Value Chain Roundtable.*

*The economic advantages of entering the organic market.  
W. Hamm & H. Martin (revised January, 2015).*

A photograph of a vast field of golden wheat under a dramatic, cloudy sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The clouds are wispy and catch the light, creating a textured, ethereal atmosphere. The field of wheat is in the foreground, with the stalks standing tall and slightly swaying. In the distance, a flat horizon line separates the field from the sky, with a few small structures or trees visible on the left side.

## **MAKE A NATURAL PROGRESSION**

The decision is yours. You don't have to convert your whole farm at once. Many producers start with one or two fields and create a plan to transition their whole farm over time.

On the other hand, you may choose to make a faster transition and take advantage of the higher profit margins.

Whatever you choose, PEI COPC has the network and resources to help your farm become more profitable.

# WHAT TO EXPECT

Interested in becoming an organic farmer? Your transition has the potential to protect and improve your farm's soil health, protect the environment, and support your family through improved profitability.

## SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION PRACTICES

### *Soil Fertility in Organic Farming*

It all starts with building healthy soil. Successful organic farming is based on using carefully planned multi-year crop rotations and boosting soil organic matter with green manuring and adding compost and manures. We can help guide you, with the local research and excellent resources on best management practices for organic production.

### *But What About The Weeds?!*

It's true that weed management is probably the biggest challenge faced by organic producers. While an organic field will never be 100% weed-free, the organic approach involves a suite of techniques to prevent weeds from adversely affecting crop yields. Successful management techniques for weed control include crop rotation, careful timing of tillage and/ or seeding, innovative tillage methods, clipping tall weeds growing above shorter crops, intercropping, etc. The PEI COPC has networks and resources to share that will help you learn more about how you can manage weeds on your farm – based on sound research and the success of other farmers like you.

## GETTING CONNECTED

Keep up-to-date on upcoming events and workshops at  
[www.organicpei.com](http://www.organicpei.com)

## BECOMING CERTIFIED

Transitioning from conventional to organic takes 36 months from the last application of a prohibited substance to when a certified organic crop can be harvested. This typically means two or three years of transitional crops following the last conventional crop before the first certified organic crop is harvested depending on when during the growing season the last prohibited substance was applied. If it was in the spring, it may be two years and if it was in the fall it would be closer to three years. For livestock, animals fed certified organic feed for the last trimester *in utero* and housed appropriately are eligible for certification.

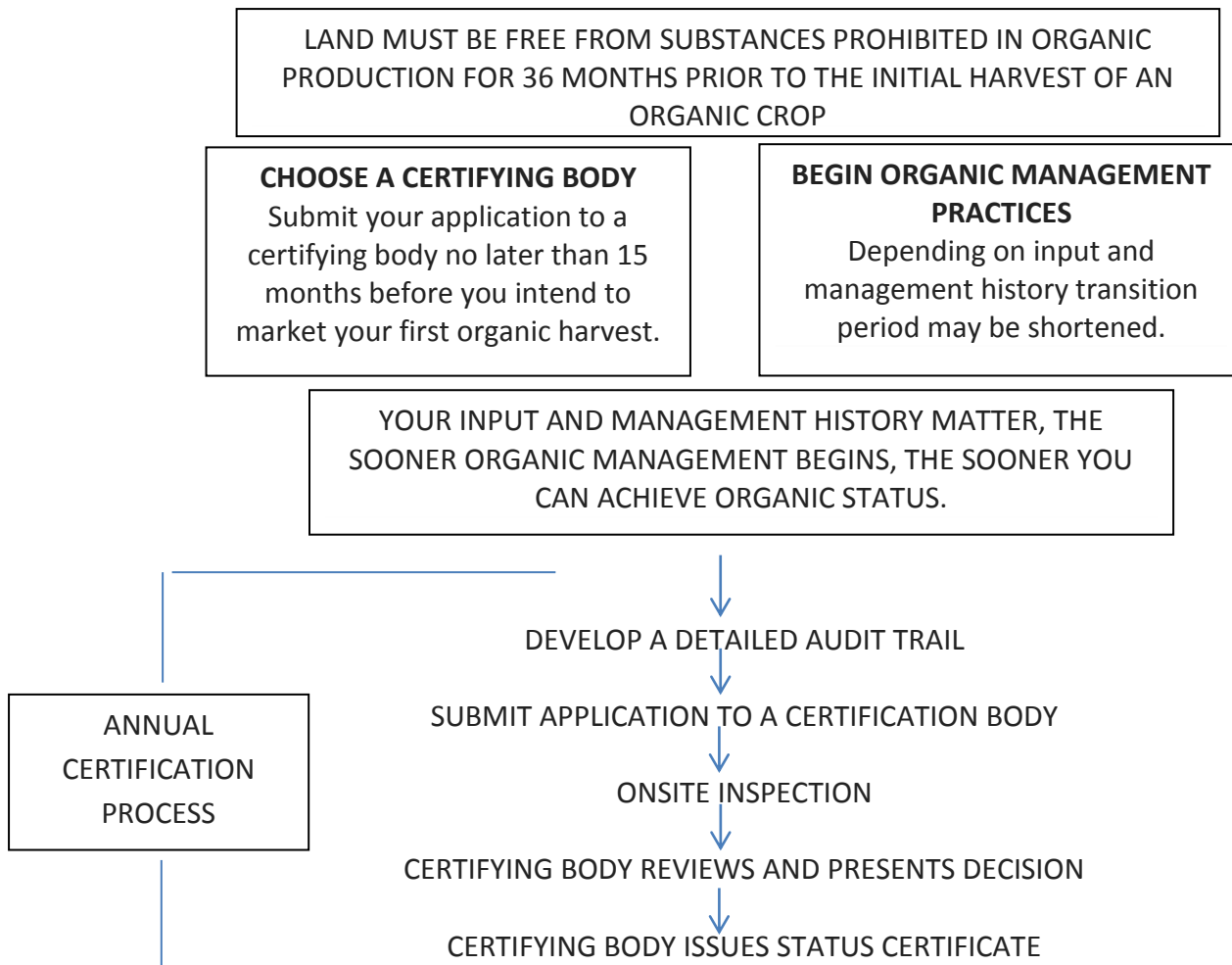


# THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Each organic farmer must certify with an accredited certification body (CB). The certification body oversees the certification process and verifies that organic products are compliant with the Canadian Organic Standards.

Maintaining certification year-to-year requires annually providing the certifier with your detailed production plan, having an inspection and reviewing of your business. Aspects of your business that are found non-compliant with the organic standard must be resolved before your business can be granted organic status by the certifier.

TRANSITION PERIOD = TIME BETWEEN THE START OF ORGANIC MANAGEMENT AND CERTIFICATION



## CERTIFYING BODIES

The following certifying bodies inspect and certify according to the **Canadian Organic Standard**

### CONTACT INFORMATION FOR CERTIFYING BODIES

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#### **Pro-Cert Organic Systems, Ltd.**

Jill Baxter  
Financial Administrator  
Eastern Regional Office

Phone: [\(705\) 374-5602](tel:7053745602)  
Fax: [\(705\) 374-5604](tel:7053745604)  
[www.pro-cert.org](http://www.pro-cert.org)

#### **Trans Canada Organic TCO**

Susannah Banks, PAg  
Administrator  
16 Gilks Road, Maugerville, NB E3A 8N4  
toll-free: [1-888-375-9190](tel:18883759190)  
Phone: [506-454-3297](tel:5064543297)  
Fax: [506-454-4155](tel:5064544155)  
[www.tcocert.com](http://www.tcocert.com)

#### **Ecocert Canada**

Gilles Belley  
Sales and commercial representation  
Telephone: [\(418\) 838-6941](tel:4188386941) ext: 112  
Cell : [\(514\) 467-6941](tel:5144676941)  
Toll-free: [1-855 246-9383](tel:18552469383)  
Fax: [\(418\) 838-9823](tel:4188389823)  
[gilles.belley@ecocert.com](mailto:gilles.belley@ecocert.com)

#### **OCIA**

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Email: [ocia.atlantic@gmail.com](mailto:ocia.atlantic@gmail.com)  
[www.ocia.org](http://www.ocia.org)

#### **OTHER IMPORTANT CONTACTS**

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Susan MacKinnon is the Organic Industry Development Officer for the **PEI Department of Agriculture & Fisheries** – where there are program supports available to assist with transition to organic production. Susan's contact information is [here](#)

#### **Check out our Producer directory at:**

[www.organicpei.com](http://www.organicpei.com)

to connect with organic farmers who have successfully made the transition from conventional to organic production.

# ORGANIC STANDARDS

Canada's Organic Standards are Federal regulations that provide organic certification requirements.

The standards, which cover production practices and permitted substances, are updated every five years.

[DOWNLOAD THE CANADIAN ORGANIC PRODUCTION STANDARD](#)

[DOWNLOAD THE PERMITTED SUBSTANCES LIST](#)

**Find Out More At:**  
[\*\*http://inspection.gc.ca\*\*](http://inspection.gc.ca)





# HOW TO DEVELOP AN ORGANIC PLAN

## WHAT IS AN ORGANIC PLAN AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

Section 4 of the Canadian Organic standard (COS) requires all organic operators to have an organic plan which provides details related to transition, productions, preparation and management. Creating an organic plan can be a valuable exercise for your overall business planning and management.

The organic certification bodies have made building an organic plan easy for you – they have designed their questionnaires to gather all of the information required by the COS. In addition to asking you detailed questions, they will also provide a list of supporting documentation required.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN AN ORGANIC PLAN?

- A MAP OF THE FARM
- FIELD HISTORIES
- INPUT DETAILS
- PRODUCTION

- CONTAMINATION RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
- RECORD KEEPING
- PLANNED SCHEDULE FOR TRANSITIONING

### YOUR PRACTICES & PROCEDURES

Describe your farm, answering questions such as the following:

- What crops will you plant this year? What crop rotations, and/ or intercropping is taking place on your farm this year?
- What soil building methods will you implement this year?
- What weed and pest problems do you anticipate, and how will you manage them?
- What strategies will you use to protect your crops from being contaminated or comingling with non-organic sources, in the field, in storage and in transport?
- Where do you source your seed?
- If you irrigate or provide water to livestock, is your water source compliant with the organic standard?
- What kind of living conditions do you have for your livestock?
- What do you feed them?
- How do you ensure they stay healthy?
- What do you do if they get sick?

Your organic plan must be updated every year to reflect changes in your management practices, any problems you may have had, and what you did to solve those problems.

### RECORD-KEEPING

Keeping good records is the foundation for an organic plan. It doesn't have to be daunting. The most crucial thing is that you must be able to provide documentation that, what you are doing in your operation complies with the standard.

Record keeping is a matter of creating a habit and style that works for you: you can keep a daily log or use a calendar to write down what you've done each day, or use a spreadsheet.

The documentation trail must be able to be used to track each organic crop and animal, in terms of the seed used, the fields planted, any equipment or materials involved in planting, harvesting, handling, storage and transport, livestock birth records, prophylactic and curative livestock treatments (homeopathic or otherwise), feed type and source. Your records are the basis for verifying that you've done everything possible to protect the organic integrity of your crops and livestock at each stage of production that was under your control. These records must be kept for at least 5 years.

When an organic inspector comes to your farm for the annual inspection, they are tasked with confirming if your records accurately represent the activity taking place on your farm. The organic inspector will visit your fields and barns, and look at your equipment and storage facilities as part of verifying if you are following the standard and maintaining organic integrity throughout your production process.

## BUYER EXPECTATIONS

Getting started in organics? Meeting buyer expectations, as summarized in 4 points below will help you achieve success.

1. **DON'T DECIDE TO GROW ORGANICALLY SIMPLY BASED ON PRICE OR WITHOUT THOROUGH RESEARCH RELEVANT TO YOUR OPERATION**  
Your experience might include growing certain conventional crops and varieties, or maybe you've heard that prices are excellent for a certain crop. Before jumping in, ask around (buyers are a good place to start) to develop a good understanding of what the market truly seeks and needs. Research all the risks and benefits of growing different highly marketable crops and livestock to refine your idea of what a target market should be, based on a range of factors specific to your operation, including: your land area available, weed pressure, available equipment for weed management and harvesting, capacity for primary processing (i.e. pre-cleaning grains), etc. Successful organic farmers mitigate risk year-to-year by developing rotations – and their expertise- that involve growing more than one highly marketable crop and break crops, such as milling wheat, that promote long-term fertility and weed control. Be sure to consider and research high-demand crops, varieties, livestock and breeds - especially ones that other farmers are not yet growing widely.
2. **BASE YOUR PRODUCTION GOALS AND PLANS ON CURRENT PRICES**  
Prices for organic crops and products do generally look attractive; prices do shift, however, year-to-year. Be sure you are growing crops (and raising livestock) according to prices for this growing year; it's worth asking around, checking in with potential buyers before you plant in order to avoid surprises at harvest time. You can keep up – to-date on organic grain prices by visiting [www.organicpei.com](http://www.organicpei.com)
3. **THINK “LONG-TERM” IN RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUYERS**  
Strive to be what buyers call a “reliable supplier”. Buyers want you to: a) meet volume expectations; b) meet quality expectations; and, c) excel at customer service in your dealings with them.
4. **MEETING QUALITY EXPECTATIONS IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE**



**WE'RE HERE TO HELP**  
Call us at 902-894-9999  
[email@organicpei.com](mailto:email@organicpei.com)  
[www.organicpei.com](http://www.organicpei.com)