

## ANALYSIS OF THE PROCESS OF ORGANIC CERTIFICATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Alexandra MUSCĂNESCU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The University of Agronomical Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest 59 Mărăști Blvd., sector 1, 011464, Bucharest, Romania, Phone No.: + 40 0724.643.385, E-mail: alexandramuscanescu@yahoo.com

*Corresponding author:* [alexandramuscanescu@yahoo.com](mailto:alexandramuscanescu@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*Every product marketed under 'organic' must comply with a set of UK, European Union and international rules. These rules (also known as standards) assure the consumers that they bought original organic products able to be traced back all the way to the farm. Organic standards cover all of the aspects of organic food certification, including production and packaging, animal welfare, wildlife preservation and interdict all useless and dangerous food additives in processing organic foods. The British organic control bodies authorize individual organic operators. These are approved by DEFRA (The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs). In order for a producer to have his merchandise marketed as organic, he must be affiliated to one of the control bodies and comply to its standards and requirements. The present article presents the certification control bodies in organic agriculture as well as the steps to be taken in the organic certification process within the United Kingdom.*

*Key words:* certification process, control bodies, DEFRA, organic standards

### INTRODUCTION

Organic food production in Europe is strictly regulated by an inspection, certification and labeling scheme. It is unlawful to call a food product 'organic' if it has not been inspected and certified by one of several organic control bodies (CBs).

If one wants to diversify into organic food, they will need to undertake a fundamental change in their farming, production and processing practices. For example, organic farming strictly limits the use of artificial chemical fertilizers and pesticides - they would need to use natural methods of pest control, as well as using crop rotation to keep the soil healthy.

It can take up to three years to become certified as an organic producer as per European Community organic food and farming regulations.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article analyzes the procedures considered by the Government of the United Kingdom and the Certification Bodies by

following a set of key requirements set towards certifying organic farming.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Whilst there is plenty of information available to assist farmers in converting their land and managing it organically, the process of getting certified often seems quite complicated and confusing.

The labelling and marketing of organic food and feed products is controlled by EC Regulations 889/2008 and 1235/2008. Any person or organization intending to produce or process these organic products must be subject to an inspection and certification procedure by an approved inspection body. Anyone contravening these Regulations could be subject to prosecution by Trading Standards.

The following operations must be subject to the inspection and certification process:

- Farm production including arable and horticultural crops and livestock producing food intended for human consumption;
- Processing involving food preparation, prepacking and storage. This includes on-farm

processing such as dairy products, butchers shops, etc.;

- Organic products imported from countries outside the European Union, known as third countries;
- Animal feeds production;
- The re-labeling of products at any stage of the distribution chain.

Each production unit has to be registered and inspected. The area of land is specified down to the individual fields, OS/RLR numbers and areas. Only products from those fields may be marketed as organic. Each production enterprise, such as, cereals, dairy cattle and milk, vegetables etc must be licensed and only products from those enterprises may be marketed as organic. A named individual has to be responsible for the management of the organic unit.

Where the processing of products takes place on the farm, these must be included in the inspection and certification process. Where the farm's products are stored or processed at other premises, the premises used must also be inspected. This can include the drying or storage of organic cereals at another farm or grain store and the cold storage and washing of potatoes off site.

A number of organic CBs are allowed to certify organic businesses in the UK, including the production, processing and importing of organic products. CBs are licensed and controlled by the responsible authority in each EU member state. In the UK, Defra is the enforcing authority.

The approved certification bodies in the United Kingdom are:

- Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd (OF&G)
- Scottish Organic Producers Association (SOPA)
- Organic Food Federation (OFF)
- Soil Association Certification Ltd. (SA Cert)
- Biodynamic Agricultural Association (BDAA Demeter)
- Irish Organic Farmers' & Growers' Association (IOFGA)
- Food Certification (Scotland) Ltd.
- Organic Trust Limited
- Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd.
- Ascisco Ltd (including processors).

Once the organic farmer has chosen a CB, the process is as follows:

- 1.He has to read their information pack thoroughly
- 2.Get the application pack and manual, which is likely to include their production and processing standards and application forms
- 3.Study the standards that apply to their farm to make sure that they will be able to meet them
- 4.Complete the relevant application forms - including the conversion plan - and return them to the CB's office, making sure they have provided all the required information.

Approved UK Certification Bodies	Logo	UK Code*
Organic Farmers and Growers Ltd		UK2
Scottish Organic Producers' Association		UK3
Organic Food Federation		UK4
Soil Association Certification Ltd		UK5
BDAA Demeter		UK6
Irish Organic Farmers' & Growers' Association		UK7
Food Certification Scotland Ltd		UK8
Organic Trust Limited		UK9
Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd		UK13
Ascisco Ltd		UK15

Figure 1. Approved Certification Bodies in the United Kingdom

Undergo an inspection of the farm and/or processing unit/s:

1. Correct any shortcomings the inspector points out and if necessary agree to a further inspection
2. Receive a Certificate of Compliance and a schedule to it - listing everything their business is certified for - for public display and to give to customers who ask for it
3. Agree to undergo an annual inspection as well as spot or unannounced inspections
4. Agree to comply with the penalties imposed following the discovery of any infringements to the standards of their CB

5. Allow the taking of samples for analysis on a routine basis or where a problem is suspected, eg. contamination.

Once the farm is registered, the CB should notify Defra so that the farm is entered onto the national register.

DEFRA is the Government department responsible for overseeing certification of organic production within the UK and has delegated that role to organic certification bodies.



Figure 2. Logo of DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

The standards set by DEFRA conform to the minimum standards set by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM).

The DEFRA UK Compendium of organic standards - set by the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) - offers a baseline for all UK organic production and each certification body owns its own standards which are based on the Compendium.

Both Soil Association and SOPA standards in particular are higher than this baseline, though other certification bodies also have higher standards.

Organic Certification Bodies hold details of their operators which is mandatory under EU legislation. Defra (as the 'responsible body') is required to send an EU return each year that includes details of all certified organic operators.

Each Certification Body sends a list of their organic operators, along with crop areas and livestock numbers measured at a point in time

through the year during the annual on-farm inspections.

The organic Certification Bodies compile data specifically for Defra based on the annual on-farm inspections of their licensees. These inspections take place to allow the Certification Bodies to fulfill the organic control requirements as determined by the organic EU Regulations.

The conversion period is normally 2 years (or 3 years for perennial fruit or vegetable crops) but this can be reduced by up to 4 months (20 or 32 months) if records and a visual inspection prove that there has been no use of artificial inputs for the 4 months prior to the date of application.

Conversion can be done in stages or the whole farm can be converted at the same time. Many farms, particularly mixed farms have successfully converted the whole farm in one go. Alternatively staged conversion over a period of perhaps three or four years has the advantage of providing time to learn new techniques, finding out which system suits the farm best and spreading risks by testing the market slowly.

During the first 12 months of the conversion period, all crops must be sold as non-organic;

- Crops harvested after the first 12 months of the conversion period may be marketed under the label "Produced under conversion to organic farming".

There is a strong market for conversion cereals and legumes for stock feed and a developing market for conversion fruit and vegetables. Farm shops can also sell the produce of the farm under this label.

-Crops that were sown or planted into land that has achieved organic status can be sold as organic;

-Perennial fruit and vegetable crops can be sold as organic after the plant has been through 36 months of conversion;

-Grazing and forage crops harvested after the land becomes organic can be sold as organic.

## CONCLUSIONS

As one of the largest producers of organic food in the whole of Europe, the United

Kingdom has to comply to a set of rules controlled by EC Regulations.

Organic production rules in the UK are governed by European Regulation EC Regulations 889/2008 and 1235/2008.

Any person contravening these Regulations could be subject to prosecution by Trading Standards.

In the UK, there are various Certification Bodies which are licensed and controlled by the responsible authority in each EU member state.

The Certification Bodies (CBs) are allowed to certify organic businesses in the UK, including the production, processing and importing of organic products.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This research work was supported and financed by the POSDRU/107/1.5/S/76888 program.

## **REFERENCES**

- [1] [www.organicfarmers.org.uk/](http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk/)
- [2] [www.organicfarmers.org.uk/](http://www.organicfarmers.org.uk/)
- [3] [www.defra.gov.uk/publications/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/)
- [4] [www.sopa.org.uk/](http://www.sopa.org.uk/)
- [5] [www.aboutorganics.co.uk/organic\\_information/organic\\_accreditation.htm](http://www.aboutorganics.co.uk/organic_information/organic_accreditation.htm)