

# ORGANIC CONVERSION PLAN

**Conversion of a holding to organic management will vary between holdings according to individual circumstances & enterprises involved.**

**Important influences on conversion planning will include the balance, complexities and intensity of current & future farming practice, on the experience of the farmer & staff, on the ecological situation and on finances.**

For SOPA Members conversion to organic management must be implemented using permitted materials & practices in accordance to the SOPA Organic Standards and begin once the Conversion Plan, Start Date & Type have been agreed with the SOPA Producer Certification Team. The holding is then subject to regular monitoring (e.g. annual organic farm inspection & review) to verify that the organic standards continue to be adhered to.

As much detail as possible should be provided within the Conversion Plan to enable the SOPA Producer Certification Team to ascertain whether the proposed plans for conversion are both a viable and sustainable proposition in relation to compliance with the organic standards. Reference to the SOPA Producer Standards should be made at all stages in the conversion process and within the plan. It is also recommended that advice is sought prior to a holding embarking on conversion to organic management. Please note that as the certification provider OF&G (Scotland) and your designated SOPA Producer Certification Officer can answer queries relating directly to the interpretation of the published SOPA Organic Standards & associated Organic Regulation but can not offer advice. Whereas SOPA Member Services can provide guidance & information on conversion planning & potential funding options in detail.

**As a guide the Conversion Plan must include the following detail where applicable to the individual unit:**

## **Overview of Holding**

### **1) Introduction - set the scene:**

- *description of farm/croft e.g. location, size, land type, rented land/common grazing;*
- *who oversees day-to-day management;*
- *Background to holding, resources and enterprises;*
- *Summary of how managed prior to decision to convert to organic management, include details of any intensive systems e.g. bull beef, continuous cropping;*
- *Once conversion begins detail all enterprises and how each will interact to create a balanced farming system under organic management. Include details of links with other producers e.g. grazier, renting out fields for veg; and*
- *Identify the type & area of land that is proposed to enter conversion, if a phased conversion (different blocks of fields starting conversion over a staggered time period due to rotational requirements) is planned and if there is any land or enterprises that will not enter conversion.*

### **Note:**

*Ideally the whole holding should convert to organic management (much easier in terms of day-to-day management & record keeping). If any land or enterprise are to continue to be managed non-organically the conversion plan must include an additional section to detail how separation will be maintained between in-conversion/organic & non-organic land/enterprises (e.g. separate crop storage, if shared machinery or staff what measures will be put in place to avoid mixing of organic with non-organic) and the avoidance of parallel production (see Section 1.2 of the SOPA Standards). It is generally not acceptable to have converting fields scattered over a larger non-organic holding unless the farm is undertaking a planned phased conversion which will result in the organic fields being grouped together once conversion is completed. If a producer is involved in the management of in-conversion/organic and non-organic land/enterprises the non-organic elements of the business will also be subject to inspection at the annual on-farm SOPA organic inspection.*

- 2) Proposed Conversion Timeline** – *detail proposed conversion start date, keeping in mind any funding rule requirements, and conversion type (standard conversion = land converts for 2 years followed by stock or simultaneous conversion = land & stock begin two-year conversion period at same time). Also see our Types of Conversion Guidance Note for more information on the conversion types.*
- 3) An up-to-date map(s) of the holding** - *including field numbers, LPIDs, hectares and full 9-digit farm/location code (CPH). Ideally the map generated by SGRPID. Also include descriptions of boundaries and buffer zones. The organic standards specify a minimum buffer distance to be maintained around*

organic land adjoining non-organic which needs to be described in the plan and checked at each annual farm inspection to ensure the risk of contamination of the organic land (e.g. from spray drift) is mitigated (see SOPA Standard 2.6.3).

- 4) **A sketch drawing of the steading** - indicating the dimensions of buildings & storage areas, description, status and capacity (e.g. number of animals, cubicles, tonne grain or litres of slurry). SOPA Record Sheet RD735 – Farm Building Plan and List can be used.
- 5) **Field cropping histories & input records corresponding to the current map** – where available detail the past four years of cropping history and the proposed conversion date along with previous herbicide, pesticide and fertiliser usage including the dates the last prohibited inputs were applied on field-by-field basis.
- 6) **At least a five year forward cropping/grazing rotation plan** for all fields in keeping with the organic rotation requirements (see SOPA Standard 2.2.2).
- 7) **A soil management programme** including soil analyses (where available) and forward plan for undertaking regular/rotational soil samples. To act as a tool for monitoring & maintaining soil fertility. Also indicate going forward the products permitted by the SOPA Standards that may be used to correct potential soil nutrient deficiencies (see Section 4 of the SOPA Producer Standards). Further details may be included in crop management plan.
- 8) **Manure management, storage, handling & spreading** of manures/slurries/dirty water e.g. timings, application rate, priority crops. Some of the storage & handling details may have already been detailed in the farm buildings plan/list and further details included in crop management plan.
- 9) **Whole farm nutrition budget** – include as much detail as possible, but at least a ‘farm gate’ budget. Describe system used to manage major nutrients on farm & control their use, output, loss, cycling and management. Initially looking at N, P & K inputs & outputs to determine if any issues with deficient e.g. lead to the need to import additional supplementary nutrients on to farm or excess.

## **Individual Enterprises**

### **10) Livestock Management**

Describe each livestock enterprise detailing planned management, husbandry, health & welfare including;

- Breeds and breeding programme including replacement policy
- Proposed conversion for livestock (linked to conversion timeline)
- Housing or other wintering practices. Include details of cubicles, housing stocking densities etc. (*linked to SOPA Record Sheet RD735 – Farm Building Plan and List*)
- Feeding sources and rations, including mineral supplements
- A detailed health & veterinary plan for each enterprise & age of stock including biosecurity protocols, farm history and details of any blood, soil or forage analyses etc that support various areas of the plan
- Grazing policy

*Completing the SOPA Livestock Management/Health Plan (LMP) template will meet the bulk of the livestock requirements for the Conversion Plan. Formulating a management/health plan in conjunction with the farm’s veterinarian is strongly recommended both to ensure appropriate technical expertise is brought to bear on the plan and so that the farm’s nominated veterinary surgeon can familiarise him/herself with the farm and with organic requirements before any emergency occurs.*

### **11) Crop Management**

Describe each cropping enterprise, including grassland grazing & conserved forage management, detailing planned management, husbandry, growing, harvest and storage requirements including;

- Crop production cycle/methods with potential varieties including ley details, including legumes
- Rotation
- Pest and disease control
- Nutrient supply
- Weed control measures/strategy
- Reference to manure and nutrient supply
- Clean grazing and parasites control practices
- Harvest & storage procedures

*Completing the SOPA Crop Management Plan (CMP) template will meet most of the crop requirements for the Conversion Plan. Input from your crop advisor/agronomist is recommended.*

- 12) **Environmental & Biodiversity Plans** - *environmental conservation measures - practice and policy. Detail existing environmental/historical resources, habitats and features on the farm and any specific management requirements. Include information on membership of any other agri-environment schemes, include details of any potential areas of conflict with organic conversion i.e. grazing management, hedge/tree planting.*
- 13) **Production & Marketing Plans** - *detail marketing plans for your produce once fully organic. Give a description of the products that will be for sale off farm e.g. store/finished livestock, grain, silage, wool, meat, on-farm processing; the markets to be sold into and links to other businesses that process and market the farm produce. If elements of further processing are to be undertaken this may need to be covered by on-farm processing certification or separate complex processing certification depending on the activities undertaken.*
- 14) **Staff and Advice** - *detail staff involved with day-to-day management and any contractors used (include any specific precautions to be taken to avoid contamination for non-organic products). As well as plans for any training required to bring staff up to speed with requirements for organic management and keeping up-to-date with the SOPA Organic Producer Standards.*
- 15) **Complaints Register** - *a complaints procedure must be in place to record and to detail the actions taken to rectify any complaints that might be received. This may sound a negative point to end the conversion plan on, but it is important to ensure measures are put in place to protect organic integrity if an issue should arise. SOPA Record Sheet 19 can be held on file and used if necessary.*

### **Submit the Conversion Plan to the SOPA Producer Certification Team for Review**

You MUST submit your COMPLETED Conversion Plan to your designated SOPA Producer Certification Officer (CO) for consideration and in return receive written confirmation that your plan, along with your type and start date for conversion, has been approved. Your farm and associated enterprise CAN NOT officially start CONVERSION to ORGANIC MANAGEMENT until these details are confirmed and approved by OF&G (Scotland).

### **Application Farm Inspection**

Please note written confirmation from your CO of the approval of your SOPA membership & Conversion Plan, including the start date & type for the holding, is subject to the successful outcome of your initial organic farm inspection. To verify the written details of the conversion plan, one of our experienced organic farm Inspectors will be in contact to arrange to carry out the inspection closely following the holding commencing conversion. Thereafter organically certified businesses must have an inspection annually to verify continued compliance to the organic standards. The allocated Inspector will contact you directly to arrange a convenient date for the inspection based on guidance from the CO of when the inspection should take place. The registered SOPA Member, and if appropriate Farm Manager or agent, need to be available for the full duration of the inspection including a tour of the holding, to answer questions & provide records. Staff responsible for day-to-day field operations or care of animals must also be available to answer queries if required. The Inspector records their findings against the organic standard requirements specific to the business & enterprises and submits a detailed report following the inspection to the SOPA Producer Certification team for review. There is a set timeframe to provide corrective action for any issues raised. **It is worth noting that the Inspector does not have the powers to grant or renew a producer's organic certification and the final decision is made by the SOPA Producer Certification Team based on the findings of the inspection report.** See the 'Information Required by Inspector at SOPA Farm Inspection' checklist for more information on preparing for an inspection.

*It is important to familiarise yourself with the SOPA Organic Production Standards. In addition, talk to other organic farmers and research organic farming through books and the internet.*

*The [SOPA website](#), [organic blog](#) and Member updates & newsletters are also good reference points.*

*Remember contact SOPA Member Services to discuss all your conversion queries & to help with your conversion planning on **0300 772 9795** or email [info@sopa.org.uk](mailto:info@sopa.org.uk)*

Your completed conversion plan should be returned marked for the attention of your SOPA Producer Certification Officer to OF&G (Scotland), The Old Estate Yard, Shrewsbury Road, Albrighton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY4 3AG or alternatively you can email your plan to [certification@sopa.org.uk](mailto:certification@sopa.org.uk).