
Organic Farming in Wales

What is organic farming?

Organic farming aims to be a safe, sustainable farming system which produces healthy crops and livestock with a minimum of external inputs. It uses animal manures and crop rotations to maintain soil fertility, so avoiding the use of artificial fertilizers, and uses environmentally friendly methods of pest control, for instance by encouraging natural predators. Animal welfare standards are high, and the use of drugs and antibiotics is strictly limited. Organic farming is good for the countryside, with benefits to water quality, biodiversity, animal welfare, public health and local economies.

Food can only be sold as organic if it comes from a farm that has undergone the required conversion period (normally two years) and been inspected by one of the official certification bodies, which will give it an organic symbol.

How important is organic farming in Wales?

At the end of June 2002 there were just over 600 registered organic farms in Wales, either in conversion or with full organic status. Most are livestock farmers, with beef and sheep the largest category, followed by dairy. They farm a total area of about 50,000 ha which represents 3.4% of Welsh agriculture. The Welsh Assembly Government has set a target of 10% organic by 2005 and provides financial support directly to farmers through the conversion period, as well as supporting the work of organizations such as Organic Centre Wales. The WDA also provides support for organic farming and the marketing of organic food.

What does Organic Centre Wales do?

Organic Centre Wales, based in Aberystwyth, was set up in 2000 to act as a central point for information and advice on organic farming in Wales. It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and run jointly by ADAS, Elm Farm Research Centre, IGER, the Institute of Rural Studies at Aberystwyth and the Soil Association. From 2002, it is also running the organic development programme for Farming Connect.

The Centre provides a technical helpline for farmers and publishes information on its website and in its bulletin and factsheets. It provides access to advice from various sources and runs technical courses and events. It coordinates a network of demonstration farms as part of Farming Connect, and organizes regular open days and farm walks. In March 2002, it organized the first UK national organic farming research conference, at Aberystwyth.

How can I find out more?

- If you are a farmer interested in converting to organic production, ring the Organic Centre Wales helpline on 01970 622100 for an information pack and to arrange free advisory visits.
- For information on the Centre's services to farmers, see the website at www.organic.aber.ac.uk or ring 01970 622248.
- For general information on organic food and farming across the UK, including briefing sheets and publications, contact the Soil Association on 0117 929 0661 or see their website at www.soilassociation.org.

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