

# Organic Farming



Photo: Jeremy Moore

This booklet outlines the basic principles of organic farming and explains the process of conversion, including the grants and other support that is available. It has been produced by Organic Centre Wales, which coordinates the provision of advice and information to farmers.



The Centre is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and the EAGGF. It is based at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and run jointly by ADAS, Elm Farm Research Centre, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER), the Institute of Rural Sciences (UWA) and the Soil Association.

**Together we can make a difference**



**Canolfan Organig Cymru**  
**Organic Centre Wales**

Organic Farming Centre for Wales  
Institute of Rural Studies  
University of Wales Aberystwyth  
Ceredigion SY23 3AL  
Tel: 01970 622248  
Fax: 01970 622238  
Email: [organic@aber.ac.uk](mailto:organic@aber.ac.uk)  
[www.organic.aber.ac.uk](http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk)

*Organic*

**CONVERSION**

**INFORMATION**

**S E R V I C E**

**Helpline**  
**Tel: 01970 622100**  
Email: [organic-helpline@aber.ac.uk](mailto:organic-helpline@aber.ac.uk)

Calls may be monitored for training purposes

## Key elements of organic farming systems

*The main components of an organic farming system are the use of crop rotations and other forms of husbandry to maintain fertility and control weeds, pests and diseases, thereby avoiding the use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. Livestock are an integral part of many such systems, recycling nutrients in the form of manures and thus maintaining soil fertility. By reducing the use of external inputs and maintaining non-intensive systems, organic farming aims to protect the environment, ensure animal welfare and food quality, and strengthen local economies.*

### Rotations

A correctly designed and implemented crop rotation is at the heart of organic crop production. The rotation contains the following key elements:

- Provides sufficient crop nutrients and minimizes their losses
- Provides nitrogen through leguminous crops
- Aims to minimize and to help control weed, pest and disease problems
- Maintains the soil organic matter, microbial activity and structure
- Provides a profitable output of organic cash crops and/or livestock
- On grassland farms, diversity can be achieved in permanent pasture and under semi-natural rough grazing, and therefore these can be seen as acceptable alternatives to rotations.

### Crop nutrition

Fertility is generally provided by animal manures, leguminous nitrogen and green manures. The aim of the organic system is to be self-sustaining, although in some instances it may be necessary to bring in organic fertilizers or mineral products like rock phosphate and lime to improve soil fertility.

### Crop protection

Pest, weed and disease control are achieved through rotations, choice of varieties, timing of cultivations and habitat management to encourage natural predators. Where these measures fail, a limited number of approved substances may be used in a controlled manner.

### Livestock

Livestock form an integral part of the majority of organic farms, although there are some successful stockless systems. Organic livestock enterprises are supported from the farm's own resources as far as possible and are land-based, i.e. no intensively housed stock or systems where a large amount of the total feed has to be bought in and manures taken off the farm for disposal. Most existing dairy, beef and sheep enterprises can be converted to an organic system, given appropriate changes to feeding and housing. Pigs and poultry are managed extensively under an organic system, with outdoor access.

Organic standards require that the feed ration is 100% organic and that for sheep and cattle at least 60% of dry matter is from fresh or conserved forage. However, if farmers are not able to source organic material, they can use a certain amount of non organic feed (5% for sheep and cattle and 15% for pigs and poultry), but they must demonstrate (to their certification body) the need to do so. All organic systems rely on clover in the sward and stocking rates are likely to be lower than conventional units, depending on the previous levels of nitrogen use on the farm.

Generally, the aim is to maintain closed flocks and herds, and to breed and rear all replacements where possible, but there are opportunities to purchase and sell store and breeding stock to other organic producers. All animals slaughtered for meat must be born and raised on an organic holding, so calves or stores brought in from a conventional farm cannot be sold as organic.

### Animal health

Animal health within organic systems relies on good husbandry and preventive management. Routine use of antibiotics, wormers and vaccines is not permitted although particular products are allowed on farms where there is a recognized problem. Conventional medicines can and must be used where it is necessary to prevent prolonged illness or suffering. Increased withdrawal periods for all medicines are required under organic standards and there are restrictions on the number of times conventional treatments may be used. The use of homoeopathy is encouraged and a health management plan is required.

### Standards

Standards for organic farming, horticulture and food processing are subject to EC regulation. In the UK they are regulated by DEFRA, under the guidance of the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS). Inspection and certification are carried out by 10 approved certification bodies, of which seven work in Wales (see contact list, page 8). Similar schemes now operate in many other countries throughout the world. Only certified produce may legally be sold as 'organic' within the EU.

### Conversion

The minimum conversion period for land is two years, during which it must be monitored and managed organically. You will have to decide on a conversion strategy, for instance whether to convert the land and stock at the same time (simultaneous conversion) or whether to convert the stock after the land has achieved organic status, and whether to convert all your land at once or to do it in several steps. It is now a certification requirement that you prepare a written conversion plan, including detailed cropping plans, rotations and a livestock management plan. Expert advice is available through Farming Connect or private advisers to help you develop this plan and start your conversion on a firm footing.



## The Organic Farming Scheme

The Welsh Assembly Government administers the agri-environmental Organic Farming Scheme (OFS), introduced in 1999 as a successor to the Organic Aid Scheme, with the aim of increasing the area devoted to organic farming in Wales. Anyone who farms as either owner or tenant and whose land is not yet fully converted to organic production is normally eligible. Any agricultural land is eligible, including land used for arable production, set-aside (other than that in non-agricultural use or growing non-food crops), horticulture, fruit growing, seed growing, dairy farming or livestock breeding and keeping, grazing land, meadow land, market gardens or nursery grounds, or the use of land as woodland where that is ancillary to the use of the land for other agricultural activities (for instance woodland forage areas).

Each application to enter land into the Scheme must be for a minimum of one hectare. Payment will be restricted to 300 hectares on all enclosed land, but there is no limit on unenclosed land and grazed woodland.

The scheme involves a 10 year agreement, with a break clause at year 5, at which point farmers can withdraw without penalty. The payments in the first 5 years are intended to contribute towards the costs of conversion, while the second phase, the so called maintenance payments, are in recognition of the environmental and social benefits that organic farming brings. Payments are made on an area basis (see the Table below), the greater part of the money being paid in the first years when the costs of conversion are

greatest. There are additional lump sum payments to each organic unit of £300, £200 and £100 respectively in the first three years, intended as a contribution to the initial costs of advice, training and registration.

Farmers who joined the OFS before the maintenance scheme was introduced will be invited to extend their existing agreements at the end of the 5 years. Those who converted with no assistance will be eligible for annual payments at maintenance rates (years 6-10 in the table below).

It is possible to combine the OFS with other agri-environment schemes, such as Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal, ESA or Tir Cymen agreements, although there are some exclusions and restrictions. For instance, since OFS and Tir Gofal are both aimed at similar environmental benefits, if you apply for both, the payments on one may be reduced slightly.

Before applying for the Scheme you will have to agree a conversion plan and register your land with an approved certifying body. You will then enter into an undertaking with the Welsh Assembly Government which will run for a minimum of five years for each parcel of land applied for, the total length of the agreement depending on your timetable for conversion. Further information and details of how to apply to the Scheme will be given to you on your OCIS visits (see below). To obtain the OFSW explanatory booklet and application pack contact Organic Centre Wales or your Welsh Assembly Government divisional office.

Type of land	£ per hectare						
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6-10	Total
AAPS-eligible land and land in permanent crops	225	135	50	35	35	35	480
Enclosed land	175	105	40	35	35	35	390
Unenclosed land/grazed woodland	25	10	10	10	10	10	65

## How should I go about conversion?

### Step 1:

Contact the Organic Centre Wales Helpline to access the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) (01970 622100)

*OCIS is designed to help farmers understand the technical implications of conversion, enabling you to make an informed decision on whether or not to convert your farm. It is a free service funded by the Welsh Assembly Government. An information pack and up to two on farm visits from a specialist organic advisor will help you decide whether organic farming is a viable option for you.*

### Step 2:

Get further information on organic farming:

Organic Centre Wales is a focal point for information on organic food and farming in Wales. We co-ordinate a range of services and provide information on a range of issues including demonstration farms, discussion groups, conferences, training courses, advisory services, market intelligence, supply chain issues and others. For more details see page 6, and visit our website: [www.organic.aber.ac.uk](http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk)

### Step 3: Plan your conversion

You will need to choose a certification body and obtain a copy of their standards. You also need to prepare a detailed conversion plan, including cropping plans, rotations, animal health plans and budgets. You can get help to do this through Farming Connect. The Farm Business Development Plan (FBDP) can help you plan the business and financial aspects, and further technical advice is also available to build on the information you received through OCIS. Further advice on environmental issues is also available through the Environmental Opportunities Review service. For further information see the box in page 6 and contact the Farming Connect Service Centre on 08456 000813.

### Step 4:

Register with your chosen certification body.

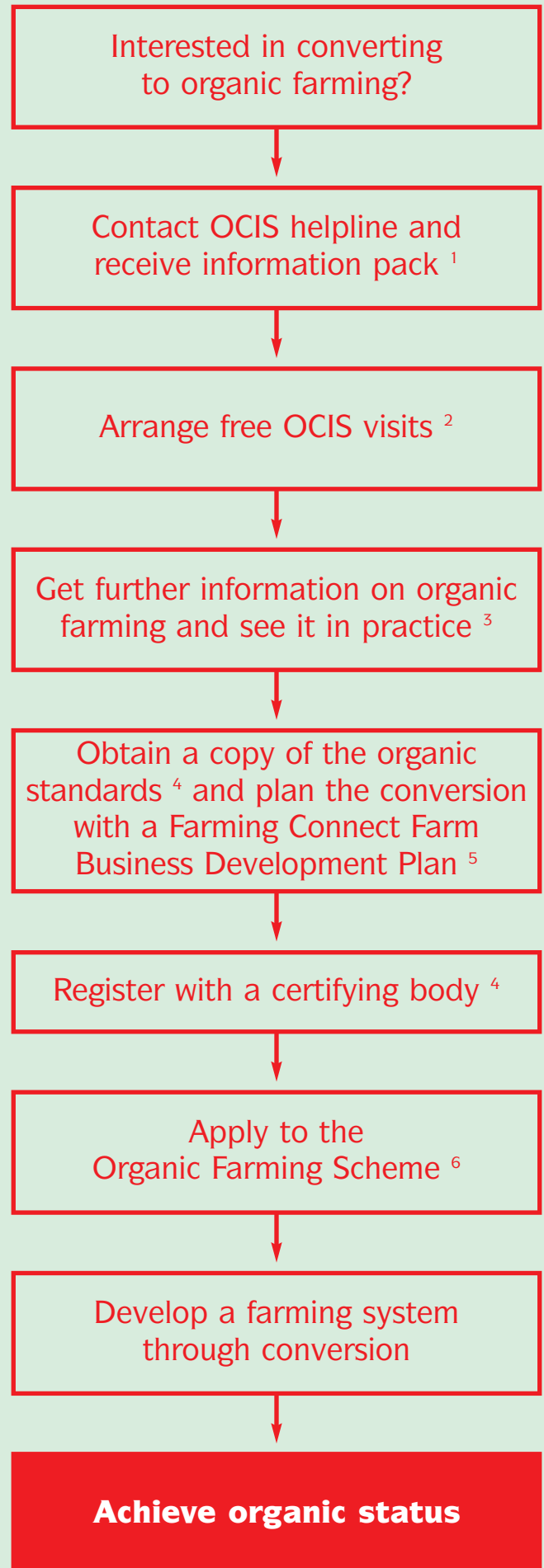
### Step 5:

Apply for the Organic Farming Scheme. For further details and an application pack contact Organic Centre Wales or your local Welsh Assembly Government Divisional Office.

### Step 6:

Develop a farming system through conversion  
Generally, approved organic status will be granted two years after registering with a certifying body and starting conversion, although it may take longer than this for the whole unit to reach this stage as progressive conversion of different fields and enterprises may be recommended. You can now sell your products as organic.

## Organic conversion:



# a step-by-step guide

Market opportunities and consumer demand/  
environmental issues/health and safety on the farm

Organic Centre Wales, in association with its partner organisations, provides information on all aspects of organic farming and coordinates access to advisory services, farm walks, marketing and training opportunities <sup>3</sup>

Organic products available

## Notes on conversion

1. OCIS Wales helpline and information pack. A conversion information pack, which includes this booklet, is available to all interested farmers. It contains a range of information covering the basic principles of organic farming.
2. Organic advisory visits. OCIS provides for up to two advisory visits, delivered by experienced advisers from ADAS or the Organic Advisory Service.
3. Organic Centre Wales. The services provided by the Centre are described on page 6. There are a number of other organizations that can also offer advice and support. See the contact list below.
4. Organic standards and certifying bodies. The process of organic farming is regulated by EC approved standards. They are administered in the UK by a number of Government-approved bodies who are also able to inspect and certify organic holdings. See the contact list.
5. Conversion plans. A conversion plan, including detailed cropping plans, rotations, an animal health management plan and budgets, is an essential part of a successful conversion to an organic farming system. You can develop such a plan through the free business and technical advice available through Farming Connect, or privately through an adviser (Organic Centre Wales maintains an accredited list). Additional advice on livestock health, grassland management and other specialist areas of organic farming may also be available.
6. Organic Farming Scheme. Welsh Assembly Government's Organic Farming Scheme replaces the old Organic Aid Scheme and was introduced in 1999. For more details see page 3 above.

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## Organic Centre Wales

Organic Centre Wales can help with all stages of the conversion process and beyond. It was set up in July 2000 to act as a focal point for the dissemination of information on organic farming in Wales. The Centre, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, is based at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth (UWA) and is run jointly by ADAS, Elm Farm Research Centre, the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER), the Institute of Rural Sciences (at UWA) and the Soil Association.

Here are the main ways the Centre can help you.

### Providing information

You can ring the free Organic Helpline on 01970 622100 or send an e-mail to [organic-helpline@aber.ac.uk](mailto:organic-helpline@aber.ac.uk) if you have a technical query about organic farming, the certification process or any other related matter. Technical and general information is also available on the website at [www.organic.aber.ac.uk](http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk), and you can subscribe to OCW's two monthly marketing and general information electronic bulletins. A range of technical factsheets and guides can be ordered from the Centre.

### Advice

The Centre coordinates the provision of high quality advice to organic farmers in Wales including:

- The Organic Conversion Information Service in Wales
- Providing access to free advice on organic grassland management, provided by IGER
- Providing access to specialist advice as part of Farming Connect
- Quality assurance of organic advice and training delivered under Farming Connect
- Holding a register of approved organic advisors, who meet a set of minimum requirements

### Training courses, conferences and seminars

Organic Centre Wales runs one-day courses at different venues in Wales for farmers and other producers on technical aspects of organic systems, such as animal health plans and homoeopathy, parasite control, permanent pasture, soil fertility and manure management, as well as marketing and conversion planning. There may be a small charge for these courses. The Soil Association and Elm Farm Research Centre also run technical events on farms around Britain.

In addition, an annual conference and a series of open events are organized for farmers around Wales. Organic Centre Wales is present at the Royal Welsh Show and other events around the country. The Soil Association has an annual conference for producers.

The Institute of Rural Sciences, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, offers a full-time BSc course in Organic Agriculture, as well as postgraduate courses. Other colleges and organizations throughout Wales also offer a variety of courses on organic production, with the Welsh College of

Horticulture now offering an HNC/HND in organic horticulture. Organic Centre Wales offers information on these.

### Demonstration farms

The Centre co-ordinates a network of demonstration farms around Wales as part of Farming Connect, where farm walks and some training events are held. These are a valuable opportunity to see organic farming in practice and to discuss technical matters with experienced producers. In addition, Elm Farm Research Centre has a similar network of farms in England, while the Soil Association has a network of organic demonstration farms open to the public in England and Wales.

### Discussion groups

The Centre also supports a network of organic discussion groups under Farming Connect. These may be independent regional or specialist groups, or commercially based. They organize their own events, including visits and speaker meetings.

## Farming Connect

Farming Connect, launched in September 2001, aims to deliver a wide range of services to the farming community in Wales, helping farm businesses to make informed decisions about their future. Services available include:

- Free business and technical and environmental advice
- Training opportunities
- Network of local demonstration farms and discussion groups
- Transfer of new technologies/information

The programme is delivered through five development programmes: Dairy, Beef and Sheep, Organic, Alternative Land Use, and Grassland. Organic Centre Wales manages the organic programme and as such is responsible for:

- A network of commercial demonstration farms and three institutional development farms, located throughout Wales and covering all the main organic enterprises
- A network of around 20 organic discussion groups
- A series of training courses and events for farmers and advisors
- Quality assurance of organic advice and training delivered under the service
- Benchmarking for organic producers
- Collation and dissemination of technical and marketing information and publications to organic farmers



## The organic market

The market for organic produce has grown steadily and reached £1.2 billion in 2004. The UK remains a significant organic market in Europe, reflecting consumer demand for environmentally sound agriculture and high quality food, but it still imports nearly half of its organic food, although this varies both between and within sectors. There are therefore significant opportunities for increasing home production, but it is essential that producers entering conversion give the marketing of their produce careful thought beforehand.

### Beef and sheep

Organic meat is the fastest growing area of the organic market, and sales were up 34% (in volume) in 2004 compared to the previous year. In Wales, producer groups Graig Farm Organics and Cambrian Organics reported good demand for both beef and lamb through the year with reasonable prices, though with some seasonal variation. However, despite this, 6% of organic beef and 11% of organic lamb producers were selling into the conventional market in 2005. The message for organic farmers is to plan to sell lambs when supplies are usually low, or to think of producing stores for others to finish.

### Dairy

Following a period of oversupply from 2001 to 2004, the situation is improving for dairy farmers. The Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative (OMSCo) reported that sales for the year ending April 2004 were up on the previous year, well above the rest of the organic food market. Increased growth was due to innovations among producers which has resulted in increased availability of many dairy lines (including fresh and flavoured milk, soft cheeses and yogurts) in the independent retail sector and a widening range of processed organic dairy products sold by the multiple retailers. Research showing higher levels of omega acids and conjugated linoleic acid in organic milk compared to conventional also strengthened consumer demand. In Wales, Rachel's Dairy built a new extension at its main processing plant in Aberystwyth which was opened in 2004, enabling processing capacity to treble from the previous level of 5 million litres.

### Horticulture

Fruit and vegetables are a key entry point for consumers starting to buy organic produce. In the 1990s and early 2000s the organic vegetable market was growing at an average rate of 30% per annum. Since then the rate of growth has slowed and the market has stabilized. The total retail value of the organic vegetable market was £197m in 2004, a 16.5% increase over the previous year, but the farm gate value of organic vegetables only increased by 2.5%. The pre-pack sector is entering a new market phase with downward price pressure – largely due to price competition between multiples – but the direct/local markets are still enjoying a period of rapid growth.

### Arable

The arable sector in Wales is comparatively small and 90% of the agricultural land area is grassland. Arable land accounts for just under 5% of the total amount of fully organic land in Wales and Welsh organic producers and processes are not fully self-sufficient in livestock feed nor milling cereals. In consequence Wales is a net importer of organic arable crops. Markets are highly dependent on weather, grain quality post-harvest and weather-driven animal feed demand. In 2004,



Photo: Supplied by FBA

stocks of feed barley, triticale, milling and feed oats were reducing rapidly, with the market for intermediate grades of milling wheat beginning to open up. Feed wheat was clearing from farms steadily but as the year progressed prices were affected by market supply and the imminent end of the EU non-organic feed derogation.

### Pork and Poultry

Pig meat comprises a relatively small share of the total market for organic produce. Fresh pork constitutes 1%, bacon rashers 1% and sausages less than 1% of the overall organic market. For the 2004 period, there were increased sales of fresh pork and sales of organic bacon also increased. Sales of pork declined at the end of the period however, along with sales of sliced cooked meats.

Sales of organic poultry showed the largest growth rate for all meat sectors in 2004. According to TNS data, fresh poultry comprised 2% of the overall market for organic food and pre-packed poultry showed strong signs of growth and contributed to the overall increase in sales of organic meat in 2004. In Wales, S & J Organics opened a new organic licensed poultry abattoir and cutting plant at Llwyncrychydod, Llanpumsaint, Carmarthen in 2004. For a full list of abattoirs see [www.organic.aber.ac.uk/markets/suppliers.shtml](http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/markets/suppliers.shtml)

### Support and advice

Further information on the market situation and organic prices can be found in the current edition of the Organic Farm Management Handbook and in the Soil Association's quarterly *Organic Farming* magazine. Organic Centre Wales has commissioned market intelligence reports for the red meat, dairy and horticulture sectors, and produces a monthly market intelligence bulletin, *Organic Market Wales*. Copies of the reports can be downloaded from the OCW website. To subscribe to the bulletin, contact Organic Centre Wales (01970 622248, [organic@aber.ac.uk](mailto:organic@aber.ac.uk)). The Food and Marketing Division of the Welsh Assembly Government offers support for the development of organic marketing and processing, including grants. Further information is available from OCW.

## Contact List

### Certifying bodies

Ascisco Ltd.  
Biodynamic Agricultural Association  
CMI Certification  
Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd  
Organic Food Federation  
Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd.  
Soil Association Certification Ltd

### Consultancy companies

Abacus Organic Associates  
ADAS Consulting Ltd  
Gaia Professional  
Organic Advisory Service

### Organizations which support organic farmers

Biodynamic Agricultural Association  
Elm Farm Research Centre  
HDRA (Garden Organic)  
Organic Centre Wales  
Soil Association Producer Services

### Research and educational establishments

ADAS Pwllpeiran  
Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER)  
Institute of Rural Sciences, UWA  
Welsh College of Horticulture

### Government agencies

#### Welsh Assembly Government Divisional Offices

Countryside Council for Wales  
Environment Agency  
Farming Connect  
Food and Market Development Division, Welsh Assembly Government

### Further reading

*Organic Farming* by Nic Lampkin, Ipswich: Farming Press.  
*Organic Farm Management Handbook* Published by the University of Wales Aberystwyth and the Organic Advisory Service, £12.00.  
*Organic Farming*, a quarterly journal published by the Soil Association. Annual subscription £15.00 (free to producer members).  
*Elm Farm Research Centre Bulletin*, published bi-monthly by Elm Farm Research Centre. Annual subscription £11.00.

A publications list including the above books and other technical booklets is available from Organic Centre Wales. A free book catalogue detailing many other publications relating to organic husbandry is available from the Soil Association.

### Addresses and contact numbers

#### Abacus Organic Associates Ltd

61 Robey Park Road, Neston, South Wirral, Cheshire CH64 9SW.  
Tel: 0151 336 2506  
gareth.jones@abacusorganic.co.uk  
www.abacusorganic.co.uk

#### ADAS Consulting Ltd

Henstaffe Court Business Centre, Groesfaen, Cardiff CF74 8NG  
Tel: 029 2089 9100; Fax: 029 2089 0054  
Christine.jones@adas.co.uk  
www.adas.co.uk

#### ADAS Pwllpeiran

Cwmystwyth, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 4AB  
Tel: 01974 282229; Fax: 01974 282302  
David.Frost@adas.co.uk  
www.adas.co.uk

#### Ascisco Ltd

Sophia House, 28 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ  
Tel: 0845 121 2321; Fax: 0845 121 2322  
wales.cert@soilassociation.org  
www.soilassociation.org/certification

#### Biodynamic Agricultural Association

Demeter Scheme Coordinator, 17 Inverleith Place, Edinburgh, EH3 5QF  
Tel: 0131 624 3921; Fax: 0131 476 2996  
fionajmackie@hotmail.com  
www.anth.org.uk/biodynamic

#### CMI Certification

Long Hanborough, Oxford, OX29 8LH  
Tel: 01993 885610; Fax: 01993 885611  
organics@cmi.plc.com  
www.cmi-plc.com

#### Countryside Council for Wales

Plas Penrhos, Ffordd Penrhos, Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 2LQ  
Tel: 01248 370444; Fax: 01248 355782  
www.ccw.gov.uk

#### Elm Farm Research Centre

Hamstead Marshall, Newbury, Berks, RG20 0HR  
Tel: 01488 658279; Fax: 01488 658503  
elmfarm@efrc.com  
www.efrc.com

#### Environment Agency

Call 0845 9333111 to be put through to your local office.  
enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk  
www.environment-agency.gov.uk

#### Gaia Professional Ltd

Dan Powell, Aeron Parc, Llangeitho, Tregaron, Ceredigion SY25 6TT  
Tel: 08453 243839 Mobile: 07887 678780  
Fax: 07092 158778  
Dan@Gaiapro.co.uk

#### Farming Connect

08456 000813  
www.wales.gov.uk/farmingconnect

#### Food and Market Development Division

Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ  
029 2082 25111

#### HDRA (Garden Organic)

Ryton Organic Gardens, Coventry CV8 3LG  
Tel: 024 7630 3517; Fax: 024 7663 9229  
enquiry@hdra.org.uk  
www.hdra.org.uk

#### IGER

Plas Gogerddan, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3EB  
Tel: 01970 823000; Fax: 01970 828357;  
Heather.McCalman@bbsrc.ac.uk  
www.iger.bbsrc.ac.uk

#### Institute of Rural Sciences

University of Wales Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3AL  
Tel: 01970 624471; Fax: 01970 611264  
irs-enquiries@aber.ac.uk  
www.irs.aber.ac.uk

#### Organic Advisory Service

See Elm Farm Research Centre; e-mail oas@efrc.com

#### Organic Centre Wales

Institute of Rural Sciences, University of Wales Aberystwyth, Ceredigion SY23 3AL  
Tel: 01970 622248; Fax: 01970 622238  
organic@aber.ac.uk  
www.organic.aber.ac.uk

#### Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd

The Elim Centre, Lancaster Road, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY1 3LE  
Tel: 01743 440512; Fax: 01743 461441  
info@organicfarmers.uk.com  
www.organicfarmers.uk.com

#### Organic Food Federation

31 Turbine Way, Eco Tech Business Park, Swaffham, Norfolk PE37 7XD  
Tel: 01760 720444; Fax: 01760 720790  
info@orgfoodfed.com  
www.orgfoodfed.com

#### Quality Welsh Food Certification Ltd.

Gorseland, North Road, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 2WB  
Tel: 01970 636688, Fax (01970)624049  
qwfc@wfsagri.net

#### Soil Association Certification Ltd

Sophia House, 28 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ  
Tel: 0845 121 2321, Fax: 0845 121 2322  
wales.cert@soilassociation.org  
www.soilassociation.org/certification

#### Soil Association Food and Farming Dept

Bristol House, 40-56 Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6BY  
Tel: 0117 914 2400; Fax: 0117 314 5001  
ff@soilassociation.org  
www.soilassociation.org

#### Welsh College of Horticulture

Northop, Mold, Flintshire CH7 6AA  
Tel: 01352 841000; Fax: 01352 841031  
enquiries@wcoh.ac.uk  
www.wcoh.ac.uk

### Welsh Assembly Government Divisional Offices

www.countryside.wales.gov.uk

#### Caernarfon (covering Gwynedd and Clwyd)

Caernarfon Divisional Office, Government Buildings, Penrallt, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1EP  
Tel: 01286 674144; Fax: 01286 677749  
agriculture.caernarfon@wales.gsi.gov.uk

#### Llandrindod Wells (covering Powys, Gwent, Mid, South and West Glamorgan)

Llandrindod Wells Divisional Office, Government Buildings, Spa Road East, Llandrindod Wells, Powys LD1 5HA  
Tel: 01597 823777; Fax: 01597 828304  
agriculture.llandrindod@wales.gsi.gov.uk

#### Carmarthen (covering Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire)

Carmarthen Divisional Office, Government Buildings, Picton Terrace, Carmarthen SA31 3BT  
Tel: 01267 225300; Fax: 01267 235964  
agriculture.carmarthen@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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