

Benefits of Certification



Whether you are looking at the transition of a large or small farm, you may be wondering about the value of organic certification. Organic certification is both a business decision and something that needs to work for your own beliefs and farming practices. Consider the following when making your certification decision:

More Customers and Better Prices

Organic produce, meat and processed goods sell for higher prices than conventional. Premiums will vary depending on the product and market conditions, but can be as high as double the conventional price! The price premium is intended to cover the increased costs associated with organic production and certification. If you are selling directly to the consumer, you may not feel that your customers are willing to pay more for certified organic. However, you might be surprised. Most supermarkets (even in small towns and rural areas) are able to stock organic produce because consumers are looking for the organic label and are willing to pay for it. Dedicated organic customers, such as chemically sensitive people or those who feed their children organic food, may be ignoring your product because it's not certified. For commodities like meat, milk or grains, the price will be higher but premium can vary depending on the crop and the supply in a given year. Do your research on potential markets and talk to buyers before you make the shift.



Stand Out from the Crowd

Are you already growing with organic methods? If you have not used any prohibited substances on your fields, then the transition period is usually one year. It takes three years for a transition from conventional production, and there is no transition period for processors. If you are already using organic methods, the only increase in cost will be the fees and time associated with certification (some of which may be eligible for subsidies). Once certified, you can use the national organic logo or the logo of your certifier in your advertising. It's a great way to differentiate your products and promote your business!



Clarity for Customers

It's faster and easier to say "Certified Organic" than to say "We're not certified but we use organic practices." Since 2009, food products have not been permitted to use the terms "organic" or "organically grown" without having organic certification. Unless a producer is *certified* organic, customers have no guarantee of their production practices. Terms like spray free or naturally grown can be used by anyone.

Join a Great Community



The organic community can be a key source of information, assistance and support for your farm. Organic farmers need to be inquisitive, creative and willing to think outside the box. Organic production is said to be knowledge driven, not input driven. Other growers, extension agents, and groups like ACORN can help you during the transition period; including ACORN's Transition Specialist (contact info below). The resources for producers in this region are second to none. Two of the Maritime Provinces provide direct financial support for transitioning and organic growers. The [Capturing Organic Development Opportunities Program \(NB\)](#) and the [Organic Industry Development Program \(PEI\)](#) provide cost-sharing for certification fees, business planning and infrastructure.

Contact ACORN for Support

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Become a Better Manager



While recordkeeping is never a favourite pastime for farmers, organic records can be useful for your farm business. The organic farm plan, field map and history keeps track of your crop production and past yields – critical information for future crop planning. Sales records and receipts for purchases need to be kept for your financial records and business management. Producers and processors who follow other certification programs (HACCP, Fair Trade) may find that organic certification is little extra work. Online, check out [ACORN's Organic Path](#) for more resources to help with transition.

Access New Markets



Being certified organic can open doors for your sales. You may be able to sell to stores specializing in organic food, or develop a niche product for a larger supermarket. You could market your products together with other organic producers to access new buyers. Export opportunities are growing for different Maritime products (maple, small fruit). There is now an equivalency agreement in place with the United States, allowing organic products to be traded with few restrictions. If you plan to export, make sure your certification is the right one to sell outside Canada.

Steps To Certification

1. Read the [Canadian Organic Standard and Permitted Substances List](#) – it will provide you with a much more concise understanding on what organic really is. Become familiar with the sections relevant for your farm (crop, honey, maple, etc.)
2. Find a certification body. There are several options - ask around and call a couple to see which one is right for you and your type of operation.
3. Complete an application for certification, which also includes creating an organic farm plan. ACORN's Transition Staff can help with this too.
4. Your application will be reviewed by the certification body and an organic farm inspection will be scheduled for sometime during your growing season.
5. Pending a successful farm inspection, you will be on your way to certified organic status!