

The Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) – August 2008 update

What is the Organic Farming Scheme?

The Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) is an agri-environment scheme that offers payments to farmers in Wales to help them convert and maintain their farm under organic management to benefit the environment. It is a key part of the Organic Action Plan for Wales, one of the aims of which is to increase the area of agricultural land in Wales under organic management to 10 – 15% by 2010. The OFS is funded by the EU and the Welsh Assembly Government as part of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Plan (RDP) for Wales.

What does the scheme look like?

The OFS is a 5 year scheme. Fields in conversion (usually for two years) will receive a higher 'conversion' rate to compensate for the greater costs incurred through the conversion process.

The scheme includes a number of improvements compared with the previous scheme. These include:

- An enhanced initial payment to help with costs of certification and information gathering
- Access to an arable payment rate to any land growing arable crops, (this was previously restricted to AAPS eligible land only);
- Payment for organic horticulture to encourage more farmers to grow field vegetables to increase the local supply of fresh organic produce;
- Reduced bureaucracy including annual claims on the Single Application Form and easier links with Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal and the removal of dual payment deductions.

What do I do to join the scheme?

Farmers must firstly apply by completing the Organic Farming Scheme Application form which should be submitted directly to the Welsh Assembly Government. **In addition** to gaining certification from a Certification Body, you must **then** make your claims for annual payments on your Single Application Form - deadline May 15.

Payment rates

The rates of payment vary according to land use and are summarised below:

	Annual Payment Rates	
	In Conversion	Fully Organic
Initial payment	£1,000	£500
Payment per hectare (up to 300 hectares)		
Grassland	£150	£40
Arable crops	£150	£60
Horticultural crops	£150	£200
Fruit Trees	£200	£200
Extensive Grassland and land over 300 hectares	£20	£10
Grazed Woodland	£20	£10

- Extensive grassland is defined as: Permanent grassland in parcels 25ha or over in SDA and areas of Heathlands; Natural Regeneration; Reed beds / swamps; Saltmarshes; Bracken; Scrub including gorse bushes and briar.

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You may enter a minimum of 1 ha and a maximum of 300 ha of land into the scheme at the higher rates, but there is no limit to the amount of 'Extensive grassland' land you can enter. A maximum of 20 ha of land will be paid at the horticultural and permanent crops rate. Common land is not usually eligible, although sole graziers may be able to claim. Contact your Divisional Office for confirmation.

How does the process work?

The OFS Application Form is available from your Divisional Office (see addresses below). This form must be submitted by 15 May 2009 if you wish to make a claim for payment on the 2009 Single Application Form (SAF). Once an application has been returned and accepted, and subject to adequate budgetary conditions, you may receive an offer to join the scheme with the detailed Scheme Rules from the Welsh Assembly Government. You should consider carefully these terms and if agreeable you should sign and return the offer letter. Please note this is the formal undertaking which constitutes the legal agreement between you and the Welsh Assembly Government.

How do I get paid?

You must make annual claims for your OFS payments on your Single Application Form i.e. May 15th, by ticking Q11 in Section 2 and under the Organic column for individual fields in Section 8. You must provide the original organic certification and field schedule documents to the Welsh Assembly Government so that they can verify the land is managed organically. The field schedule from the Certification Body must, therefore, detail the field sheet reference and field numbers and match the sizes detailed on your SAF.

Common land: If land has been given a code CL99 on the SAF and you are a sole grazer, you need to declare that land in Section 7, and write on the 'SAF Supporting Information Page' that you have sole use of the land and you wish the area (specify) to be allocated to you for the purposes of claiming the OFS. Note that shared common land is not eligible for OFS - if common land has been removed from Section 8 of your SAF and you re-enter it, you may incur a penalty for over-claiming.

If you do not have the certificate or field schedule available when you submit your SAF, you may submit the information after this date, but you should do so by no later than 31 July or you will not be eligible to claim payment.

There may be some farmers that have applied to join the OFS that have not received offer letters by the time they complete the SAF, in which case you may make your OFS claim on the SAF but if you later decide not to join the scheme, you will need to inform the Welsh Assembly Government that you wish to amend your SAF or you may incur penalties.

When will I get paid?

For 2008 claims the Welsh Assembly Government are aiming to make partial OFS payments from September, with a balance early in 2009. Payments can only be made once all administrative checks and cross checks have been satisfactory completed.

Who is eligible?

Farmers that agree to farm their land according to organic principles and become registered with an organic certification body are eligible to join the scheme. Before you make your claim you must have been inspected by the organic certification body (see OCW Factsheet No. 9 for details). You must be the lawful occupier of the land (either as the owner or a tenant) with full responsibility for, and control over, the farming on that land. All farmers who join the scheme are subject to the full Cross Compliance rules. Details of these are available on the Welsh Assembly's web site <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingconnect/crosscompliance/?lang=en> or from your local divisional office.

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Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Canolfan Organig Cymru
Organic Centre Wales

Are there issues for tenants?

You need to have full responsibility for the land for the duration of the scheme. Should your lease expire and new occupants choose not to remain in the scheme, you will be required to repay the money received in full, plus interest. This year (2008) landlords can claim the SAF and farmers the OFS, but this is subject to a report from the European Court of Auditors: see SAF Rules booklet K2 page 46 which highlights that this situation may not be satisfactory in future years.

Can you combine OFS with other agri-environment schemes?

Yes. The OFS can complement other agri-environment schemes, such as Tir Gofal and Tir Cynnal. Farmers already in Tir Gofal and thinking of converting to organic should carefully examine any constraints on organic management that their Tir Gofal agreement may cause.

Where can I get advice on organic conversion?

The Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) is a free service designed to help you understand the implications of conversion for your farming system, enabling you to make an informed decision on the future direction of your farm. The service consists of access to the OCW technical helpline, an information pack and up to two on-farm advisory visits. To register, call the OCW helpline 01970 622100.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS AN OCW FACTSHEET TO PROVIDE GENERAL INFORMATION BUT PRODUCERS MUST REFER TO THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT SCHEME TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR DETAIL, AND BE CONTENT BEFORE SIGNING THEM TO JOIN THE SCHEME.

Contact details

Organic Centre Wales, Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences, Aberystwyth University, Ceredigion SY23 3AL

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