

COMMODITY

ORGANIC PRODUCTION

Description

Organic farming is based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony. Organic farmers believe that there is an essential link between the health of the soil, the health of plants, the health of animals, and ultimately the health of human populations.

Although organic farming is often characterized by what cannot be used – such as the prohibition of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides – it is defined more accurately by its dependence and emphasis on active improvement practices such as crop rotation and the introduction of green manure crops. Simply removing agrochemical inputs is not enough to turn a conventional farm into an organic farm. Dynamic organic practices which improve the biological activity of the soil and the environment must be a key component of legitimate production.

Soil Fertility

The recognition that soil is a living system is fundamental to the principles of organic farming. The restoration, maintenance and enhancement of soil life is therefore one of the cornerstone components of organic production.

As part of active soil management, most organic farmers pay careful attention to composting. Quality compost is characterized by active beneficial microbiological activity. Essential soil organisms are key components of organic production, in addition to the practice of incorporating commonly-used organic crop nutrients. Green manure cropping – growing crops such as clover, buckwheat or rye in order to plough it into the soil before it seeds – provides organic matter and nutrients to subsequent crops. Every organic farm must have a crop rotation plan to ensure that steps are being taken to improve the overall quality of the soil.

Environmental Protection

Environmental protection is a primary factor in the decision of most farmers to become involved in organic agriculture. Aspects of environmental care that organic producers readily identify with include the following:

- protection of stream banks and watersheds
- the handling and application of all animal wastes of quality and quantity that meet land needs
- protection and fostering of wildlife, including wild bird populations
- elimination of a variety of products such as sanitizers and chemical fertilizers, as well as toxins such as pesticides
- research into alternative methods of recycling agricultural nutrients in closed-loop systems

Animal Welfare

An essential component to organic livestock management is the health and living environment of animals. Rather than relying on antibiotics to reduce disease, organic farms mitigate the risk of disease by ensuring that animals are provided a healthy environment with adequate pasture, comfortable and spacious shelter, and opportunity for natural socialization.

Chickens, ducks and turkeys must have access to pasture during the summer growing season and access to covered outside runs during winter. Battery cages for poultry are not permitted in an organic production regime, and poultry must be fed an all-vegetative diet consisting only of certified organic grains, oilseeds, hay, grass and vegetable matter. All livestock must have access to food, water, fresh air, daylight, veterinary care, and shelter from inclement weather.

Provincial Organic Standards

Provincial organic certification falls under the *Organic Agricultural Products Certification Regulation* of the *Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act*. The purpose of the Act is to allow farm operations to obtain certification for the food products which they grow and the practices which they follow. Agri-food products are to be produced, sold and labeled in accordance with prescribed standards. These standards were established by the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia (COABC) in collaboration with the BC Ministry of Agriculture. Subsequent to the issuance of a certificate, organic producers may advertise that their operations meet the prescribed standards. To be considered for certification, farmers wishing to market organic crops must ensure that the land they farm has been free from chemicals for a minimum of three years; furthermore, the land must be chemical-free for the duration of organic operation. Farmers wishing to market organic meat, poultry and other livestock products must use certified organic feed and must not administer any prohibited medication. To ensure standards are observed at all times, organic growers are subject to both regular scheduled and unannounced inspections.

The Certified Organic Association of British Columbia is an umbrella organization representing various provincial organic certifying agencies. It is authorized under the *Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act* to implement the British Columbia Certified Organic Program. Organic produce in the province is identified on packaging as *British Columbia Certified Organic*.

Federal Organic Standards

On January 1, 2009, the Certified Organic Association of British Columbia adopted the Canada Organic Standard as the standard for the BC Certified Organic Program. Products granted organic status by a certification body (CB) of an International Organization for Standardization (ISO) program – and certified using the Canada Organic Standard – are considered compliant with the federal *Organic Products Regulation* and may display the *Canada Organic* logo if desired. These products may also carry the well-recognized British Columbia Certified Organic (BCCO) check mark on their products and on advertising materials. Organic products certified under a certification body's regional program may only display the BCCO check mark.

As of June 30, 2009, the *Organic Products Regulations* under the *Canada Agricultural Products Act* require mandatory certification for agricultural products represented as organic in international and inter-provincial trade, or for products that bear the federal organic agricultural product logo. Complete details about organic registration, certification and operation can be found on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's organic products website.

Farm Practices of Particular Interest

Farming activities in organic operations are strictly regulated by the province's organic management standards. These standards stipulate which practices and inputs are regulated, allowed, prohibited, or

recommended within the BC Certified Organic Program. Organic farmers must also adhere to all federal, provincial and local government legislation. All Commodity and Farm Practice documents in the Farm Practices Reference Guide are therefore relevant.

Principal and Accessory Buildings

From an operational perspective, the definition of principal and accessory farm buildings for organic production operations can be found in the applicable Commodity documents of this Farm Practices Reference Guide. For the purposes of determining applicable setbacks from watercourses and property lines, local government bylaws or the *Guide for Bylaw Development in Farming Areas* should be consulted. Building assessments may need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis if the designation of a building as principal or accessory is unclear.

Legislation

Agricultural producers are expected to follow all legislation that pertains to their farming operations. The *Farm Practices Protection (Right to Farm) Act* stipulates that the farm operation must meet the *Public Health Act*, *Integrated Pest Management Act*, *Environmental Management Act* and the regulations under those Acts. Information on federal and provincial legislation can be found in Appendices B and C.

Acts that pertain to specific farm activities are listed in the Farm Practices section of this reference guide. Local government bylaws may also apply to some farm practices. Acts that are not referenced elsewhere and which are of special interest to organic producers include the following.

Provincial Legislation

The *Agri-Food Choice and Quality Act* allows farmers to obtain certification that the food products which they produce or that the practices which they follow in the production and selling of agri-food products are in accordance with prescribed standards.

Publications and Websites

Publications and websites that provide further information on organic production include, but are not limited to, the following. Refer to Appendix D for details.

Publications

British Columbia Certified Organic Production Operation Policies and Farm Management Standards
Introduction to Certified Organic Farming

Websites

Information on certification and labeling requirements for Canadian food products can be found at the organic products webpage at Canada Food Inspection Agency.

Information on the use of the Canada Organic logo can be found at the Guidance Document Repository on the Canada Food Inspection Agency webpage.

Information on mandatory certification of products traded internationally for products bearing the federal organic agricultural product logo can be found on the Equivalence Arrangements webpage at the Canada Food Inspection Agency:

License conditions and logo stipulations for British Columbia's organic farm production can be found at the Certified Organic Associations of BC webpage.

Certified Organic Production Operation Policies and Management Standards for organic production in British Columbia can be found on the internet.