

GUIDANCE NOTE: STEPS TO CONVERSION

Your AECS application for organic conversion has been successful.
What do you do now?








Follow these important steps to ensure you meet the requirements for your funding contract and organic certification

Remember that organic conversion usually takes a minimum of two years.



There are several important steps that follow the approval of your AECS application, to ensure that you are compliant to the ScotGov AECS funding rules and the SOPA Organic requirements, and before your land & any associated enterprises can be regarded as officially commencing conversion to organic management:

-  **Check, sign and return your AECS contract:** We recommend that you check the details in your Scottish Government contract are correct e.g. field areas (SGRPID use the same approach to check land eligibility for payment as for the Basic Payment Scheme), and also that the organic land type definitions (e.g. arable, improved grassland, unimproved grassland/rough grazing or fruit & veg) are accurate for each field. It is important that you sign and return the contract to your local SGRPID Area Office within the given timescale. ***If you have any queries about your AECS funding contract please contact your [local SGRPID area office](#) directly.***
-  **Familiarise yourself, and your staff, with the SOPA Organic Production Standards:** These are arranged in 4 main sections: Section 1 - Standards of Management which details the principles of the standards, conversion to organic production, organic inspection process and record keeping requirements; Section 2 - Crop production; Section 3 - Livestock production and; Section 4 - Soil, soil fertility and care of the environment. It is also advisable to speak to other organic producers in the area to hear from them first-hand of the practical aspects of organic production. SOPA Member Services offer free advice and guidance over the telephone 0300 772 9795.
-  **Select a Conversion Start Date:** Having returned your signed AECS contract to SGRPID, they will then send you an 'authority to start' that acknowledges receipt of the returned contract. **The date given on the authority to start letter is important. [ScotGov organic conversion funding requirements](#) state you must have begun conversion by either six months from the date of your authority to start work letter or by your contract start date (usually 1st January) – whichever is the later.** As well as complying with the funding scheme rules it is important that your organic conversion start date suits your farm enterprises. There are different types of conversion (Simultaneous or Standard – see the SOPA Guidance Note & below). For example, for spring sown cereals or veg to gain organic status in year 3 the start date opted for would need to be prior to spring sowing dates, for cattle 12 weeks before calving or sheep prior to tupping. **The conversion start date you choose must also be approved in advance by your OF&G (Scotland) Producer Certification Officer (CO).**
-  **Decide on Conversion Type:** The conversion of a holding to full organic status generally takes two years and there are two type of conversion to choose from:- a standard conversion (*land converts for 2 years followed by conversion of the livestock*) or simultaneous conversion (*land & stock begin two-year conversion period at same time*). **Again, the conversion type opted for must be approved in advance by your CO.** Opting for Simultaneous or Standard conversion depends on your farm enterprises

-  **Submit full Farm Conversion Plan:** the plan needs to detail your proposed start date for conversion, conversion type and importantly how you intend to manage your holding and its enterprises to the SOPA Organic Production Standards through the conversion period, and once fully organic. The SOPA Farm Conversion Plan Guidance Note detailing what information needs to be included in the plan can be found [here](#). **The full farm conversion plan must be approved by your CO prior to conversion commencing.** The SOPA template plans e.g. buildings plan, Livestock Management/health Plan (LMP) and Crop Management Plan (CMP)) are available to download from the [Member's area](#) of the SOPA website or by contacting SOPA Member Services. Your completed conversion plan can be returned by post to OF&G (Scotland), The Old Estate Yard, Shrewsbury Road, Albrighton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY4 3AG or emailed to certification@sopa.org.uk (we prefer email). All of your correspondence with SOPA and OF&G (Scotland) should be referenced with your SOPA Membership Number.
-  **Start Organic Conversion:** Once your conversion plan is approved and you have official confirmation of your organic start date, you commence your organic conversion. From this date you must farm according to the SOPA Organic Standards.
-  **First inspection:** You can expect your first organic inspection within 6 months, and your annual SOPA membership fee will be invoiced. Please refer to the SOPA Payment Terms about our annual fees. The organic farm inspector will make contact with you to arrange a time and date, and you will receive a full pack of SOPA Record Sheets to complete and present to the inspector when they visit you. If you already maintain good farm records that provide the information in the SOPA Record Sheets, you do not need to duplicate the information. We provide the Record Sheets to help you be fully prepared for the inspection.
-  **Advice:** Your organic certification officer at OF&G Scotland can give approval (or not) for farm management techniques and reviews your organic inspection report. The CO cannot advise you. If you need advice, you should contact Joanna or Debs in **SOPA's Membership Services on 0300 772 9795** or by [email](#). Our motto is *No question is a silly question* as we want you to be prepared with as much information as possible to assist in the conversion process.
-  **Two sets of rules:** It is important to note that the Scottish Government rules for organic funding are separate to the organic standards. Keep in mind that if you accept your organic conversion funding contract from SGRPID this is a 5-year commitment and subject to your continued compliance to both the ScotGov funding rules and the SOPA Organic Production Standards.
-  **Claiming organic funding:** After your inspection is reviewed by your CO, they may contact you for further clarification, or if everything is clear then you will receive a letter confirming your compliance to the SOPA organic standards. You must submit a copy of this letter to SGRPID in order to claim your funding. You must remember to complete the SAF with the correct AECS organic details when claiming your BPS in May, otherwise you will not receive your funding.
-  **Your farm and enterprises will not be regarded as officially entering conversion until the conversion plan, conversion start date and type are approved by your CO in writing. The official start date becomes your reference date for achieving full organic status after your two year conversion period.**

In the event that your AECS Organic Conversion funding application was not successful please let us know so that we can discuss your options.