



# CHAPTER 12

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## 12.1. General

### 12.1.1. What does “certified organic” actually mean?

“Organic” is a labelling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods that integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilisers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.” (*What is Organic? USDA National Organic Program – <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop>*.)

**The IFOAM definition is:** “Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people. It relies on ecological processes, bio-diversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair

relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.” (*Definition of Organic Agriculture, IFOAM Information Hub – <http://infohub.ifoam.org/en/what-organic/definition-organic-agriculture>*)

### 12.1.2. I think our farming is already mostly organic, what is the difference?

The only way to determine whether your farming practices are organic or not, and at the same time to determine the differences, is to work through the organic standards, consider each point for your enterprise/s and to write down whether your production system satisfies each requirement.

This is a necessary step before applying for certification, as it is the only way to determine whether your enterprise is ready for the first inspection, which will cost money. The inspection is a verification process whereby the inspector will look at what you say you do, will determine what you actually do and whether

the practices conform to the standards and the certifier's requirements. This is a verification process, the results of which will determine whether your enterprise can be certified, and if so, what status can be awarded.

### 12.1.3. What are the benefits of organic farming?

There are many benefits of organic farming, some of which include:

- Environmental benefits
- Benefits to plants and animals
- Health benefits to those living and working on farms
- Health benefits for consumers

The reader is encouraged to look at the following related websites, all of which have search functions leading to discussions of the benefits:

- Namibian Organic Association, NOA  
<http://www.noa.org.na/content/what-is-organic/faq-why-organic-2>
- International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, IFOAM  
[www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)
- UK Soil Association  
<http://www.soilassociation.org>.  
The following link has a long list of benefits:  
<http://www.soilassociation.org/trade/marketingsupport/advertisingclaims>
- USA Rodale Institute  
<http://rodaleinstitute.org> and  
[www.rodaleinc.com](http://www.rodaleinc.com)
- USA National Centre for Appropriate Technology, ATTRA, National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service  
<https://attra.ncat.org/index.php>
- Australian Certified Organic  
<http://austorganic.com>

There are in fact many websites which discuss the benefits of organic agriculture.

### 12.1.4. Are there additional expenses when you farm organically?

The development of Namibian organic farming is still in its infancy. Economic data is not available, so consideration of factors such as the internal costs of slower growth of the animals or the higher costs of sourcing non-GMO supplements have not been assessed.

It is likely that these will differ from farm to farm and as such will require experience and research in assimilating this data and working it into reliable figures to guide Namibian farmers. Factors such as these are good reasons behind the standards requiring accurate record keeping by organic farmers.

The expenses associated with certification are the most significant additional expenses incurred by farmers seeking formal recognition of their production practices. These are:

- Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) assessments: PGS only work if all members participate in the peer review process. So while there usually are no direct fees paid to the PGS, members incur costs through physically visiting their peers and the time it takes to do so.
- Certification by international certifiers: International certifiers incur huge annual costs to achieve and maintain their annual accreditation by which their clients enjoy the prospects of gaining formal recognition and thus marketing opportunities in domestic and international markets. Someone has to come and conduct the audit or audits, and someone

has to make the certification decisions, issue the certificates and monitor the exports of each client. These are all administration tasks which make formal third party certification expensive and have to be paid by someone – most often the clients or their sponsors.

There is no such thing as cheap certification!

### 12.1.5. Is organic more work than non-organic farming?

Typically organic horticulture and crop production does involve more hand labour, and thus work, than non-organic production does.

Compost making, a key to successful organic crop production, is a high input operation in terms of physical materials, water, facilities (either machines or physical work to turn the compost) and management. The high water requirements for making good quality compost are often not met by the average farmer.

The high input nature of composting can be offset through practices such as green manuring and the resulting in situ sheet composting, intercropping and mulching, both with plant residues and using live crops such as creeping vines, to cover the soil.

Additional hand labour may be incurred through cultivation practices such as transplanting of seedlings, weeding and harvesting. It all depends on the scale of the farming operation and the level of mechanisation adopted.

The increased labour requirement is often promoted as one of the positive impacts that organic farming can have in rural areas, providing work opportunities for those who would otherwise, for many reasons, not have a source of income.

Organic livestock production may incur more labour costs, especially if grazing management systems are changed and animals are inspected or handled more frequently. The reality will be farm-specific.

Generally certified organic production requires planning and keeping reasonable production records, a task which may incur more work for some farmers.

## 12.2. Organic Certification

### 12.2.1. What are the certification options for and requirements of Namibian organic producers?

Namibian producers have two certification options:

- The NOA PGS for the domestic market
- International 3rd party certification for the export market

The requirements are:

- Assessment to and compliance with the NOA PGS standards for the domestic market
- Compliance to and certification according to international standards, the choice of which depends on the target market

### 12.2.2. What are the Namibian Organic Standards?

The NOA developed standards specifically for Namibian conditions based on the IFOAM Basic Standards. The NOA standards are used by the NOA PGS to assess producers and through the use of the NOA logo on produce, give consumers the assurance that the produce has been produced according to these standards.



### 12.2.3. How can I get a copy of the NOA Standards?

The NOA's standards are available from the website: [www.noa.org.na](http://www.noa.org.na)

### 12.2.4. Does my enterprise need to be assessed by the NOA PGS?

Yes, in order to make a true and justifiable claim, all Namibian enterprises claiming to produce organic produce should be assessed by the NOA PGS. The NOA PGS assessment is good for all domestic Namibian sales.

### 12.2.5. How long does the process take?

Typically, if all goes well and responses are immediate, NOA PGS assessment and 3rd party certification take about 3 months to complete.

### 12.2.6. How much does it cost?

The NOA PGS operates on a peer review process in which all members (i.e. producers who are assessed) are expected to participate. So while direct fees are not a feature of the NOA PGS, producers incur costs through the associated travelling and time required to undertake the peer reviews. The NOA has recently implemented a fee structure to cover expenses. Third party certification is expensive, the main cost arising from the time and travel costs of the inspector who is sent to conduct the inspection of the enterprise. There are associated administrative fees too. Each 3rd party certifier has their own particular fee structure.

### 12.2.7. How often must my enterprise be assessed or certified?

Assessment or certification has to be undertaken annually. This includes the annual submission of the application documents, a site visit and the decision.

### 12.2.8. What is the anticipated outcome?

Upon the successful completion of the process and depending on the conversion status if applicable, a producer's enterprise will be certified as being either in conversion or fully organic. The producer is then given the right to use the NOA PGS logo or that of the certifier for a year.

### 12.2.9. Do I need to notify my certifier if my organic production practices change during the year?

Yes. The certification process is to verify the circumstances of the enterprise on the day and production plans for the year ahead. Any changes must be communicated before they are implemented as they may necessitate another supplementary assessment/inspection.

## 12.3. Organic Crop Production

### 12.3.1. Can I grow both organic and non-organic crops on the same farm?

Yes. Operations with both organic and non-organic crops are referred to as split operations. Adequate buffer zones and/

or barriers must be in place to prevent the unintended application (i.e. spray drift) of a prohibited substance on an organic crop and procedures must be in place to prevent organic crops from being contaminated (i.e. cleaning procedure for equipment used for both non-organic and organic production). Record keeping must clearly delineate between organic and non-organic crops.

### 12.3.2. What are the requirements for using manure on organic crops?

This depends on the standards, some of which allow the use of raw manure from certified organic livestock on crops, while others allow its use only on crops which are not intended for human consumption. The producer needs to refer to the standards used for their certification to be sure.

However, it is generally accepted that the application of raw manure is not good agronomic practice for a number of reasons, ranging from negative effects on the soil, optimising the benefits of using manure, crop quality and taste, to the spread of human pathogens. Composting manure is always considered best practice.

### 12.3.3. What are the requirements for composting?

This too depends on the standards, as some have pre-defined procedures and parameters, whereas others do not.

The answer lies in what are considered “best practices” which are described in Chapter 2 of this manual.

### 12.3.4. If I grow perennials, do I need to grow a cover crop?

Yes. For perennial cropping systems, grow cover crops in alleys, between rows or as hedgerows to introduce biological diversity in lieu of a crop rotation.

## 12.4. Organic Livestock Production

### 12.4.1. What is the difference between organic and non-organic livestock production?

In the Namibian context there is not a big difference between the two, but the differences are significant. The main ones are that:

- Organic production holds animal welfare of prime importance. This implies that extensive and some intensive systems are acceptable, the latter depending on predefined parameters. There are specific transport and slaughter requirements too which look after animal welfare. Animals have to receive appropriate veterinary treatment of any injuries or illness, irrespective of the consequence to their certification status
- Animals which are well adapted to their environment are used in preference to others, possibly higher yielding and thus more input intensive, breeds. This is especially significant in Namibia where the smaller frame Nguni-type beef animal is considered to be “lighter” on the environment, requiring less supplemental inputs, and thus better adapted than the larger European breeds
- Herds and flocks are essentially “closed” on organic farms as this ensures that animals become better adapted to their

environment, and through the cyclical nature of organic farming, display corresponding improvement in health characteristics. The standards define the percentage of non-organic animals which may be brought onto an organic farm as breeding animals. Artificial insemination is also allowed. Thus the need to ensure genetic diversity is catered for

- Production relies on natural sources of nitrogen and proteins
- Feed and fodder must be used, unless local circumstances prevent this
- Production focuses on good animal husbandry and preventative measures to ensure the health of the livestock. Vaccines may be used when legally required or to ensure that animals do not succumb to endemic diseases
- External and internal parasites may be controlled using veterinary products, although some standards such as the NOP do not allow the use of Ivermectin
- Standards differ in their requirements regarding antibiotic use. Some standards, such as the EU, IFOAM and NOA allow animals to receive two courses of antibiotics per year, whereas the NOP outright prohibits their use in certified organic livestock production

### 12.4.2. Can I use vaccines?

Yes, you may use vaccines if legally required to do so and to prevent animals being infected by endemic diseases, typically tick-borne diseases. However these vaccines may not be derived from Genetically Modified Organisms.

### 12.4.3. Can I use antibiotics?

Standards differ in their requirements regarding antibiotic use. Some standards, such as the EU, IFOAM and NOA allow animals to receive two courses of antibiotics per year, whereas the NOP outright prohibits their use in certified organic livestock production.

### 12.4.4. Can I use hormones?

Hormones may only be used to correct an individual animal's veterinary problems.

### 12.4.5. Can I de-horn and castrate my cattle?

Yes, mutilations such as de-horning, are allowed under specific circumstances. Organic agriculture recognises the intrinsic value that horns have for cattle, including self defence against predators. De-horning is typically required under intensive and factory farming conditions, so should not be a common feature in certified organic production.

Castration is also allowed as long as it is carried out humanely with minimal suffering to the animal.

### 12.4.6. Can I use urea?

No, you may not use urea in certified organic horticulture, crop and livestock agriculture.

Synthetic agro-chemicals of which urea and herbicides are historically the two commonly quoted examples, may not be used in certified organic farming.

### 12.4.7. Can I use licks and supplements?

Yes, naturally derived licks, some of which may have undergone treatment to make

them safe for livestock consumption, may be used to correct nutritional imbalances.

So supplements too, may be used as long as they are not GMOs. Supplements should be of organic origin, but if not available, non-organic sources may be used.

In all cases when deciding on the use of licks and supplements the certified organic livestock producer must consult the standards, and if necessary, the certifier before purchasing these inputs.

### **12.4.8. What happens during droughts when my veld can no longer sustain my certified organic herd?**

Droughts, like veld fires, are considered extreme events. A certified organic livestock producer should always make specific arrangements with their Accredited Certification Body (ACB) to decide on measures during and after a drought. Remember that animal welfare always comes first in any decision-making process.

### **12.4.9. Can I buy in non-organic weaners, fatten them organically and sell them as such?**

The simple answer is “No”. The principle is that all cattle, sheep and goats, whose products are sold as organic, have to be raised organically from birth. Some standards require that the organic management has to commence in the last, pre-defined period of pregnancy. You will need to consult the standards to find out the specific requirements.

## **12.5. Where can I find additional answers to FAQs?**

The reader is encouraged to search the internet for answers to questions. Although details may differ between certifiers and countries, the principles are all essentially the same. Once you understand these, your logic will go a long way towards answering your questions. This is a journey of discovery that you have embarked upon – enjoy the ride!

You are encouraged to visit the following websites, most of which have search functions:

[www.noa.org.na](http://www.noa.org.na)

[www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)

[www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

[www.attra.ncat.org](http://www.attra.ncat.org)

[www.rodaleinstitute.org](http://www.rodaleinstitute.org)