



# Knowledge Tree

## Organic Certification

An overview of what you can expect in your certification journey, from the day you first decide to become organic, to the day you can sell your product as Certified Organic and beyond

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# Organic Certification in a Nutshell

**Step 1** – Decide that you want to use organic production /processing methods ([Becoming Organic: An Overview of the Requirements](#)).

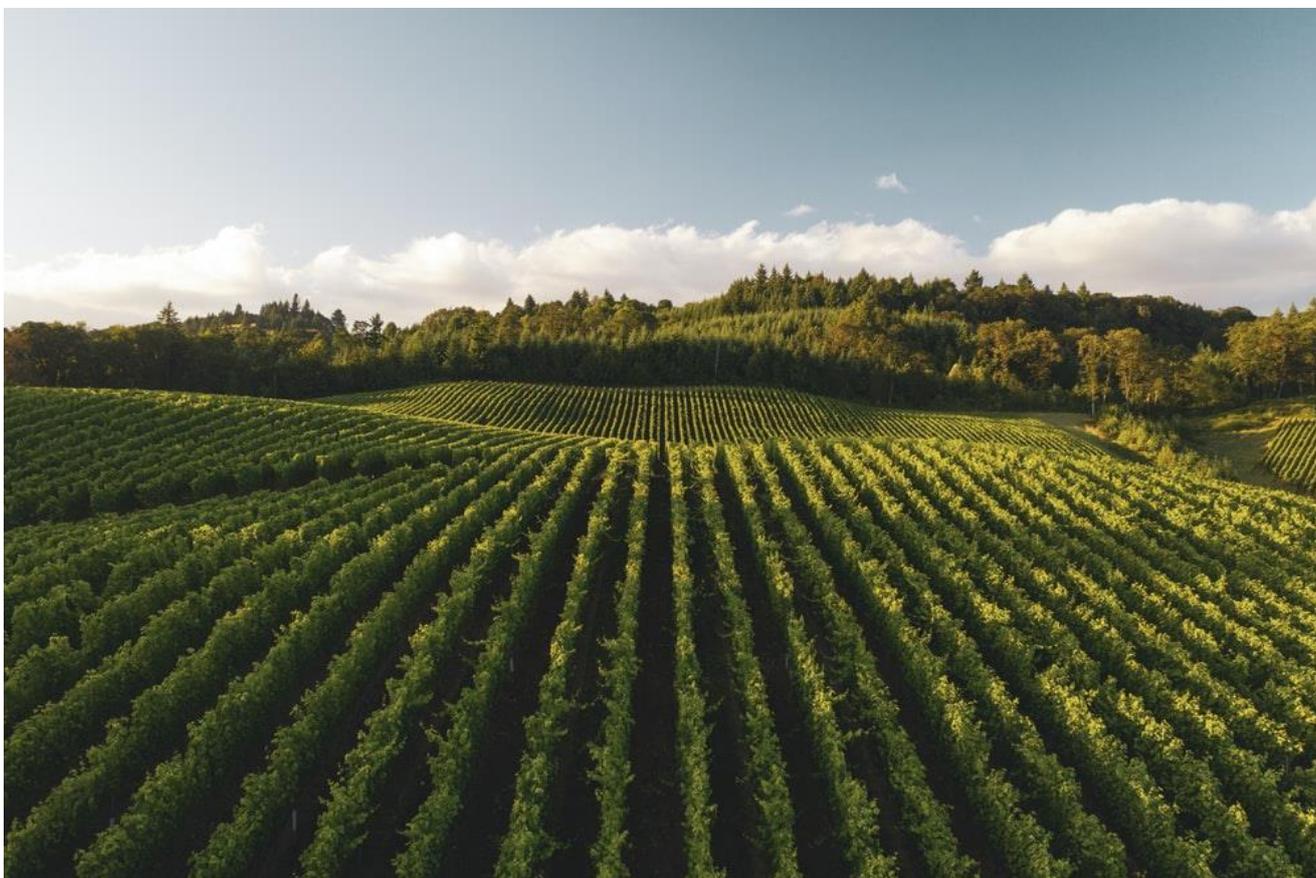
**Step 2** – Decide which Certification you need ([Which Standard Should I Choose?](#)).

**Step 3** – Apply for Certification ([Applying for Certification](#))

**Step 4** – Fill in the Application Form and have an on-site audit and soil test.

**Step 5** – Wait for a Certification decision.

**Step 6** – Maintain organic processes and have annual on-site audits conducted. ([What Happens Once I'm Certified?](#)).



# Becoming Organic: An Overview of the Requirements

If you've decided to become an organic producer or processor you will need to know what to expect about the way your farming or processing practices will need to change (...or stay the same if you have been biologically farming for at least the last few years). This section will give you an idea of the fundamentals of organic systems as well as some of the key requirements of the various organic standards.

## Principals of Organic Systems

Fundamentally, organic farming and processing is about ensuring:

- Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) do not enter the system at any point,
- Synthetic substances that are made in a laboratory and do not occur in nature, such as pesticides, herbicides and fungicides do not enter the system (however each standard allows some exceptions to this),
- Soil, water and the environment are managed sustainably,
- Animals are well cared for and can act and behave as nature intended,
- Accurate records are kept ensuring the above principals are verifiable and auditable.

## In-Conversion to Organic

To start your organic journey, a period known as "In-Conversion" must be undertaken. This is a period that a producer must run their operation according to organic principals before they are permitted to call their products "Certified Organic." For example, if you sprayed your paddocks with Glyphosate yesterday, then it will take a good 3 years of applying organic principals, before product leaving the operation can be deemed "Certified Organic." Almost all organic standards have this 3 year In-Conversion period.

If the way in which you have been farming satisfies organic principals, then In-Conversion periods can be reduced. The amount of this reduction depends on the organic standard to which you want to be certified to. (Which Standard Should I Choose?).

## Fundamental Requirements

The following are requirements (paraphrased for simplicity) that appear in almost all organic standards. The information is a guide only to give you an idea of what to expect from organic standards. The standards generally go into a lot more detail than what is presented here, so please, if you are interested in proceeding with organic certification, review all requirements of the standard you choose (Which Standard Should I Choose?).

## Plants and Pasture



- Potential risks such as those from prior operations and external contaminations (such as spray drift and runoff from neighbouring properties) must be managed using techniques such as buffer zones, barriers, and drainage design.
- The fertility and the biological activity of the soil must be maintained or increased by practices such as rotational planting of legumes / green manure crops, application of animal manure and /or compost, tillage techniques that preserve or improve soil health and incorporation of livestock into the farming system.
- Brought in fertilisers and inputs can only be applied if there is a demonstrated need.
- Cultivation of soil must maintain and improve soil structure.
- Organic crops must be grown in soil, must be GMO free and varieties grown need to be those best suited to local and regional conditions and are the least susceptible to pest and disease.
- Organic plants must be grown from organic seed or organic plant propagation material. Note however, especially in Australia, these seeds are not always available. Most standards permit the use of non-organic seeds, so long as you try to source them organically in the first instance.
- Pests for plants can be controlled by careful selection of crops, rotation programs, mechanical cultivation, mulching, mowing,

grazing of livestock, traps, barriers, light, or sound. The methods permitted depend on the organic standard to which you are certified. (Which Standard Should I Choose?).

- Water should be recycled wherever possible, and the harvest, storage, use and fate of water must be carefully controlled to ensure environmental impact is minimised.

## Livestock



- The choice of breeds and breeding methods must take into consideration their adaptation to local conditions, vitality and resistance to disease.
- Natural breeding methods are preferred, however, GMO free, unsexed Artificial Insemination can be used (but is not recommended).
- 100% of livestock feed (including feed from grazing) must be organically produced. Animals must also be provided with a wide variety of food natural to their diet and have access to mineral and other supplements (supplemental feeding has many additional requirements).
- In extreme circumstances, some standards allow conventional feed to be given to livestock. When this occurs, substantial waiting periods apply before products from the affected livestock may be sold as certified organic.
- Livestock health must be maintained through a combination of breed selection, rotational grazing management, appropriate stocking densities or high quality feed.
- Vaccines are permitted where you can demonstrate that management practices are insufficient to guard against disease and illness.
- For sick animals, if phytotherapeutic or homeopathic remedies have not worked, veterinary drugs can be used. In this case:
  - the affected animals must be quarantined for a specified period,

- the live animal can never be sold as certified organic,
- Products from the animal can be sold as certified organic after substantial waiting periods.

- Sick animals must be treated.
- Living conditions must provide for the natural needs of the animal for free movement, including free ranging during day light hours, food, water, shelter and shade. Standards may also specify stocking densities for some species.
- Loading and transport management must be carried out so as to limit stress and injury to livestock. Electrical stimulation and chemical tranquillisers are generally not permitted.
- Livestock manure must be managed in a manner that optimises recycling of nutrients, while minimising soil and water degradation.

## Processing and Handling



Processing and handling refers to operations who process organic produce such as bakers, wine makers, baby food manufacturers etc. or

operations that handle organic product such as re-packers, transporters, storage facilities, wholesalers, exporters or importers.

- Organic products must be processed and handled in a manner that prevents contamination or substitution with substances or products not compatible with organic standards. This can be done by keeping certified organic products physically separated from conventional products by using separate spaces, or by processing certified products at different times to conventional products.
- All equipment must be pre-cleaned of substances not compatible with organic standards. This may include a water rinse, a sufficient flush of organic products (the flushed product must not be sold as certified organic) or a sufficient time for the cleaning product to volatilise.

- Inputs, processing aids and ingredients are strictly controlled (each standard has slightly different requirements than others) and must be traced back one step in the biological chain to the organism from which they were produced to verify that they are not derived from GMOs.
- Allowed processing techniques are prescribed by the relevant standard, and can include filtration, biological, mechanical, physical, smoking, extraction, precipitation.
- Allowed preservation techniques are prescribed by the relevant standard, and can include freezing, salting, natural dehydration, vacuum packaging, gas flushing, canning, smoking, pasteurising, ultra-heat treatment.
- Packaging materials must not contaminate the product and as far as possible exclude unnecessary packaging.
- Labelling must be done in accordance with the label guidelines which specify aspects such as size, colour and aspect of the certification mark, as well as the minimum information required to accompany a certified organic claim.

The following will give you an idea of what SXC looks for when assessing allowed input products:

- Products must not be made with ingredients that are derived from GMOs, use nanotechnology or interfere with the natural metabolism of livestock and plants.
- Products must not contain materials that are prohibited by the various organic standards.
- Products can generally not contain synthetic chemicals, except those that are nature identical.
- Use of the product must not result in, or contribute to unacceptable effects on or contamination of, the environment.
- Inert ingredients must comply with the organic standards.
- Products must be labelled correctly, including an indication that they may not be suitable for use under some standards.
- Comprehensive records must be kept of all ingredients, batches/runs/mixes and sales.

## Allowed Inputs



Allowed Input manufacturers or providers are those operations that produce products such as fertilisers, pest control sprays and composts that are acceptable for use in a certified organic system but are not able to be certified in their own right as certified organic.

When certified organic farmers or processors or handlers see the SXC Allowed Input logo, they can be assured that the product is acceptable for use in their operation (so long as the product is used for its intended purpose).

## Which Standard Should I Choose?

Choosing the correct standard depends on where you intend to sell your product, and in some cases, what the buyers of your product intend to do with it. A standard is a document that specifies the rules for organic production. See the next page [Download or View the Standards](#).

### Standards Overview

Standard	Who Should Choose	Export Possibilities	Examples of Who Should Choose
AS 6000	<p>Good for those who want to sell directly to consumers or retailers, or for those who sell to customers they know do not export.</p> <p>If you are unsure, it's a good idea to consult your customers to understand their export needs before making a decision to use AS 6000.</p>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers that sell directly to supermarkets.</li> <li>• Farmers that sell to wholesalers that sell to supermarkets.</li> <li>• Farmers who sell at farm gate or markets.</li> <li>• Wine makers who sell at the cellar door.</li> <li>• Grape growers who sell grapes to wine makers who sell at the cellar door.</li> <li>• Restaurants.</li> <li>• Processors who make products for cafes and restaurants.</li> </ul>
National Standard	<p>If you or your customers export certified organic product, you must choose this standard, as a minimum. This is because the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment regulates exports and requires you to be certified to this standard if you export certified organic products.</p> <p>If you want to sell product to the US, EU or China, you must be certified to this standard as well (because this is the standard that allows you to export in the first place).</p>	<p>Unregulated markets*</p> <p>Plant and processed plant products (except wine) and seeds may be exported to the EU.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine makers who export wine to unregulated markets or who sell to customers export to unregulated markets.</li> <li>• Growers who sell grapes to wine makers who export to unregulated markets.</li> <li>• Growers who sell to processors who export.</li> <li>• Livestock &amp; dairy producers who sell products to companies that export to unregulated markets.</li> <li>• Seedling producers that sell to growers who sell to exporters....and so on.</li> </ul>
National Standard & IACB	<p>If you are in Australia and wish to sell wine, animal feed or livestock products to the EU, or to someone who exports to the EU, then this is what you'll need. International Operators wishing to supply any product into the EU will also need this.</p>	Unregulated markets and any EU country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wine makers / livestock processors wishing to export directly to the EU.</li> <li>• International Operators wishing to sell any plant or livestock product to the EU</li> </ul>
National Standard & NOP	<p>If you wish to sell any product into the US market, or to someone who exports to the US, then this is what you'll need. International Operators wishing to supply any product into the US will also need this.</p>	Unregulated markets and the US and Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beef Cattle producers who sell to companies that export to the US.</li> </ul>
National Standard & China	<p>This is the standard for those who wish to sell to the Chinese market, or to someone who exports to the China.</p>	Unregulated markets and China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processors who sell product into China.</li> <li>• Growers that sell to processors who sell to China.</li> <li>• Growers who sell feedstuffs to other farmers (eg dairy) who then sell to processors who sell to China.</li> </ul>
SXC Allowed Input Scheme	<p>If you sell products that are permitted by the various standards above, but are not certifiable in their own right, then this is what you need. Customers who see the certification mark on these types of products can immediately know that they are suitable for use in their organic farming operation.</p>	Products cannot be exported as organic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compost manufacturers</li> <li>• Mineral and soil amendment suppliers</li> <li>• Animal feed supplement suppliers</li> <li>• Plant and animal pest control product manufacturers.</li> </ul>

\* An unregulated market is a market in a country where there is no legislation that enforces the use of the term Certified Organic. Examples are most countries in Asia (except Korea, China and Japan), New Zealand, Papua New Guinea.

Regulated markets such as the US and the EU have legislation which mandates that any operation that makes a certified organic claim, must be certified to that countries required standard. For example, in the case of exporting product to the US, you must be certified to the NOP standard.

## Download or View the Standards

The following is a list of links to where you can find most of the above standards. Unfortunately, the AS 6000 standard is a Standards Australia document and must be purchased, however, it is almost line by line equivalent to the National Standard – so if you are interested in AS 6000, please look at the requirements in the National Standard to give you a really good idea.

National Standard	<a href="#">Available from the SXC Website</a>
IACB Standard	<a href="#">Available from the SXC Website</a>
USDA NOP Requirements	<a href="#">Available from the US governmental Website</a>
Chinese Standard	<a href="#">Available from the SXC Website</a>
SXC Allowed Input Scheme	<a href="#">Available from the SXC Website</a>

## SXC Fees

Which standard you choose will also have an impact on the fees you'll be asked to pay with SXC. SXC operates on a fixed fee for certification plus whatever it costs SXC to conduct audits and testing (if required) – at cost. This means the better prepared you are for your annual audits, the less the audit will cost you.

SXC will only ever ask you for the one fee for your operations. For example, if you have both a farming operation and a processing operation under the one ABN, you will only be asked for the one certification fee.

We do not charge industry levies nor do we charge product, ingredient or label approval fees. In most

circumstances, you'll only ever get one invoice, once a year. [Click here to view the SXC Fee Schedule.](#)

# Applying for Certification

## What to Expect

Applying for certification with SXC is a simple process. It should take between 20 – 30 minutes to fill in the on-line application form. The following gives you an idea of what sort of questions you can expect:

- We'll ask you to describe your operation - such as location, land size, soil types and rainfall.
- For plant and livestock producers, we'll ask you for a farm map showing key features such as boundaries, paddocks, watering points etc.
- We'll ask questions about how you manage your operations, such as how you manage your soil, pests and diseases, what sorts of inputs you have used etc.
- For processing and handling operations, we'll ask you to provide a floor plan and process flow chart / description so that we can understand how you process or handle products.
- We'll ask you about the sorts of records you keep.

**Tip:** When you apply with SXC, you can start and stop your application and come back at any time. If you don't have all the information at your fingertips, that's ok – fill out the form as best you can, then gather the additional information then come back and finish the application when you're ready.

## Steps for Applying

1. Make sure you have a good understanding of what standard you want to apply for. Read the Which Standard Should I Choose? section for more information
2. If you have registered before, go to Step 3. If not, [click here to go to the SXC Registration Page](#). Once you have filled in the information and clicked the "Register" button, you will get an email asking you to confirm your email address. Click the link in the email then go to Step 2.

3. [Click here to go to the SXC Website Login Page](#). To login, enter your email address and password.
4. On the left hand side, click the "Applications" menu item, then click "Apply for Certification".
5. You'll now be asked some questions about which standard you want to apply for, what sort of operation you have and confirming that you have read and understood the fees. Once these questions have been answered, your application will be ready to go.
6. You can now complete the application form at your leisure. If you wish to come back later, follow steps 2 through 4, but instead of clicking the "Apply for Certification" button, just click the "View" link for the application you have started earlier.

When you have finished answering the questions, you will be asked to submit the application. This involves making a declaration that the answers you have given are true and correct, and paying the application fee if one is required (there are some cases where the application fee can be waived, such as if you were previously certified and are transferring, or if you are part of an industry development program).

Once the application is submitted – it's over to the SXC team. We'll review your application and come back to you if we have any questions.

If you have any difficulties with the above process, Matt and Ben are here to help. Just call us for assistance and we'll be able to help.

## After the Application

If we have all the information we need, it's time to organise an on-site audit. An initial on-site audit is a requirement of all the standards. Audits involve the auditor asking you questions about your operation and will most likely involve a tour of your operation, and a review of the records that you keep.

SXC will assign an auditor based on their knowledge and skills and on their location in relation to your operation. The auditor will then make contact with you to arrange a date and time of day that suits you both. We often try to get multiple audits done in a

day to share audit costs and to keep them as low as possible. Our auditors are highly experienced and professional and will make the on-site audit a rewarding experience.

After the audit, SXC will then make a decision on whether to certify your operation based on the information in the application, and on the findings of the audit and testing. If we make the decision to certify, we will send you:

- a report that lists issues identified at the audit and includes tests results (if testing was required).
- the certification agreement and
- the invoice for certification.

Once the agreement has been signed and returned, and the invoice has been paid, we will send you a certificate and some examples of how you can use the SXC certification mark.

## What Happens Once I'm Certified?

Once you have received your certificate, it's then up to you to ensure that your farming or processing and handling practices are always compliant with the standard you are certified to.

The key issues for farmers are around ensuring that inputs (such as fertilisers or livestock pest and disease control) used are acceptable and ensuring that records are diligently kept. For processors and handlers, ensuring that products, recipes, ingredients and labelling are all kept up to date.

SXC must also conduct regular "surveillance" on certified operations. See the Ongoing Audits and Testing section below.

You will also need to keep SXC up to date with information about your operation. This can be done using your SXC portal. See below for more details on what you can do with your access to the SXC portal.

## Managing your Information with your SXC Portal

Over time, you'll need to keep SXC informed of any changes to your operation, and sometimes ask SXC for permission for such things as using conventional seed, or to check on the suitability of an input product. SXC provides its certified operators an easy to use online "Portal" where most of the tasks can be easily accomplished.

The SXC portal allows you to:

- Update information on how you manage your operation.
- Apply for derogations (where the standard requires this).
- Add additional land – such as a newly acquired lease block or an additional farm.
- Add additional facilities such as a warehouse or storage site.
- For processors and handlers, add new products, recipes, ingredients and labels.
- Control who has access to your information (such as a farm manager or consultant).
- Update and respond to issues raised at audit.
- Pay your invoices online using credit card

Your SXC portal also gives you access to resources such as :

- examples of farm diaries, Inputs registers etc,
- various forms and documents you may need from day to day,
- some SXC internal procedures, and
- our online shop where you can order things like Gate Signs.



## Ongoing Audits and Testing

SXC will keep an eye on how you're going by:

1. Conducting annual on-site audits.
2. Conducting unannounced audits on approximately 10% of all our operators based on risk. This process is defined very clearly in the "SXC unannounced audit procedure" which is available via your portal in the "Resources" section.
3. Conducting soil, water or tissue testing as required.
4. Conducting investigations based on customer feedback and complaints if they are raised and found to be valid.
5. Regular market surveillance on label and logo use and periodically conducting tissue tests from retailers, wholesalers or other downstream customers.