

Organic Poultry Production: An introductory guide

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is part of a range of short introductory guides that are designed to help anyone who is thinking about starting an organic enterprise. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide but aims to answer the most common questions.

The booklets must be read together with the standards of your organic certification body. For example, if you are a Soil Association Certification Limited (SACL) licensee then you should read the full *Soil Association organic standards*.

SOIL ASSOCIATION Supporting organic businesses...

The Soil Association has an independent membership-based team within the Soil Association charity, dedicated to helping farmers, growers, primary processors – and the wider organic sector. We are independent of the organic certification process and are here to provide you with information, advice and support.

To find out more about the benefits of producer membership see the rear pages. Alternatively, call us on **0117 914 2400** and we will be happy to help discuss any membership queries you have, or any other questions arising from this booklet.

The aim of organic poultry production

Organic poultry seeks to produce healthy, good quality poultry meat and eggs in an ecologically responsible way, for which the producer gets a fair return. The system is designed to avoid the need for agrochemicals and to minimise damage to the environment and wildlife.

Organic conversion

If I convert who will buy my organic produce?

This should be the first question that you ask yourself: just being organic is not enough to guarantee a market. You will need to develop your market and produce sufficient birds or eggs to meet it.

A range of information is available to help you identify and develop a suitable market. The Soil Association fact sheet *Marketing Information for Organic Farmers* provides further useful information and contacts. The Soil Association also produces an annual *Organic Market Report* which gives a useful market overview, while the regular 'Market news' section in the Soil Association *Organic Farming* magazine highlights recent market trends and prices.

Local retail and contract prices and market information is also available from the Soil Association website at

www.soilassociation.org/pricedata

How long will it take to convert my land?

Most arable, horticultural and grass-based farms will go through a 24-month conversion period when the land must be managed to full organic standards. However, sometimes the conversion period may be increased or reduced.

Land used specifically for poultry and pigs may be eligible for a reduced conversion period. In order to qualify, farm records and a field assessment at inspection must demonstrate that no prohibited inputs have been applied to the land for 12 months before the start of conversion (see 'What are prohibited inputs under organic rules?' below).

According to organic regulations all land must be monitored during the conversion period. This normally involves at least one farm inspection each year by an approved UK organic certification organisation, such as Soil Association Certification Limited (SACL).

If land has received any herbicide or synthetic fertilisers – including spot herbicide treatments or weed wiping – it will not be eligible for any reduction in the conversion period. The absolute minimum organic conversion period for land is 12 months.

What is the purpose of the conversion period?

Organic production is governed by UK and EU legislation. Part of this legislation specifies a conversion period before any land or products can be marketed as organic. This period provides time to start establishing organic management techniques, build soil fertility and biological activity, as well as to develop a viable and sustainable agro-ecosystem.

During the conversion period you will have time to gather information, develop your markets and embark on the learning curve that commencing organic farming brings. It also allows time for the break down of any traces of agrochemical residues left in the soil from previous management practices.

What are prohibited inputs under organic rules?

Any materials, other than those listed as 'permitted' in the standards of your organic certification body, should be regarded as prohibited. SACL licensees should see the *Soil Association organic standards* which has a positive list of permitted and restricted inputs.

Prohibited inputs for land would include, for example, all synthetic fertilisers, herbicides and synthetic pesticides. Prohibited inputs for livestock include all organophosphate treatments, the unauthorised use of routine veterinary treatments, such as routine worming, and the unauthorised feeding of non-organic feedstuffs which might contain genetically modified (GM) material.

Full lists of approved fertilisers, pest and disease control products, approved feed suppliers, abattoirs and so on are available free to SACL licensees and food and farming members.

If you are in any doubt about the status of any product you can always contact the Soil Association for advice on **0117 914 2400**.

Do I have to convert all my land?

You are not required to convert all land on a holding. However, the area converted must be large enough to be a viable and sustainable organic production unit.

If you are thinking of converting only part of the holding, you will need to make sure the organic area is physically separated from any non-organic land on the same holding by means of stock-proof fences or hedges. You will also need to maintain separate records, invoices and accounts for the organic business.

What stocking rate is allowed?

The following table shows the maximum number of birds per hectare that can be kept under different certification schemes. From this it can be seen that producers must check the specific requirements of their chosen certification body before planning an organic poultry enterprise:

Certifier	Layers	Broilers	Turkeys	Ducks	Geese	Guinea fowl
EU regulation	2,500	2,500 (unless in mobile housing when up to 4,000 may be permitted)	1,000	2,222	666	2,500 (unless in mobile housing when up to 4,000 may be permitted)
Organic Farmers and Growers (OF&G)	1,000	2,500 (unless in mobile housing when up to 4,000 may be permitted)	1,000	2,222	666	2,500 (unless in mobile housing when up to 4,000 may be permitted)
Soil Association Certification	1,000	2,500	800	2,000	600	2,500

However, EU regulations prohibit manure applications directly from livestock in excess of 170kg N/ha a year on the whole agricultural area used. For poultry, this effectively sets a maximum stocking density equivalent to 230 laying hens/ha, and 3.5 batches of 580 table birds/ha over the farm as a whole. In other words, to keep 1,000 laying hens under Soil Association organic standards a producer needs 1ha of land where the hens will actually be kept and also access to an additional 3.34ha of organic land so that the nitrogen limit is not exceeded.

The important principle is to prevent damage to the pasture and to avoid disease build up while allowing free and easy access to pasture. From the perspective of managing poultry health, producers should stock at considerably less than any of these standards allow for particularly when the local climate or topography is less than ideal.

What type of feed is required?

The ideal situation is that all organic livestock should be fed 100% organic feed. However, the standards currently allow the use of a limited proportion of approved non-organic feedstuffs where the farmer is unable to source fully organic feed.

Defra have compiled a so-called 'green' list of permitted non-organic feeds which are deemed to be in short supply, and which can be fed where prior justification is provided. Producers need to fill in a derogation form (available from your certification body) and keep it ready for inspection. A derogation to use non-organic feed ingredients will only be given where producers can show that they have tried to source organic ingredients.

Feed mills will also need prior permission before milling compounds with non-organic ingredients. If the feed mill has been given permission to make a feed using non-organic ingredients the farmer does not have to ask prior permission to use that feed. On an annual basis up to 10% of the ration for poultry (calculated as a percentage of dry matter intake – DMI) can comprise approved non-organic feed.

This non-organic allowance is set to decrease over the next few years. The 10% cent non-organic allowance will be in place until 31 December 2009, when it will drop to 5%. If sufficient organic feed ingredients are

available it is expected that poultry will have to be fed 100% organic feed from 31 December 2011.

On a daily basis the maximum allowance for approved non-organic feedstuffs (calculated as a percentage of DMI) is 25%, provided that the total annual non-organic ration does not go above the current maximum of 10%, as indicated above.

Managing the ration can become complicated and careful rationing is advised in order that the annual 10% limit is not exceeded.

There has been a recent change to the European Regulation regarding the amount of in-conversion feed that can be fed to organic livestock. The amount you can use depends on whether the feed comes from land in its first or second year of conversion and the source of the feed. If you produce feed from your own holding on land that is in its second year of conversion you can feed your animals 100% of their diet from this second year and still sell your products as organic – as long as you have some land that is already registered as fully organic. If the second year conversion feed is produced on another holding – even if it is one with which your own farm is linked – the maximum amount that can be fed is 30% on an annual dry matter basis.

Second year in-conversion crops or forage must come from land that is in its second year of conversion – in other words, crops or forage cut at least 12 months after start of your conversion date.

Crops such as wheat or barley that come from first year conversion land – land that has not yet completed 12 months of conversion – are considered to be non-organic. However, up to 20% of the annual or lifetime intake of the animal on a dry matter basis may originate from the grazing or harvesting of permanent pastures or perennial forage parcels in their first year of conversion, provided that this land is part of your own or a linked holding. Note that this 20% allowance does not apply to annual forage crops such as stubble turnips that are grown on first year conversion land.

As you can see, feed rationing and the use of in-conversion crops and forage can be complicated. In order to ensure you are meeting the organic standards on feed please contact the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400** with details of your proposed ration

The tightening of the requirement to use organic feeds, combined with a ban on synthetic amino acids (see below), provides a particular challenge for organic poultry producers and feed mills in terms of achieving protein balance in rations. Producers should be fully aware of these issues when choosing breeds and rations, designing systems, and working out costs of production.

Can fish meal be a part of the ration?

Yes. Due to the ban on synthetic amino acids in organic rations under the EU organic livestock regulation, fish meal can now be included in all poultry rations. However, the Soil Association requires that all fish products must either be from the by-product of fish for human consumption or from fisheries that have been independently certified as sustainably managed (for example by the Marine Stewardship Council).

Where can I get organic concentrates?

Organic feed is widely available. A list of approved organic feed suppliers is available from the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400** or producer.support@soilassociation.org

All concentrate feeds and blends fed to organic stock must be from approved – or certified – suppliers. Such certification includes an assurance that they do not contain GM materials or other prohibited materials, which the feed manufacturer will have verified as part of their own certification process.

For licensees who mill and mix their own non-organic feeds and use straights, then non-GM declarations or organic certificates must be obtained from the supplier(s) of all relevant ingredients.

All non-organic single-ingredient feed materials bought-in to feed stock during the conversion period or fed to organic stock, such as grains, pulses, oil seed cakes, and food by-products, must be accompanied by a GM-declaration form.

Non-GM declarations are not required for organic feedstuffs, approved straight minerals, seaweed, and other products that are clearly not produced from GM sources or derivatives.

All concentrates, cakes and blends fed during the land conversion period (before stock are required to be managed to organic standards) must be accompanied by a GM-declaration form.

All concentrates, cakes and blends fed during simultaneous conversion, or to fully organic stock, must be approved or certified as organic feed.

Does the land ranged by poultry have to be rested?

Yes. Under the ACOS Compendium of standards for the UK land used for table birds must be rested for two months in any calendar year and land used for laying hens must be rested for two months between each batch. The Soil Association has stricter requirements on resting land and for table birds there is a requirement to rest the pasture for two months in any one calendar year, as well as for one year in three. For laying birds the pasture must be rested for at least nine months after each batch of birds.

Health and welfare

What about protection from predators?

It is important to try to protect birds from predators and to keep mortality to a minimum. The main problems are foxes and birds such as buzzards. The use of electric fences can provide good protection from foxes, while decoys or overhead wires may be required to deter aerial predators. Young table birds may also need to have overhead covered shelters or trees to provide both shade and security from predators.

Can beaks be clipped to prevent feather pecking?

Beak-tipping is prohibited under Soil Association standards. If nonorganic pullets (see above) are sourced they must be ordered well in advance to ensure that birds are not beak-tipped. Remember nonorganic birds must be managed to organic feed and veterinary standards if they are to be used on organic farms. If in doubt, contact your certification body.

What can I use to treat external parasites, such as red mite?

Prevention is paramount and houses should be thoroughly disinfected between batches with iodoform, steam, blowtorch or lime (depending on the materials used for construction). Attention should be paid to house construction: a good design with washable surfaces and without hard-to-clean cracks and cavities will help to ensure a parasite-free house. If it is possible, rest houses between batches – or ideally partially dismantle them to expose them to the elements – to help break the cycle of external parasites.

Using diatomaceous earth around the house can help as a preventative or treatment for red mite. This product has no effect on the chickens but acts by damaging the waxy external coating of the mite so they dry out and die. There are also certain cleaning products like 'Poultry Shield' that can be used to get rid of red mite. The products are sprayed round the house and act by dissolving the waxy coating on the red mite and their eggs so that they dessiccate and die. You would need to check with your certification body before using this kind of product if you are using it other than at depopulation.

What about vaccination?

Under the organic standards vaccines should only be used if there is a known disease risk on the farm or neighbouring land which cannot be controlled by any other means. Any vaccination programme should be agreed in advance with the certification body and reviewed regularly as part of the health and welfare plan for the farm.

How can coccidiosis be controlled?

Like many other poultry diseases, coccidiosis can be successfully controlled through good stockmanship, proper cleaning and disinfection of houses.

Ensure litter is kept dry and clean by replacing regularly, and that a proper rotation of poultry pasture is maintained. Where these fail, it is possible to obtain permission from your certification body to treat with a coccidiostat on veterinary advice, and a vaccine may also be considered.

What about roundworms and tape worms?

If pasture is well rested and birds integrated into the farm rotation such internal parasites should not pose too much of a problem. This is why a minimum resting period is required under Soil Association standards (see 'Does the land ranged by poultry have to be rested?').

Research has shown that worm eggs can be reduced by up to 80% after being exposed to ultra violet light, so light tilling of the ground through harrowing or reseeding can help with control. Bringing on cattle and sheep while the pasture is being rested from poultry should also help to keep the pasture clean. These animals effectively consume poultry parasites, which are killed in their gut.

If there are problems with internal parasites birds can be treated with the prior permission of the certification body, although there will be an extended withdrawal period before poultry meat or eggs could be marketed as organic.

Conversion grants

What government grants are available?

The following schemes are available to farmers undertaking conversion to organic production:

- Organic Entry Level Stewardship for England
- Organic Farming Scheme for Wales
- Organic Aid Scheme for Scotland
- · Organic Farming Scheme for Northern Ireland.

The above schemes aim to encourage the expansion of organic production. Under the scheme, farmers moving from nonorganic to organic farming methods receive financial help during the conversion period in the form of a 'per hectare' payment over a five year period, depending on the type of land you have.

There are specific requirements so if you are considering making an application to join one of the schemes you must read the eligibility requirements in full in the explanatory booklet that are available for the respective schemes. Application forms for the above schemes and full explanatory booklets are available from the various government offices.

The OELS for England and the OFS for Northern Ireland both require that the land must be registered as 'in-conversion' with a registered certification organisation, such as Soil Association Certification Limited before the grant is applied for

The OAS for Scotland and OFS for Wales require that farmer apply for the grants before land is registered as 'in-conversion'

Please note that full contact details are provided at the end of this document. Each scheme varies slightly according to its requirements and eligibility for payment, as well as the levels of payment. Please contact the Soil Association for further information and relevant fact sheet on 0117 914 2400.

Is there any on-going support?

Ongoing payments are available to producers in England once conversion has been completed, and after the initial five years of support through Organic Entry Level Stewardship.

The National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Executive also provide ongoing payments to organic producers in Wales and Scotland.

Egg production

A useful technical guide, *Managing Organic Laying Hens*, is available from the Soil Association (see end of this booklet for further details).

How does a flock of laying hens become organic?

Producers must use organic pullets (reared organically from less than three days old to point of lay) where available. There are a number of large and small scale pullet rearers producing a variety of breeds, some of which can deliver country-wide. Some rearers will rear to order whatever breed you choose, but you will need to plan your flock placement and give your rearer plenty of notice.

To find suppliers of organic birds see

www.soilassociation.org/organicmarketplace or call the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400**. The Soil Association produce a 'poultry information sheet' which lists pullet and meat bird suppliers, as well as equipment housing and sources of further advice. Producers should consider rearing their own pullets, if possible, and be aware of the market opportunities in producing a surplus for sale. Home grown pullets will generally fare better than brought in pullets.

If you cannot find organic pullets, or you think the available pullets are not suitable, you will need to ask your certification body for permission to use non-organic pullets. Since 31 December 2005, all non-organic pullets must also be reared to organic feed and veterinary standards in order to be eligible for production on organic farms. Before they can produce organic eggs they must go through a six week conversion period being managed to full organic standards on an organic farm for at least six weeks.

Regardless of age, an existing flock on a converting holding may be converted over a period of six weeks from the date the land becomes organic by being managed to full organic standards.

Which breeds are best?

Producers can use commercial hybrids or traditional breeds as they wish. In many cases the quality of the rearing is more important than the breed.

The breeding of laying hens has also become a highly specialised process in recent years and is now largely the domain of a few specialised breeding companies. Most of these commercial layers are hybrids, selected for their superior egg production and feed efficiency.

Laying breeds that are suitable for free-range conditions, such as ISA brown or hyline, while the more traditional breeds such as the light Sussex and Rhode Island red are also suitable for organic egg systems. Other popular breeds in some organic systems are black rocks, bovans nera and Colombian blacktail.

What system of management can be used?

The only system that meets the requirements of the EU regulation governing organic farming is free range.

Mobile houses are preferred as they allow grazing areas to be rotated and because fixed houses tend to have less pasture in close proximity, and are often sited in the corner of fields. However, fixed houses are permitted if other management requirements are met. Soil Association standards and EU organic regulations both effectively penalise fixed housing systems as providing the required ranging area and resting it for appropriate times for the larger number of birds usually kept in fixed houses may not be possible.

Hens should have continuous and easy daytime access to land covered with vegetation. Soil Association standards require that shade and shelter are provided in the run, preferably in the form of trees, shrubs or tall hedges. Failing this, game cover strips or artificial cover could be provided.

What sort of housing is suitable?

Houses should provide enough space for birds to move around freely. Soil Association standards favour buildings which house no more than 500 birds and are mobile. However, over 500 – and up to 2,000 laying hens – may be allowed in one housing group on a 'restricted basis'; in other words, provided that various extra conditions are met and the producer can demonstrate that the health and welfare of the birds will not be affected by the larger flock size.

In such cases, the restrictions on ranging distances, resting of land and stocking rates under Soil Association organic standards tend to limit laying flocks to a maximum of around 1,500 birds for totally fixed houses (see worked example below) and possibly less than this. Higher numbers are achievable in mobile-housed units. This may not be a unit that is moved throughout the life of the flock but one that is at least capable of being relocated to a new piece of ground for each new batch of hens allowing the previous area to be rested.

Restricted flock sizes

As noted above, Soil Association standard 20.7 allows flock sizes in excess of 500 birds – up to 2,000 laying hens or 1000 meat birds if further conditions are met. In addition to a demonstrably high level of management, hygiene and welfare, producers must also comply with standards on ranging distance. These ensure that colony size is limited by the amount of pasture within a certain distance from the poultry house: for layers this is 100m.

The following example provides the 'best case' scenario for a static house in the middle of a large field:

Approximately 3.14ha could be within 100m of a poultry house. To allow for a nine-month rest between batches, this area will need to be divided in half. Therefore the colony size must be based on 1.57ha. At 1,000 birds/ha this means the maximum number of poultry that could be kept is 1,570 birds. If the static house were in the corner of the only field to which it had access, the maximum number of birds dictated by the ranging distance is likely to be a quarter of this. This would mean the numbers are further restricted to approximately 390 birds. However, this would default to the permitted limit of 500.

If the house can be moved between batches and access allowed right around the house for the full life of the flock it can be seen that 2,000 birds could be accommodated.

If the aim is to keep these larger flock sizes the producer must ensure that they have enough suitable land to be able to rotate the birds round the farm.

Should there be any litter in the houses?

Yes. Litter should always be provided for birds to scratch in. The standards require that litter must be regularly replenished and kept in a dry and friable condition. The use of organic straw as a bedding material is the ideal but non-organic straw may be used. For poultry, chopped straw or wood shavings from untreated timber are the most suitable bedding materials.

Are there requirements for the dimensions of the house?

Yes. The requirements under the ACOS Compendium are:

- Stocking rates: maximum six birds/m2
- Perch space: minimum 18cm/bird
- Individual nest boxes: maximum eight birds/nest
- Communal nests: minimum 120cm²/bird
- Slatted floor area: maximum 66%
- Exit/entry pop-holes: minimum 4m/100m² floor area.

The Soil Association allow only six birds per nest box and a maximum slatted area of 50%.

Is artificial lighting permitted?

Yes. Artificial lighting will normally be necessary to ensure continuity of egg production. However, 'daylight' should not exceed 16 hours.

Batteries, solar powered units and small wind generators are often used for mobile houses to provide lighting and to power other services in the house.

Is there a market for organic eggs?

Yes. However, before you enter conversion, it is essential to explore and secure your market – whether through local sales or a wholesale contract to the supermarkets.

Eggs can be marketed very successfully from the farm gate or through farm shops, depending on passing trade, while local farmers' markets and vegetable box schemes can provide lucrative alternative local marketing options. Organic wholesalers and supermarket contracts are also available. Check the Soil Association fact sheet, *Marketing information for organic farmers*.

At certain times the large companies involved in egg marketing look for new producers. They will provide a complete integrated contract package. Premiums can be achieved but the market should be thoroughly researched for all marketing options, with contracts secured before production commences.

Be aware of the statutory requirements for packing and selling eggs. For example, in most instances producers will need to stamp eggs with a unique distinguishing number before selling. It is advisable to contact your local council's environmental health department and the regional government egg inspectorate.

Table poultry

A useful technical guide, *Rearing Organic Poultry for Meat*, is available from the Soil Association (see end of this booklet for further details).

Is it possible to buy organic day old chicks?

The organic standards require producers to source organic stock where possible, and poultry producers are not exempt from this requirement. For potential suppliers call the Soil Associationervices on **0117 914 2400**.

To find suppliers of organic birds see **www.soilassociation.org/ organicmarketplace** or call the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400**. The Soil Association produces a *Poultry Information Sheet* which lists pullet and meat bird suppliers, as well as equipment housing and sources of further advice.

If no organic birds are available, or if you decide the available organic birds are not suitable, you may be able to get permission from your certification body to buy non-organic birds.

If you use non-organic birds they must be managed to full organic standards on organic land from less than three days old for a 10 week 'conversion period' before they can be sold as organic.

Which breeds are best suited to organic production?

Many producers are rearing the same strains of bird that is kept in nonorganic systems – predominantly the Ross Cobb. The use of such birds effectively incurs a 'penalty' as the EU regulation prohibits the slaughter of fast growing non-organic strains before 81 days (the Ross Cobb is designed to reach slaughter weight at around 42 days in intensive conditions).

Table birds which are better suited to organic meat production are becoming available. The lack of synthetic amino acids and organic vegetable protein sources available to organic feed suppliers means that producers should consider slower growing strains with lower amino acid requirements in order to avoid health and welfare problems. They should also take this into account when predicting growth rates, which may be lower, as well as planning costs. While this may be more costly, it is a positive aspect of production that could be highlighted in the marketing of your chicken to the end consumer.

The Sasso breed has been developed in France for the Label Rouge designation. It is a slow growing bird designed for free range and organic systems. Hubbard also provide a range of slow growing strains suitable for organic production. These are usually chicks from the 'colour' type hens including the JA57. These are sometimes also known as 'poulet Anglais' There are, of course, the more traditional breeds such as the Cornish or Indian Game, or older dual purpose crosses such as the Rhode Island Red male crossed with a Light Sussex female, where the hens were kept to lay eggs and the males reared for meat. However, these older breeds may yield less meat and take a long time to grow to slaughter weight.

What system of management can be used?

A free range system is required under Soil Association standards and the EU organic livestock regulation, where the emphasis is on slow growing strains suited to free range organic systems.

What about brooding?

Chicks can be brooded within their field house or in a specialised brooding house. They should be encouraged to start ranging as early as possible.

Most producers let the birds out from about week three, depending on weather conditions. This is typical when chicks have been brooded in specialised houses away from the field. Those that brood in the field may start to encourage chicks to have some outside access from under a week old. Generally the younger birds are when they begin to go outside, the more they will range through their lives.

The ACOS Compendium requires birds to have access to the range for at least one third of their life. Soil Association standards require birds to have access to the range for at least two-thirds of their life. Some strains may need to be encouraged to range by providing vermin-proof feeders and water outside the house. However, this should be considered carefully as part of overall biosecurity management on site particularly in light of the spread of diseases, such as Avian Influenza. Having feed and water points on the range can attract wild birds to mix with the domestic flock.

Soil Association standards also require that shade and shelter are provided in the run, preferably in the form of trees, shrubs or tall hedges. Failing this, game cover strips or artificial cover can be provided.

What about waterfowl?

If waterfowl are kept organic producers are required to provide them with access to a stream, pond or lake with sufficient water for them to dip their heads in.

Environmental considerations can make it difficult to allow waterfowl unrestricted access to streams and so on as they can cause erosion to the banks and potential pollution problems. Many organic producers provide water for these birds in low troughs that can easily be cleaned and refilled with fresh water on a regular basis.

Are there any specific requirements for the house?

Yes. The house must provide a minimum internal stocking density for broilers and ducks of 21kg/m^2 (10 birds) in fixed housing, and 30kg/m^2 (maximum 16 birds) in mobile housing. For turkeys and geese this equates to two birds/m².

The maximum area of houses for table poultry on any one holding is 1,600m². In effect this limits the total number of birds that can be present on the holding at any one time. For chicken this equates to a maximum of 16,000 where birds are kept in fixed housing or 25,600 when birds are kept in mobile housing.

What flock sizes are allowed?

The ACOS Compendium allows up to 4,800 chickens, 2,500 geese or turkeys and up to 4,000 ducks (depending on breed and sex) in each poultry house.

The Soil Association recommends a maximum flock size of 500 birds for chickens and ducks and 250 birds for geese and turkeys. However, if the producer can demonstrate that the health and welfare of the birds will not be affected they may allow flock sizes of up to 1,000 birds of all species.

What about arrangements for on-farm slaughter?

Many organic producers selling birds direct to the end consumer kill and process birds on the farm. This is partly due to the difficulties of finding suitable organic abattoirs willing to take small numbers of birds for return to the producer.

The Code of Practice for Welfare of Poultry at Slaughter must be followed and all local council environmental health department regulations complied with. Contact your local council for further information.

Dry plucking is recommended but wet plucking is also permitted. See the Soil Association briefing sheet *Small-Scale On-farm Poultry Processing:* slaughter and dressing for further information.

What if the birds are sent to a slaughterhouse?

There are specific organic standards concerning the transportation of birds to slaughter. Off-farm slaughter must involve a journey time of less than eight hours from loading the first bird to unloading at the slaughterhouse. Birds must be treated with care at all times, protected from undue fluctuations in weather conditions and given sufficient space to rest and stand up without restriction.

If meat is to be marketed as organic the birds must be slaughtered and processed by operators who are registered with an organic inspection body and subject to an annual inspection process. A list of approved organic abattoirs is available from the Soil Association **0117 914 2400**.

Is there a market for organic table birds?

Yes. However, it is essential to explore and secure your market before you enter conversion – whether through local sales or a wholesale contract to the supermarkets. There is a strong demand for organically-reared table birds, provided that they are of good conformation and quality. There is some resistance to birds with brown stubs. However, the market for table birds that vary in colour and shape from standard broilers is developing. Remember if you wish to sell through local sales you will need to ensure you can get your birds slaughtered at an organically approved abattoir or set up your own on-farm slaughter. Contact the Soil Association for more information on **0117 914 2400**.

While the market for organic turkeys, ducks and geese is also growing, it remains small and most producers sell direct to consumers rather than supplying the supermarkets.

Where can I get further advice and support to help me decide?

Choose producer membership with the Soil Association

To get advice before you even go into conversion you can become a producer member with the Soil Association.

Producer membership is designed to assist you in the essential task of gathering the information and advice that you need before you even start the conversion period. As a member you can gain access to the same advice and support available to fully organic producers:

- Receive the excellent 52-page full colour quarterly journal, Organic Farming, which provides invaluable technical and market information, as well as a full range of news and feature articles
- Use our on-line telephone services for free technical advice, support, information and contacts
- Attend a varied national programme of on-farm training events and farm walks. Here, farmers and growers can meet to share information, see organic farming demonstrations and socialise. Members receive priority booking status and substantial discounts to all events and seminars
- Have your views heard. Over 70% of the UK's organic producers are represented by us in all major agriculture, environmental and food industry forums. This is particularly important when battling for European levels of support – including aid payments – to be made available to UK producers
- Benefit from our **market development** work. We support a range of initiatives to ensure UK producers succeed in the market place
- Receive support with waste minimisation and energy efficiency.

Once you enter conversion with Soil Association Certification Ltd all of the above benefits and services are FREE, provided as part of your licence fee.

Useful contact numbers

Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS):

A Government-funded free advisory service is available in for producers interested in conversion. In England producers who farm more than 10ha of land, or who derive at least 50% of their income from a holding they are intending to convert may be eligible for a free advisory visit

In Wales call **01970 622100**In Scotland call **01224 711072**In Northern Ireland call **02894 426752** (for livestock) and **02890 701115** (for crops).

In England call **0800 980 0048**

Main contacts for the government's Organic Farming/Aid schemes in the UK:

Natural England (formerly Rural Development Service) contact details for information on Organic Entry Level Stewardship:

T: 0845 602 4093

National Assembly for Wales (Agriculture) Divisional offices:

Llandrindod Wells T: 01597 823777 Caernarfon T: 01286 674144 Carmarthen T: 01267 225300

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD):

T: 028 9052 4567

Scottish Executive for Environment and Rural Affairs **Department (SEERAD) Local offices:**

SEERAD Office) :	SEERAD Office:			
Ayr	T: 01292 610 188	Inveruri	T: 01467 626 222		
Benbecula	T: 01870 602 346	Kirkwall	T: 01856 875 444		
Central Area	T: 01738 602000	Lairg	T: 01549 402 167		
Dumfries	T: 01387 255 292	Lerwick	T: 01595 695 054		
Elgin	T: 01343 547 514	Oba	T: 01631 563 071		
Galashiels	T: 01896 758 333	Portree	T: 01478 612 516		
Hamilton	T: 01698 281 166	Stornoway	T: 01851 702 392		
Inverness	T: 01463 234 141	Thurso	T: 01847 893 104		

Useful marketing contacts:

For up to date arable marketing contacts and market information contact the Soil Association and ask for the Marketina information for organic farmers (meat, milk, eggs and grain) factsheet and visit www.soilassociation.org/pricedata

Stonegate Farmers can offer an organic egg production system, laying pullets, financial and technical advice, together with a market for the eggs. For more information contact the Soil Association on 0117 914 2400.

The Specialist Poultry and Smallholder magazines regularly carry useful adverts for equipment and livestock suppliers.

Recommended reading for organic poultry production

Lampkin, N (2002) *Organic Farming*, Old Pond Publishing (available from the Soil Association)

Lampkin N (ed) (1998) *Organic Poultry Production*, Welsh Institute of Rural Studies (see www.organic.aber.ac.uk)

Lampkin N, Measures M & Padel S (eds) (2008) *Organic Farm Management Handbook*, University of Wales, Aberystwyth, Organic Advisory Service (available from the Soil Association)

Soil Association (2004) *Managing Organic Laying Hens*, Soil Association technical guide

Soil Association (2004) Rearing Organic Poultry for Meat, Soil Association technical guide

Soil Association *Poultry Information Sheet*, provides useful contacts and sources of information for poultry producers, Soil Association briefing sheet.

For a full list of Soil Association literature, including technical guides, fact sheets and briefing papers, contact the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400**.

Comprehensive and practical Soil Association technical guides covering specific areas of organic production:

- Growing Organic Vegetables for a Box Scheme
- Guidelines for the Production of Organic Apples and Pears in the UK
- Improving Biodiversity on Organic Farms
- Organic Carrot Production
- Organic Herbs: markets, production and processing
- Organic Leek Production
- Organic Lettuce Production
- Organic Onion Production
- Organic Potato Production and Storage
- · Organic Weed and Scrub Control on Organic Grassland
- Rotations for Organic Horticultural Field Crops
- · Setting Up an Organic Box Scheme
- · Soil Management on Organic Farms.

For a full list of the available Soil Association literature, including books, technical guides, fact sheets and briefing papers, contact the Soil Association on **0117 914 2400** or visit

www.soilassociation.org/shop

Soil Association Producer membership

You don't have to be an organic farmer to join the Soil Association – everyone can benefit from organic techniques! Our membership options:

Producer membership - £80 a year

For farmers and growers – or anyone interested in or connected to producing food! Benefits include the *Organic Farming* magazine, access to over 50 factsheets and briefing papers, technical guides, our e-mail bulletins, farm walks, training events and seminars – and the knowledge that you are directly supporting our development and producer-related work.

Producer membership plus - £168 a year

Provides you with all the benefits of producer membership... *plus* unlimited access to our exclusive helpline where our experienced team is on-hand to help your business succeed.

Public membership - £24 a year

Keeps you in touch with the organic world, helps you find where you can buy organic food, and allows you to support our campaigning work and projects that aim to transform food culture.

For more information call **0117 914 2400** or visit **www.soilassociation.org**

The Soil Association is based in Bristol but we work across the UK.

Soil Association Scotland

Call 0131 666 0847 or visit www.soilassociationscotland.org

To discuss developments in other areas call the Bristol office on **0117 914 2400**.