

# STARTER KIT



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**pivot**  
transition to organic grains

# THE ORGANIC ADVANTAGE

Consumers are hungry for organics. Since 2006, the Canadian organic food market has tripled in value. With more than 20 million consumers buying organic products weekly, it's clear that consumers have bought into this healthier and more sustainable lifestyle.

As an organic farmer, you'll rely on energy-efficient and cost-effective fertilizers and pesticides, such as manure and legumes. And, when it comes to harvest time, your organic crops will be worth much more than their conventional counterparts. Combine these lowered costs and price premiums, and you uncover a healthier bottom line.



**\$2.8 BN**

*in annual Canadian  
organic food sales*



**\$458 MN**

*in annual Canadian  
organic exports*



**58%**

*of Canadian consumers buy  
organic products every week*



**Demand for organic products has been growing at 20% per year yet we haven't seen an increase in organic producers over the past 3 years.**

*Source:  
Organic Advantage. Grain Production, Organic Value  
Chain Roundtable*

# 5 REASONS WHY TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC GRAIN MAKES BUSINESS SENSE

*Lower costs,  
increased profitability.*



[Download the full report](#)

1

Inputs like synthetic fertilizer and pesticides are not relied upon.

2

Less investment per acre to grow an organic crop.

3

30% and 50% less energy is required per acre when all energy sources are accounted for.

4

High quality organic crops receive premium prices (generally 1.5 – 3.0 times higher than those for conventional)

5

Combining lower costs with price premiums results in a healthier bottom line.

Source:  
Organic Advantage. Grain Production, Organic Value  
Chain Roundtable

The economic advantages of entering the organic market.  
W. Hamm & H. Martin (revised January 2015)



### **MAKE A NATURAL PROGRESSION**

*The decision is yours. You don't have to convert your whole farm at once. Many producers start with one or two fields and create a plan to transition their whole farm over time.*

*Or on the other hand, you may choose to make a faster transition and take advantage of higher profit margins.*

*Whatever you choose, Pivot has the knowledge base and resources to help your farm become more profitable.*



# WHAT TO EXPECT

*Interested in becoming an organic farmer? Your transition has the potential to protect and improve your farm's soil health, protect the environment, and support your family through improved profitability.*

## SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION PRACTICES

### *Soil Fertility in Organic Farming*

It all starts with building healthy soil. Successful organic farming is based on using carefully planned multi-year crop rotations and boosting soil organic matter with green manuring and adding compost. We are ready to help guide you, with the latest research and excellent resources on best management practices for organic production.

### *But What About The Weeds?!*

It's true that weed management is probably the biggest challenge faced by organic producers. While an organic field will never be 100% weed-free, the organic approach involves a suite of techniques to prevent weeds from adversely affecting crop yields. Successful management techniques for weed control include crop rotation, careful timing of tillage and/or seeding, innovative tillage methods, clipping tall weeds growing above shorter crops, intercropping, etc. We are ready to share many resources in the form of research and stores to help you learn more about how can manage weeds on your farm, based on the success of other farmers like you.

### *Pests and Diseases*

Improving soil quality, making use of crop rotations and encouraging the presence of beneficial insects helps organic producers reduces pests and prevent disease. We can help by sharing a variety of resources so you have the management knowledge you'll need.

We highly recommend that you attend workshops, conferences or other producer training sessions. The information you can glean by talking with your peers and researchers is invaluable.

## GETTING CONNECTED

*Keep up to date on upcoming events and workshops at*

[www.pivotandgrow.com](http://www.pivotandgrow.com).



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## BECOMING CERTIFIED

Transitioning from conventional to organic takes 36 months from the last application of a prohibited substance to when a certified organic crop can be harvested. This typically means two or three years of transitional crops following the last conventional crop before the first certified organic crop is harvested depending on when during the growing season the last prohibited substance was applied. If it was in the spring, it may be two years and if it was in the fall it would be closer to three years.



# THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

Each organic farmer must certify with an accredited certification body. The certification body oversees the certification process and verifies that organic products are compliant with the Canadian Organic Standards.

Maintaining certification year-to-year requires annually providing the certifier with your detailed production plan, having an inspection and reviewing of your business. Aspects of your business that are found non-compliant with the organic standard must be resolved before your business can be granted organic status by the certifier.

**TRANSITION PERIOD = TIME BETWEEN THE START OF ORGANIC MANAGEMENT AND CERTIFICATION**

**LAND MUST BE FREE FROM SUBSTANCES PROHIBITED IN ORGANIC PRODUCTION FOR 36 MONTHS PRIOR TO THE INITIAL HARVEST OF AN ORGANIC CROP**

## CHOOSE A CERTIFYING BODY

*Submit your application to a certification body no later than 15 months before you intend to market your first organic harvest.*

## BEGIN ORGANIC MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

*Depending on input & management history transition period may be shortened*

**YOUR INPUT AND MANAGEMENT HISTORY MATTER, THE SOONER ORGANIC MANAGEMENT BEGINS, THE SOONER YOU CAN ACHIEVE ORGANIC STATUS.**



# CERTIFYING BODIES

## **CCPB**

+39 071 7916311  
cpb@ccpb.it  
<http://www.ccpb.it/>

## **CSI**

Contact: Danielle Fletcher  
dfletcher@csi-ics.com  
1-855-831-1313 (Western Provinces)  
[www.csi-ics.com](http://www.csi-ics.com)

## **ECOCERT**

Contact: Jennifer Bromm or Natalie Bromm  
1-306-665-9072  
jennifer.bromm@ecocert.com  
natalie.bromm@ecocert.com  
[www.ecocertcanada.com](http://www.ecocertcanada.com)

## **GOA – Global Organic Alliance**

Contact: Betty Kananen  
1-937-593-1232  
goaorg@centurylink.net  
[www.goa-online.org](http://www.goa-online.org)

## **ICS – International Certification Services**

1-701-486-3578  
info@ics-intl.com  
[www.ics-intl.com](http://www.ics-intl.com)

## **LETIS**

Contact: Ingrid Clausen  
iclausen@letis.org  
<http://www.letis.org/>

## **OCIA International-Canada**

Contact: Marg Laberge  
1-780-851-9482  
mlaberge@ocia.org  
[www.ocia.org](http://www.ocia.org)

## **OPAM – Organic Producers Association of Manitoba**

Contact: Melanie Rivard or Tiffany Priestley  
1-204-567-3745  
info@opam-mb.com  
[www.opam-mb.com](http://www.opam-mb.com)

## **Oregon Tilth**

1-877-378-0690  
organic@tilth.org  
<https://tilth.org/>

## **PACS Certified Organic – Pacific Agricultural Certification Society**

1-250-558-7927  
admin@pacscertifiedorganic.ca  
[www.pacscertifiedorganic.ca](http://www.pacscertifiedorganic.ca)

## **Pro-Cert Organic Systems**

Contact: Cody Sander  
1-306-382-1299  
cody.sander@pro-cert.org  
info@pro-cert.org  
[www.pro-cert.org](http://www.pro-cert.org)

## **QAI - Quality Assurance International**

1-858-200-9708  
qai@qai-inc.com  
[www.qai-inc.com](http://www.qai-inc.com)

## **TCO Cert - Trans Canada Organic Certification Services**

Contact: Art Hesje  
1-306-682-3126  
info@tcocert.ca  
[www.TCOCert.ca](http://www.TCOCert.ca)

## **TCO Cert Western Canada Chapters**

Alberta Organic Producers Association (AOPA)  
Contact: Kathy Petterson  
1-780-939-5808  
aopa@cruzinternet.com  
[www.albertaorganicproducers.org](http://www.albertaorganicproducers.org)

Southeast Organic Growers Chapter 1 - Carnduff, SK  
Contact: Jenny Turton  
1-306-482-3799  
sogchapter1@xplornet.ca

TCO Chapter #3 - Kelvington, SK  
Contact: Carol Lowndes  
1-306-327-4753  
jclowndes@sasktel.net

TCO Cert Chapter #4 - Zehner, SK  
Contact: Robyn Hamann  
1-306-781-4701  
lrhamann@yourlink.ca

TCO Chapter #5 - Kelvington, SK  
Contact: Carol Lowndes  
1-306-327-4753  
jclowndes@sasktel.net

TransCanada Organic Certification Services Chapter #7 Inc.  
Rockglen, SK  
Contact: Darcy Kimball  
1-306-476-2408,  
tcocert7@gmail.com

SouthWest Saskatchewan Organic Producers  
Contact: Jamie Baxter  
1-306-629-7773  
swtco8@gmail.com

FOF Saskatchewan #9 - Humboldt, SK  
Contact: Ruth Baumann  
1-306-682-3126  
rbaumann@tcocert.ca

# ORGANIC STANDARDS

*Canada's Organic Standards are Federal regulations that provide organic certification requirements.*

*The standards, which cover production practices and permitted substances, are updated every five years.*



**DOWNLOAD THE  
CANADIAN ORGANIC  
PRODUCTION STANDARD**



**DOWNLOAD THE  
PERMITTED SUBSTANCES  
LISTS**





# HOW TO DEVELOP AN ORGANIC PLAN

## WHAT IS AN ORGANIC PLAN AND WHY DO I NEED ONE?

Section 4 of the Canadian Organic Standard (COS) requires all organic operators to have an organic plan which provides details related to transition, production, preparation and management. Creating an organic plan can be a valuable exercise for your overall business planning and management.

The organic certification bodies have made building an organic plan easy for you – they have designed their questionnaires to gather all of the information required by the COS. In addition to asking you detailed questions, they will also provide a list of supporting documentation required.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN AN ORGANIC PLAN?

**A MAP OF THE FARM  
FIELD HISTORIES  
INPUT DETAILS  
PRODUCTION PRACTICES**

**CONTAMINATION RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT  
STRATEGIES  
RECORD KEEPING  
PLANNED SCHEDULE FOR TRANSITIONING**

## YOUR PRACTICES & PROCEDURES

Describe your farm, answering questions such as the following:

- What crops will you plant this year? What crop rotations, and/or intercropping is taking place on your farm this year?
- What soil building methods will you implement this year?
- What weed and pest problems do you anticipate, and how will you manage them?
- What strategies will you use to protect your crops from being contaminated or commingling with non-organic sources, both in the field, in storage and in transport?
- Where do you source your seed?
- If you irrigate, is your water source compliant with the organic standard?
- What kind of living conditions do you have for your livestock?
- What do you feed them?
- How do you ensure they stay healthy?
- What do you do if they get sick?

Your organic plan must be updated every year to reflect changes in your management practices, any problems you may have had, and what you did to help solve those problems.

## RECORD-KEEPING

Keeping good records is the foundation for an organic plan. It doesn't have to be daunting. The most crucial thing is that you must be able to provide documentation that what you are doing in your operation complies with the standard.

Record keeping is a matter of creating a habit and style that works for you: you can keep a daily log or use a calendar to write down what you've done each day, for example, or use a spreadsheet.

The documentation trail must be able to be used to track each organic crop, in terms of the seed used, the fields planted, any equipment or materials involved in planting, harvesting, handling, storage and transport. Your records are the basis for verifying that you've done everything possible to protect the organic integrity of your crops at each stage those crops were under your control. If you are a livestock producer you will keep birth and feed records as well as tracking any treatments you may have used, either homeopathic or other. These records must be kept for at least 5 years.

When an organic inspector comes to your farm for its annual inspection, he or she is tasked with confirming if your records accurately represent the activity taking place on your farm. The organic inspector will visit your fields and barns, and look at your equipment and storage facilities as part of verifying if you are following the standard and maintaining organic integrity throughout your production process.

# COSTS TO TRANSITION

*Transition and production costs will vary from farm to farm.  
Calculating and knowing your costs will help you determine your transition plan.*



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**COSTS OF  
PRODUCTION**



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**CERTIFICATION  
COSTS**



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**PRICE  
EXPECTATIONS**

*Find cost of production resources and current organic prices at  
[www.pivotandgrow.com](http://www.pivotandgrow.com)*

# FARMER STORIES

Visit [www.pivotandgrow.com](http://www.pivotandgrow.com) to read stories of farmers who have made the transition from conventional to organic grain production. Learn about their success, challenges, and experience.



## SCOTT OLSEN, MAYERTHORPE AB

We are hoping that going organic will be a good decision because we will be working with fewer acres. Previously, we managed large acreage and I'm used to management of something big, I'm hoping when we go smaller, with more management I will do a better job, and make more money on less acres.

Getting the land certified seemed like a challenge. I thought it was going to be a big production with the inspector there for days. They were really nice to deal with and spent a few hours on each field. We were fine with the cost, you have to pay people to do this, we have no problem paying yearly fees.

The biggest thing to overcome is everyone telling you it's a bad idea saying, "you won't get any grain, you might get 15 bushel of grains and nothing but weeds". My father-in-law has been helpful because he's been farming since the '70s and now he's reminiscing about how things were. My dad was old school and I pushed him to grow canola and use fertilizer, and we didn't have success, and now I'm paying for that decision. He's very involved now and likes it. I am always probing the old guys for knowledge.

*What was the biggest challenge that you faced through the transition?*

Getting started was the hardest part, but it worked out perfect. We went to the Organic Alberta conference and were starting within the year. Finding a Certifying Body was also pretty easy. After a few phone calls and some questions we really just had to pick one.

Production will be a challenge but we will be trying different things. Weed control is our biggest worry, and we bought some special equipment, including a Yetter rotary hoe, and bought some nice older equipment including a six inch spacing box drill, and tine harrows for weeding.

*What's one piece of advice you would give to a new farmer getting into organics?*

Don't listen to all the naysayers, it's fun and it's not expensive. That's why we choose to do it. It fits with what we want to do and has been relatively inexpensive so far. I look forward to see how it will work!

# BUYER EXPECTATIONS

*Getting started in organic grain production? Meeting buyer expectations, as summarized in 4 points below, will be key to your success.*

## **1. DON'T DECIDE TO GROW A CROP SIMPLY BASED ON PRICE, OR WITHOUT THOROUGH RESEARCH RELEVANT TO YOUR OPERATION.**

Your experience might include growing certain conventional grain varieties, or maybe you've heard that prices are excellent for a certain crop. Before jumping in, ask around (buyers are a good place to start) to develop a good understanding of what the market truly seeks and needs. Research all the risks and benefits of growing different highly marketable crops to refine your idea of what your target market should be, based on a range of factors specific to your operation, including: your land area available, weed pressure, available equipment for weed management and harvesting, capacity to pre-clean, etc. Successful organic farmers mitigate risk year-to-year by developing rotations—and their expertise—that involve growing more than one highly marketable crop and break crops, such as alfalfa for seed, that promote long-term fertility and weed control. Among grain varieties, be sure to consider and research high-demand crops that other farmers are not yet growing widely, such as kamut, teff, emer, spelt, etc.

## **2. BASE YOUR GROWING GOALS AND PLANS ON CURRENT PRICES.**

Prices for organic grain crops do generally look attractive; prices do shift, however, year-to-year. Be sure you are growing crops using prices for this growing year: it's worth asking around, checking in with potential buyers before you plant in order to avoid surprises at harvest time. You can also keep up-to-date on organic grain prices by visiting [www.pivotandgrow.com](http://www.pivotandgrow.com)

## **3. THINK "LONG-TERM" IN GETTING INTO RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUYERS.**

Strive to be what buyers call a "reliable supplier." Buyers want you to: a) meet volume expectations, b) meet quality expectations (see point 4, below) and c) excel at customer service in your dealings with them. Examples of good customer service include being able to provide a truly representative grain sample when asked, being able to be contacted and respond to requests readily, etc. Commodity markets tend to cycle; when markets get tight, farmers with solid relationships based on their performance (consistently meeting quality, quantity and customer service expectations) will be able to move their grain.

## **4. MEETING QUALITY EXPECTATIONS IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE.**

Your ability to consistently produce grain that meets clear specifications for weight, protein content, cleanliness, etc. will influence your reputation as a "reliable" or "unreliable" seller from a buyer's perspective. Avoid surprises: be knowledgeable about the quality of the grain you are selling. Keep in mind that you'll receive less money for substandard commodities, either because of the costs associated with cleaning/sorting your harvest and/or diverting it to feed markets. Be sure that you are capable of delivering crops that meet intended market expectations—gain experience by growing grain varieties on a smaller area of land before devoting larger acreage to any variety; seek to develop your expertise of how your crop quality and weed pressure shift year-to-year depending on growing conditions. Remember to always verify that your storage and transportation units will not negatively impact your crop quality—for example, improper clean out can lead to commingling of non-organic and organic grain, inadvertent introduction of wheat into hemp intended as a gluten-free crop, etc.

# WE'RE HERE TO HELP

## 1 CALL

Call **1-800-245-8341** to get connected with experts in organic grain production, marketing and certification.

## 3 CHAT

Follow the hashtag **#pivotandgrow** on social media and participate in conversations about organic grain farming on the Prairies.

## 2 EMAIL

Email **info@pivotandgrow.com** with your questions about organic grain production. We'll connect you with our network of experts across the prairies to get your questions answered.

## 4 CONNECT

Connect with us on Twitter **@pivotandgrow** or on Facebook at **www.facebook.com/pivotandgrow**. Stay up to date on the latest news and events happening across the Prairies and get resources on organic grain farming.







TELEPHONE: 1-800-245-8341  
E-MAIL: [INFO@PIVOTANDGROW.COM](mailto:INFO@PIVOTANDGROW.COM)  
[WWW.PIVOTANDGROW.COM](http://WWW.PIVOTANDGROW.COM)