



African Organic Agriculture Manual Booklet Series
No. 13 | Certification

HOW DO I PROVE MY PRODUCTION IS ORGANIC?

Why certify your products as organic?

Organic certification is a marketing tool. It ensures that everyone in the supply chain adheres to the organic regulations. It provides trust to the consumer and protects from fraud.

You don't need organic certification just for the sake of it. You only need it if you are going to sell organic products to the market:

1. You are an organic farmer without certification: Customers who know you appreciate the quality your products. However, you can not sell or export your products as organic.
2. You are an organic farmer with certification: You have to comply with all provisions of the organic regulation. Thanks to certification, you can label your product as organic. Customers who don't know your farm therefore can recognize your product as organic, even exporting them to Europe.

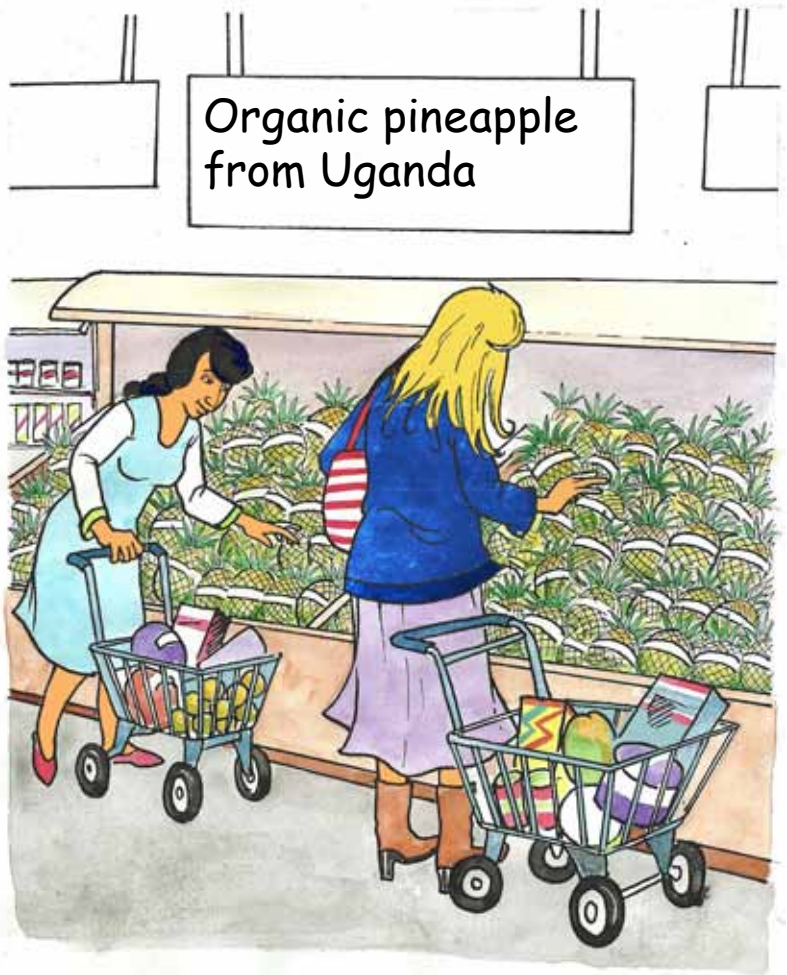
Do you need certification: Would you like to sell products to the market with an organic label? Does your customer request a specific certificate for your products?



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Which certification system do I need?

To be certified as organic, you must be inspected by a certifying organisation. There are two types of certification:

1. Participatory certification through a Participatory Guarantee System: this is mainly relevant for the local or domestic market.
2. Third party certification conducted by an independent (third party) organic certification body. This is relevant for some domestic markets, but mostly export markets.

A PGS involves organic farmers, consumers and advisors. Farmers are typically organised in local groups. Each farmer receives an annual farm visit by a farmer of the group. The farmer group decides on the certification status of each member. A regional council endorses certification decisions



Annual inspection of farms



Committee representing:



Consumer/traders



Farmers group



Inspector

Inspection report



*Tasks of Committee
Decision on standards
Approval of farmers
Communication & promotion*



Other stakeholders



Farmers



Third party certification is provided by a certification body to its clients for a fee. The service consists of a farm-inspection at least once a year. There are two systems:

1. Individual certification: The farmer alone signs a contract and will obtain his or her own certificate.
2. Group certification: A group of farmers (e.g. a cooperative) is managing an Internal Control System (ICS) and requests certification as a group.



Annual inspection of farms





Farmers group



Inspector



Inspection report



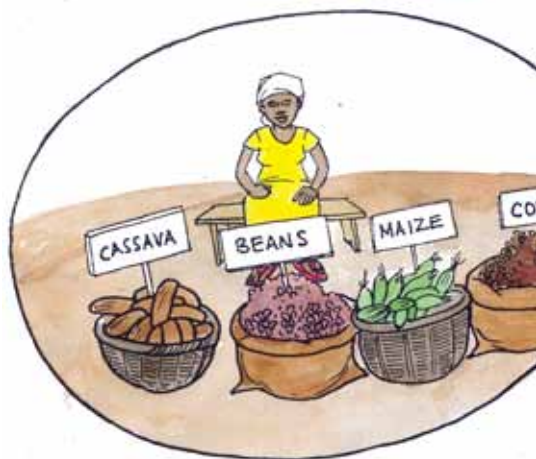
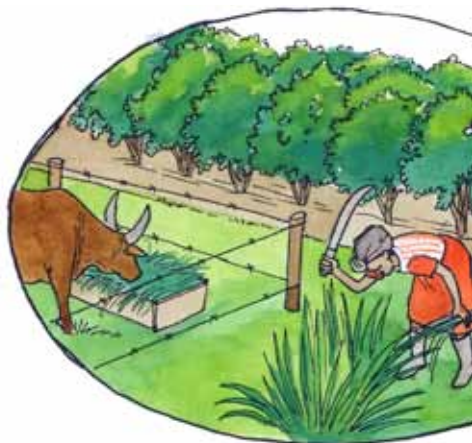
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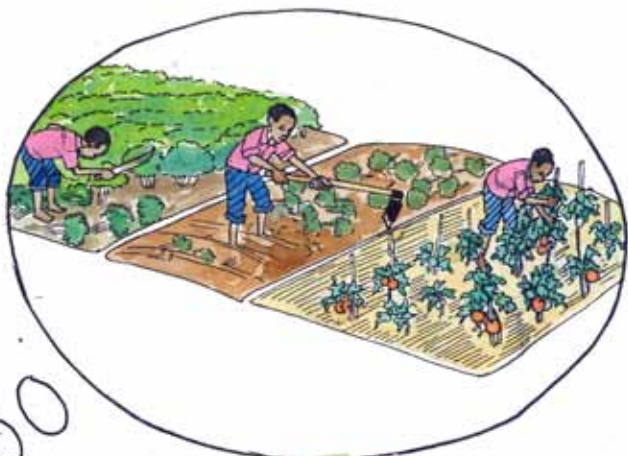
Step 1: Conversion planning

Steps are required to certify a farm start with learning about organic regulations and farm methods. It ends with a certification agency issuing a certificate.

The first step on your way to organic certification is to review your current farm management and set goals where you would like to go with organic. Ask an experienced advisor for support at least one year before the first organic inspection is to take place. What to consider in a conversion plan?

- › Which crops to grow organically
- › How to manage crops and animals organically
- › Organic inputs and where to get them
- › How farm products will be harvested and stored
- › How and where to sell your farm products
- › Costs of certification
- › Investments in equipment and tools
- › Human and financial resources





Step 2: Decision to pursue certification



- › *Discuss with farmer colleagues*
- › *Check market possibilities with customers*
- › *Get the help of an advisor from a NOAM*
- › *Ask an officer of a certification body*
- › *Decide within your family*

Prepare your decision on whether or not to certify your farm. Discuss the results of your conversion plan and prepare your decision with farmer colleagues and with potential customers.

Step 3: Application and agreement

When the decision to certify is clear, you must submit an application to the chosen certification agency. With this step you agree:

- a. To produce according to organic regulations
- b. To establish proper recordkeeping
- c. To receive annual on-farm inspection visits
- d. To apply correct declaration and labelling when selling the product
- e. To pay for inspection and certification

The farmer agrees:

- › *To produce along organic regulations*
- › *To establish proper recordkeeping*
- › *To receive annual on-farm inspection visits*
- › *To apply correct declaration and labelling when selling the product*
- › *To pay for inspection and certification*



Step 4: Recordkeeping

Once a contract with a certification body is signed, you have to keep day-to-day written records and present them to the inspector during his annual visit:

- a. The area around the farm (with a farm map)
- b. Planted crops on the farm (list)
- c. Specific management applied on the crops (conversion plan)
- d. Application of inputs and purchase of inputs (e.g. for pest and disease management, fertilizers and seeds) (list)
- e. Animals on the farm, purchased animals, forage (list)
- f. Sales records (list)





Step 5: Annual inspection

The contracted certification body will visit your farm at least once a year for an on-farm inspection. The inspection includes:

- a. A physical tour to the field, stables, storage and sales facilities
- b. Oral interviews
- c. An examination of the records
- d. An inspection report, to be signed by the farmer

In case of doubts or specific needs, an inspector can make additional, unannounced visits to the farm to check specific issues, get additional documentation or visit the farm when the crops are harvested.





Step 6: Certification

Revision and certification: After the farm inspection, the inspector delivers his report to the agency certifier. He reviews the inspection report with all annexes (map and records, conversion plan). The certifier determines whether the farm will be approved for organic certification or not.

Congratulation on your first organic certificate!

If you comply with the organic regulations and the inspection report states this, then the certifier will issue a certificate. The certificate may perhaps be accompanied by some suggestions or stipulations to improve your management or documentation for next season.

The certificate includes a list of products that you may now sell as organic and use the labels agreed upon with the certification body. The product labels must identify the certifier and information about





- › *Inspector delivers the inspection report to the agency certifier*
- › *Certifier reviews the inspection report*
- › *Certifier approves for organic certification or not*
- › *Certifier issues a certificate*
- › *The farmer may now sell its products as organic*



Traceability

Revision and certification: After the farm inspection, the inspector delivers his report to the agency certifier. He reviews the inspection report with all annexes (map and records, conversion plan). The certifier determines whether the farm will be approved for organic certification or not.

Consumers require the confirmation that the complete organic supply chain is in compliance with organic standards. The best way to communicate to consumers that your products are 'certified organic' is through the label. The organic label confirms that the product is grown according to organic standards and regulations. In this way, certification and labelling influences the level of trust between the consumer and your product.





Traceability: document and monitor each stage of the supply chain



This booklet is an outcome of the African Organic Agriculture Training Manual project and was conceived as a handout for farmers.

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