



Organic farming can suit all systems regardless of soil type or location.

Going organic: is it an option

The best organic farmers can achieve stocking rates up to 170kg N/ha and healthy profits, but if you are considering conversion, be diligent in your research.

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Organic farming is enjoying increasing interest, partly due to the rising costs of feed and fertiliser. Farmers also increasingly see organics as a system that is good for the environment, is profitable and has a promising future.

Over 4,000 Irish farmers are farming 200,000 hectares organically. That's 4% of the agricultural area.

The target set out in the Programme for Government is to have 7.5% of the total land area farmed organically by 2027. The Climate Action plan target

is to achieve 10% land area in organic farming by 2030.

Farm systems

There is stocking rate limit of 170 kg N/ha. Organic farming is being practised successfully in Ireland at stocking rates up to this level. The stocking rate of an organic farm will be determined by soil type, production capabilities and the land's stock carrying capacity.

On clover rich swards a farm can potentially be stocked between 1.5 and 2.0LU/Ha, but every field on the farm would have to have a clover content of at least 30%. Excellent quality free draining soils, capable of growing white clover and red clover is needed to achieve this.

On farms with a large proportion of swards made up of permanent pastures one could consider a stocking rate of above 1LU/Ha. The swards on these farms are most likely old permanent pasture and may not have been reseeded over the past 50 years or so. A farmer with a high proportion of rushy type land would have to stock their farm at under 1LU/Ha.

Old permanent pastures

Old permanent pastures can contain hugely diverse swards and ideally should not be reseeded. If farmers wish to introduce clovers and multi-species swards, they should target fields with low levels of sward diversity, with high levels of perennial ryegrass. This could enable such farmers to increase their stocking rate above 1LU/Ha.

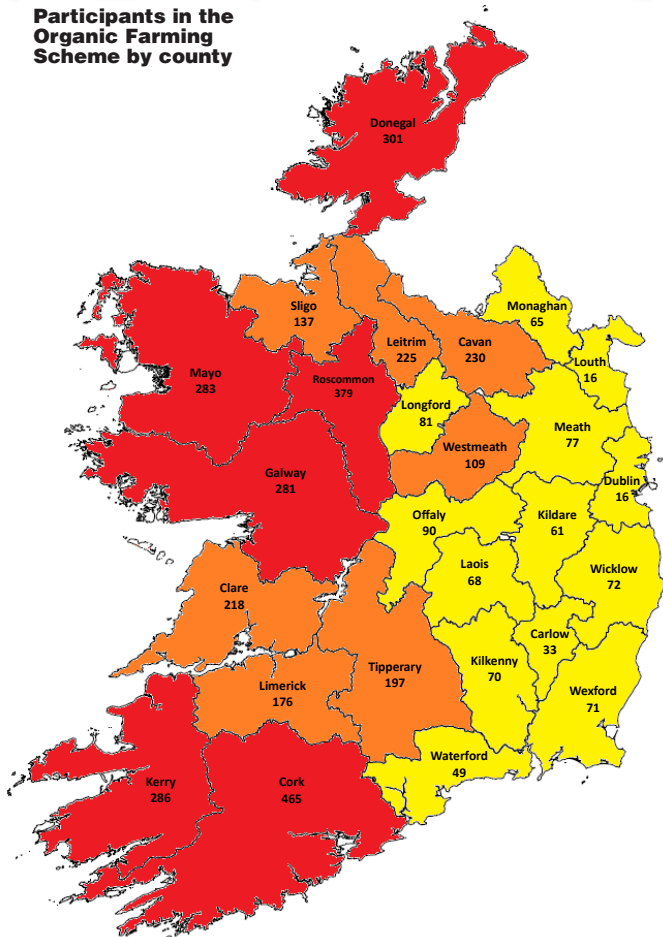
On hill farms which are made of grassland area that are of great habitat value, the key on these type pastures is not to overgraze but, equally not to undergraze and to allow the diverse species of plants to grow.

Suitable stocking rates on this type

Irish Organic Production in 2022

12,500 organic cattle slaughtered
22,000 organic sheep slaughtered
23million litres of organic milk
3,522 hectares of organic cereals

Participants in the Organic Farming Scheme by county



for your farm?

of land can vary greatly. Some farms may carry a stocking rate of up to 0.5LU/Ha, whereas on farms where sheep are out-wintered, a stocking rate of 0.1LU/Ha (which is the minimum Stocking Rate for the Organic Farming Scheme) may be more appropriate.

Organic farming can suit all systems regardless of soil type or location. Organics suits all land types, improved clover type swards can take higher stocking rates while stocking rates may need to be adjusted to match the natural growing capabilities of the sward.

USEFUL LINKS

- **Teagasc** www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/organics/
- **Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine** www.gov.ie/en/publication/fc7c8-organic-farming/
- **Bord Bia** www.bordbia.ie/industry/insights/global-sustainability-insights/natural-food-and-drink/organic/
- **Irish Organic Association** www.irishorganicassociation.ie/
- **Organic Trust** www.organictrust.ie/
- **National Organic Training Skillnet** www.nots.ie
- **IFOAM** www.ifoam.bio/
- **FiBL** www.fibl.org/en/

Organic Farming Scheme (OFS)

The Organic Farming Scheme is a five-year standalone scheme run by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM). It supports farmers with per hectare payments as well as a participation payment. The payment rates for the scheme are based on the area farmed and the type of enterprises on the farm (see table below).

The participation payment is an annual payment of €2,000 for the first year of conversion and €1,400 thereafter for organic licence holders to cover administration and training costs etc. The next round of the Scheme is expected to open for applications in late October of this year.

DAFM Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) payment rates

	Year 1-2 <70ha (€/ha) (in conversion)	Year 3-5 <70ha (€/ha) (fully converted)
Drystock	300	250
Tillage	320	270
Dairy	350	300
Horticulture	800	600
<i>>70ha receives €60/ha in conversion and €30/ha fully converted</i>		
<i>Participation payment = €2,000 in first year and €1,400 per year thereafter</i>		

To be eligible for payment you must:

- Register with, and be approved as, an organic operator by an Organic Certification Body
- Apply on agfood.ie for the Organic Farming Scheme
- Submit a DAFM BISS application in 2024
- Complete an approved training course
- Produce livestock and crop products according to European Union Organic Standards

If you are interested or considering converting to organics, you should

- Talk to organic farmers
- Attend information meetings/farm walks
- Engage in family discussion.
- Assess how organic conversion can be achieved on your farm
- Calculate the economic implications.
- Consider completing a 25-hour organic farming principles course
- Be absolutely committed to working to and abiding by the Organic Standards

The organic marketplace

Irish organic food enjoys an excellent reputation both at home and especially across Europe. Latest figures show the organic retail food market in Ireland in 2021 was worth €193 million (Source: Bord Bia).

The European Union market for organic food is worth a total of €54.5 billion (2021). The largest markets are in Germany (€15.9 billion), France (€12.7 billion), and Italy (€3.9 billion). This presents an opportunity for Irish organic producers.

Consumer demand

Bord Bia conducted a six month Irish consumer market research project on Irish organics from January to June 2023 with 2,500 shoppers. Some of the key feedback included:

- 88% of all Irish shoppers buy organic food and drink in some format
- Eggs and vegetables are the largest categories for organic shoppers. However one in two of all shoppers buy organic dairy (milk, yogurts, cheese) and/or organic meat weekly
- Over the next 12 months, 95% of all Irish shoppers say they will look to maintain or increase their organic consumption.

National marketing campaign

To help build the awareness of Irish organics for Irish shoppers, Bord Bia will be launching its first national organic marketing campaign this November. The focus of the multimedia campaign will be to demonstrate the quality and value of Irish organic food and drink to Irish consumers. The second wave of this marketing campaign will be rolled out in March next year.