

Factsheet

#23-017 | FEBRUARY 2023

Organic Fruit Production in Ontario

INTRODUCTION

Organic farming is a holistic system designed to optimize the productivity and fitness of diverse communities within the agro-ecosystem, including soil organisms, plants, livestock and people. The principal goal of organic production is to develop enterprises that are sustainable and harmonious with the environment.

Some general principles of organic fruit production include:

- maintaining long-term soil fertility
- avoiding the use of synthetic pesticides and genetically modified organisms
- maintaining biological diversity within the system

Why farmers transition to organic fruit production varies from farm to farm, but common reasons include concerns about working with agricultural chemicals, effects of conventional farming on soil quality and conservation, and opportunities to improve farm profitability.

This factsheet provides an overview of certification and production requirements for producers considering organic fruit production. There are links to additional information that will provide details to help you make your decision. Contact a certification body for detailed requirements.

DEFINITION OF CERTIFIED ORGANIC

“Certified organic” is a term given to products produced according to organic standards as verified by a certification body (CB). There are several CBs operating in Ontario. A grower wishing to be

certified organic must apply to a CB requesting an independent inspection of their farm to verify that the farm complies with the organic standards. Farmers, processors and traders are each required to maintain the organic integrity of the product and to maintain a document trail for audit purposes.

Products from organic farms that meet the requirements of the organic standards and are verified by a CB can be labelled and promoted as “certified organic.” According to the [Canadian Organic Standards](#) (2020), Canadian producers or processors who wish to produce, process and/or market agricultural products or foods as “Certified Organic” and identify them with the Canada Organic label (Figure 1) must hire an accredited certification body to review their system and provide inspector oversight. More detailed information is available in the OMAFRA factsheet [Introduction to Organic Farming](#).



Figure 1. Being able to display the Canada Organic logo provides more opportunities for organic producers. Source: Canadian Food Inspection Agency, 2014. [1]

STEPS TO TRANSITION

Before making the switch to organic fruit production, research the benefits and risks that organic production and sales may have for your farm. The OMAFRA factsheet [Introduction to Organic Farming](#) provides more information. It is also important to learn and understand the organic standards and certifications for organic fruit production and determine what assets and resources are needed for the transition. The following list includes factors to consider before starting the transition to organic fruit production:

- **Planning:** Organic standards require the producer to develop an “Organic Plan” that outlines the details of transition, production, preparation, handling and management practices.
- **Land management:** Decisions must be made as to whether all fields will be transitioned at once, or if a small percentage of the farm will be transitioned at a time.
- **Inputs:** All inputs, such as seed, nutrients and pest management tools, used within 36 months of the expected organic crop harvest must comply with both the Canadian Organic Standards and the [Permitted Substances List](#).
- **Organic certification:** Certification should be completed before the harvest date of the first certified organic crop. Contact the certification body early. Ask for details on its program and fees to help determine which certification body is best for your certification needs.

STANDARDS FOR ORGANIC FRUIT PRODUCTION

Guidelines for the transition to organic fruit production are outlined in the [Canadian Organic Standards](#) of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), including the [General Principles and Management Standards](#), which outline the general standards for organic production systems. Specific requirements for transition to organic fruit production are outlined in section 5.1. These include the following:

- The land must be managed as organic for 36 months prior to the first organic harvest. During the last 12 months of this period, the land must be under the supervision of an organic certification body.

- The goal for the producer must be for a complete transition of their production.
- Production units must have distinctly defined boundaries.
- Buffer zones between organic and non-organic production must be at least 8 m wide.
- Production units cannot alternate between being organic and non-organic production.

Additional information on fruit production can be found on the OMAFRA website.

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

Your decision to certify will depend on marketing plans, the location of the sale (within Ontario or outside of Ontario), use of the Canadian organic logo and the crops you plan to produce.

Organic production in Ontario includes both certified and uncertified production. Currently, if all sales are to local buyers and they do not require certification, certification is not mandated unless the grower plans to use the federal organic logo.

Growers of uncertified organic products in Ontario are still subject to Section 5(1) of the *Food and Drugs Act* and the *Safe Food For Canadians Act* regarding the fact that all labelling must be true and the farmers/manufacturer/seller must be able to prove that the product is organic. It is a federal criminal offence to engage in false labelling, including labelling a product organic when it is not. Further information can be found in [Organic Claims on Food Labels](#) on the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website. There is also information on [food labels](#).

To be compliant with Section 5(1), it is advised that the seller of non-certified organic products contact the CFIA at [Contact CFIA online](#).

For the non-certified organic products, the CFIA uses the Standard Regulatory Response Process to guide its enforcement actions. [Details of the enforcement actions](#) can be found on the CFIA website.

When selling products intended for export, growers must follow the production requirements of the organic standards of the importing country and may

have to be certified according to the requirements of the specific foreign market.

When considering organic certification, know ahead of time the requirements and accreditation(s) needed in the marketplace where your products will be sold. When comparing certification bodies, make sure they have the certification requirements and accreditations needed to meet market requirements. For sale of products on the Canadian market, as a minimum, certification bodies should be accredited under the Canadian Organic Products Regulations. As of 2021, Canada has equivalency arrangements with the U.S., the U.K., Japan, Costa Rica, Taiwan, Switzerland and the European Union, which means that the products certified under Canadian regulation need not be re-certified under the regulations in these countries.

More information on certification bodies is available on the [Canadian Food Inspection Agency](https://inspection.canada.ca/food-label-requirements/labelling/industry/organic-claims-on-food-labels/eng/1389725994094/1389726052482?chap=5) website.

PEST CONTROL FOR ORGANIC FRUIT

Some pests can be challenging to control with organic methods and integrated pest management tools are valuable for organic growers. This can include using preventive measures such as crop rotations, cover crops, improved genetics, optimum populations, stress management and sanitation. They are essential to improving plant health since many chemical tools for pest and disease control are not used in organic production. In certain cases, growers can use approved organic pesticides. Detailed information on pest control is available on the OMAFRA website and in the [Ontario Crop Protection Hub](#).

CONCLUSION

Organic fruit production can be a viable alternative production method for producers, but there are many challenges. One key to success is being open to alternative organic approaches to solving production problems. A willingness to learn, to adapt, to network and to persevere will be invaluable assets on your road to success.

RESOURCES

1. Canadian Food Inspection Agency (2014), *Canada Organic Regime: A Certified Choice*. Reproduced or adapted with the permission of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. 2014. <https://inspection.canada.ca/food-label-requirements/labelling/industry/organic-claims-on-food-labels/eng/1389725994094/1389726052482?chap=5>

This factsheet was authored by staff from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.