DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS? WE CAN HELP!

Organic farmers, those transitioning to organic production, and those who are just curious; a resource is available to answer questions and to help you explore options. Pivot and Grow’s ‘Ask an Expert’ phone line (1-800-245-8341) offers farmers an opportunity to ask questions about everything from organic certification requirements to green manure options, from how to find local organic farms to how to control Canada thistle, from designing rotations to finding a certifier.

Q: IF I START NOW, HOW LONG WOULD IT TAKE BEFORE I CAN GROW AN ORGANIC CROP?
A: The rules in the organic standard state that it must be at least 36 months since last chemical application before harvest of an organic crop. By eliminating any desiccants or post-harvest treatments in the final chemical year, the land can be organic sooner. Likewise, if the land has not been treated for more than 3 years, for instance if it has been in alfalfa, an even quicker path to organic is possible.

Q: WHEN SHOULD I BE INSPECTED?
A: When the land has had no prohibited substances for 36 months, it also needs to have been under organic oversight for 15 months before the harvest of the first organic crop. This means having the land inspected in the year before the first organic crop is in the ground, and then again every year of organic production.

Q: WHERE DO I FIND A CERTIFIER?
A: The Pivot and Grow website lists a number of certifiers. All certifiers use the same Canadian standard, but each is different in management, service, price and specific expertise. It may be wise to do some comparison-shopping.

Q: WHERE DO I FIND BUYERS?
A: Best practice is probably to contact the people you wish to buy your product, in advance of deciding what products to grow. Begin doing research into who buys what, what specs do they have, what are their prices. Producer meetings are wonderful for the material they present, but especially for the opportunity to meet with organic producers and find out what they’re doing and who they trust. Check out the Business to Business Directory. Once there, click Find a Business, then select “Certifier” in the drop-down menu to find a list of organic certifiers in your area!

Q: THERE ARE NO ORGANIC PRODUCERS IN MY AREA. WHO DO I GO TO FOR MENTORSHIP?
A: Although you may feel all alone in your decision to go organic, there are often organic producers in your general area. Check with your certifier. In fact, having other organic producers in the neighbourhood can often reduce the cost of inspection by splitting the travel costs of the inspectors among the neighbours.

Q: WHERE DO I FIND A LIST OF ORGANIC PRODUCERS IN MY AREA?
A: Some times the questions that producers bring to the ‘ask an expert’ line are as simple as providing information, websites, and finding the appropriate people to talk to. Most often the planning questions are complex, and depend on many different factors, including the ever-predictable future weather. Often it is helpful to have an interested and informed ear to listen to the planning process, to affirm that the plan makes sense or to point to red flags, problems to watch for. Either way, the service exists to meet the producer where she or he is and help to find solutions to organic questions. Source: Dr. Brenda Frick and Prairie Organic Grain Initiative

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