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There are 5 modules in the syllabus for the BASIS Foundation Award in Organic Farming

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INTRODUCTION

In the UK 489,000 hectares of agricultural land is farmed organically by approximately 5800 organic operators. This coincides with the production of more than 250,000 cattle, 650,000 sheep and 35 million chickens which are all farmed under an organic system. Organic farmers in the UK are supporting and supplying a growing consumer market, with UK households now spending approximately £2.5 billion a year on organic produce.

All organic crop and livestock production in the UK can only be carried out by farmers certified by an authorised organic control body, for example the Organic Farmers & Growers (OF&G) or the Soil Association. Meeting the requirements for organic certification can be relatively complex, and an understanding of the rules and regulation surrounding organic production is essential. All farmers looking to implement an organic farming system will have to go through a conversion process, and effectively planning changes to farm management practices is essential for this process to be successful.

There are huge potential benefits for farmers converting to an organic production system, for example access to new markets, improved farm biodiversity, reduced reliance on inputs and premiums on farm produce. An organic farming system can also be beneficial for the wider environment as the integrated approach organic farmers use helps protect natural habitats and wildlife populations, as well as reducing the risk of negative impacts on air, water and soil quality. However, organic farming does pose some unique challenges. These include more complex management, suppressing weeds, pests and disease, ensuring the highest standards of animal welfare and meeting the requirements of organic certification. Therefore, knowledge and expertise specific to organic systems is essential for both growers and advisers who want to successfully produce high quality organic produce.

The BASIS Foundation Award in Organic Farming provides a comprehensive introduction into the production of organic crops and livestock. This broad understanding will be beneficial for both farmers and advisers who work within the industry, and for many this foundation qualification acts as a stepping-stone towards more advanced certificates in the future.

WHISTLE BLOWING POLICY

BASIS Registration Ltd is committed to the highest standards of openness and accountability. Therefore, we expect employees, candidates and others who work with BASIS who have serious concerns about any aspect of our work voice those concerns.

To this effect BASIS has a Whistle Blowing Policy. This procedure is designed to allow concerns of a public interest kind within BASIS to be raised, investigated and where appropriate, acted upon. Complaints may be made by or about any member of staff, candidates or those contracted to provide services to BASIS.

To view the full Whistle Blowing Policy go to:

<http://www.basis-reg.co.uk/documents/BASIS-whistle-blowing-policy.pdf>

DYSLEXIA POLICY

BASIS Registration Ltd allows students diagnosed with Dyslexia to request special examination arrangements. Proof of dyslexia is required a **minimum of 4 weeks** before the exam date so that BASIS can provide special examination arrangements if required.

For a full copy of our Dyslexia Policy please go to:

<https://basis-reg.co.uk/documents/Dyslexia-Policy.pdf>

COMPLAINTS POLICY

For a full copy of our Complaints Policy please go to:

<https://www.basis-reg.co.uk/documents/Complaints-Procedures.pdf>

COURSE DELIVERY

This course is delivered by BASIS approved trainers with each course lasting between 4 to 6 days. The training will predominantly be provided as participatory training in small groups. This will be supported by independent study, for example using the recommended reading list provided and online training resources.

EXAMINATION

The examination is a written paper consisting of 40 multiple choice questions (40% of the total marks) and three structured short-answer questions (60% of the total marks) with a time allowance of 1 hour 40 minutes. This will be a closed book exam and candidates must achieve a mark of 70% or more to achieve a pass.

MODULE 1 – INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIC FARMING & LEGISLATION

AIMS:

To understand the key principles of organic farming and how these can be integrated into UK farming systems. Outline the key legislation and standards which govern organic food production in the UK.

Essential Knowledge & Skills:

- Understand the principles of an organic system and how this can be applied to farms in the UK
- Outline the key benefits for farmers, the environment and wider society of converting from a conventional system to an organic system
- Outline the key challenges and potential risks associated with converting to an organic system
- Define the term “Organic” and outline the legal regulatory framework which underpins the industry
- Understand the legislation which governs organic food production in the UK including how it relates to both UK domestic production and potential export markets
- Outline the regulations which control the use of approved inputs on organic crops and livestock
- Outline the role of assurance schemes within organic food production in the UK
- Understand how farmers become certified as organic and the criteria they must meet to maintain organic status
- Outline the process and requirements of an organic certification inspection
- Provide an overview of markets and trends within the organic food production industry in the UK
- Identify how organic farming is recognised within UK environmental stewardship schemes
- Identify support available to UK growers looking to convert to, or maintain, organic status

MODULE 2 – SOILS & NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT IN ORGANIC SYSTEMS

AIMS:

To understand the fundamental aspects of soil and nutrient management within an organic farming system.

Essential Knowledge & Skills:

- Define soil type, texture and structure
- Identify the characteristics of good and poor soil structure and explain why maintaining good soil structure is important
- Outline the key principles of good soil management and why this is particularly important within an organic farming system
- Explain why promoting soil biology and nutrient cycling is important within an organic farming system
- Identify key management techniques which can be used to improve nutrient cycling and soil biology
- Explain how you would increase soil nutrient reserves and organic matter within an organic system
- Explain how you would carry out and interpret soil analysis results to improve nutrient management
- Define what a whole farm approach to nutrient management is and why this is especially important within organic farming systems
- Outline how you would provide essential nutrients to crops on an organic farm using management strategies such as rotation, manure applications and cover crops
- Explain how leguminous crops can be used within an organic farming system to benefit other crops within the rotation
- Outline best practice for storing and applying organic manures
- Identify approved inputs which can be used in an organic farming system
- Outline the benefits of an organic approach to nutrient and soil management for growers, the environment and wider society

MODULE 3 – ORGANIC CROP PRODUCTION

AIMS:

To be able to outline the key principles of organic crop production with the aim of growing high-quality organic produce in a sustainable way.

Essential Knowledge & Skills:

- Understand the key principles of organic crop production which must be followed to develop a robust, sustainable system and meet organic certification requirements
- Explain how you would develop a sustainable organic rotation, including how you would do this with and without livestock in the system
- Outline the importance of grassland, cover crops and green manures within a rotation, and how they should be managed as part of an organic system
- Outline the principles of cultivation and crop establishment for a range of broadacre crops
- Explain how you would manage weeds, pests and diseases within an organic system for a range of broadacre crops
- Identify cultural weed control strategies which are compatible with an organic farming system
- Explain how you would use nutrient management and rotation to maintain crop quality
- Identify the standards which must be met for harvesting, storing and marketing organic crops
- Identify crop inputs which can be approved for use within organic farming systems and the circumstances and mechanisms under which their use would be allowed
- State typical crop yields for a range of organic crops

MODULE 4 – ORGANIC LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

AIMS:

To understand how you would manage an organic livestock production system to promote the highest standards of health, welfare and productivity.

Essential Knowledge & Skills:

- Outline the principles of livestock production, welfare and management within an organic farming system
- Explain how grassland can be effectively managed to support organic livestock production
- Identify the benefits, risks and challenges associated with parallel production of non-organic and organic livestock
- Outline the required standards for certified organic livestock production in the UK
- Outline the principles of animal nutrition within an organic livestock system
- Identify key diseases associated with livestock production in the UK
- Explain how you would ensure high animal welfare standards and disease prevention using organic animal husbandry techniques
- Outline the standards for forage and feed used for organic livestock production
- Identify approved organic inputs used for livestock production
- Identify the key markets for organic milk, meat and eggs within the UK
- Describe the opportunities and challenges associated with marketing organic livestock products in the UK
- Outline the organic certification requirements for storing, processing and selling livestock produce on-farm

MODULE 5 – ORGANIC CONVERSION PLANNING

AIMS:

To understand the principles of organic conversion and certification in the UK.

Essential Knowledge & Skills:

- Identify approved UK organic control bodies
- Compare the difference between simultaneous conversion and standard conversion
- Outline how you would prepare and plan before starting on the pathway to organic conversion
- Outline the process for organic conversion for both livestock production and crop production
- Identify the challenges associated with organic conversion
- Outline the key opportunities and benefits for converting to an organic system
- Identify specific changes to farm management practices which promote effective organic conversion
- Identify common problems farmers encounter while converting to an organic system, and explain how you would mitigate against these problems
- Explain how you would analyse farm output and financial performance before and after organic conversion
- Explain how you would assess whether organic conversion is appropriate for a range of different scenarios you might encounter on UK farms
- Identify capital investments which may have to be made before or during the organic conversion process

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

The following sample questions give a guideline of the type and presentation of questions candidates will have to answer when taking the BASIS Foundation Award in Organic Farming examination. They are purely intended as a guide as it is not possible to publish old examination papers since, once these have been published, questions cannot be used again.

Multiple Choice – Sample Questions

Which of these organisations is an approved UK Organic Control Body:

- a) BASIS
- b) The Food & Drink Federation
- c) The Soil Association Certification Ltd**
- d) Organic Research Centre

All food products labelled as organic in the UK must display:

- a) The farmers name
- b) The county the produce was grown in
- c) The Organic Control Body's code**
- d) A list of all approved inputs made to the crop

Which of these is **not** an essential crop nutrient:

- a) Nitrogen
- b) Phosphorous
- c) Potassium
- d) Sodium**

Which of these is a definition of soil compaction:

- a) An increase in soil density due to the soil being compressed**
- b) An increase in soil porosity due to reduced cultivations
- c) The proportion of sand, silt and clay particles in the soil
- d) A desirable soil condition

In a UK supermarket organically produced beef is likely to be:

- a) Sold at the same price as conventionally produced beef
- b) Sold for more than conventionally produced beef**
- c) Sold for less than conventionally produced beef
- d) Only available in specific organic supermarkets

Short Answer – Sample Question

Organic Legislation:

- a) Outline three key regulations which organic farmers have to follow to meet the requirements of legislation within the UK:
- b) Identify two key requirements for labelling organic produce in the UK:
- c) Describe five documents or pieces of evidence an Organic Control Body inspector might expect to see when they carried out their annual inspection:

RECOMMENDED READING:

A Guide to Better Soil Structure (Cranfield University) -

http://adlib.everysite.co.uk/resources/000/094/894/soilstructure_brochure.pdf

Converting to Organic Farming (SAC) -

https://www.sruc.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/548/tn520_converting_to_organic_farming_-_david_younie_hannah_jones_sandy_ramsay_march_2002.pdf

Organic Arable Farming Technical Leaflet (Organic Farmers & Growers) - <https://assets.ofgorganic.org/tl-128-organic-arable-farming.ipi4sm.pdf>

Organic Standards & Certification Manual (Organic Farmers & Growers) - <https://ofgorganic.org/useful-info/organic-standards>

Principles of Soil Management (AHDB) -

<https://projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/Imported%20Publication%20Docs/AHDB/GR/EATsoils/Principles%20of%20soil%20management.pdf>

Soil Association Technical Guide (Soil Association) - <https://www.soilassociation.org/farmers-growers/technicalinformation/technical-guides/>

The Organic Farm Management Handbook (The Organic Research Centre) -

<https://www.organicresearchcentre.com/resources/the-organic-farm-management-handbook/>

USEFUL WEBSITES:

Abacus Agriculture - <https://abacusagri.com>

Agricology - <https://www.agricology.co.uk/>

Organic Farmers & Growers - <https://ofgorganic.org/>

Organic Regulations (IFOAM) - <https://www.organicseurope.bio/what-we-do/eu-organic-regulation/>

Soil Association - <https://www.soilassociation.org/>

The Organic Research Centre - <https://www.organicresearchcentre.com/>

UK Government - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/organic-food-uk-approved-control-bodies>
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/organic-food-labelling-rules>

What Can We Learn From Organic Farming (AHDB) - <https://ahdb.org.uk/what-can-we-learn-from-organic-farming>

BASIS APPROVED TRAINERS

The following Colleges, Trainers and Training Providers are successfully running the Foundation Award in Organic Farming Course and Exam and have been accepted as BASIS Approved Trainers for the Foundation Award in Organic Farming.

Organic Farmers & Growers CIC / Abacus Agriculture

Old Estate Yard
Shrewsbury Road
Albrighton
SHREWSBURY
Shropshire SY4 3AG

Contact: The main office
Tel: 01939 291800
email: admin@ofgorganic.org

The following Colleges, Trainers and Training Organisations have expressed an interest in running the Foundation Award in Organic Farming Course and Exam.

21 July 2021