

Organic Farming Certification



Thematic area:

Environmental Sustainability.

Priority: How to improve biodiversity while maintaining equine activities?

Need: Find solutions to reduce the loss of biodiversity (and/or even increase biodiversity) in equine farms (positive and negative impacts of horses): How to identify good, practical and biodiversity-friendly methods?; How to fight weeds without phytosanitary products? ; How to fight against the decline of biodiversity?

Solution EU number: BD-11.

Content of the solution:

Reasons for obtaining organic farming certification and the steps required to achieve it.

Reasons for Implementing the Solution

Eco-certification positions a company as environmentally conscious, health-oriented and sustainable, which not only reduces the ecological footprint but also offers economic opportunities.

Description of Solution Strategies

Organic certification is an important step for agricultural and equine businesses committed to ecosystem preservation and sustainable production methods. This certification confirms that agricultural products are produced in accordance with strict environmental and sustainability standards. The certification process requires compliance with precise guidelines and practices that help protect natural resources and minimize environmental impact.

These requirements are defined by Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and the labelling of organic products, which sets the framework for organic farming practices and certification within the European Union. Key requirements include:

- **Prohibited substances:** The use of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, growth regulators and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is strictly prohibited, helping to reduce pollution and improve soil and water quality.
- **Crop rotation and cover crops:** The introduction of crop rotation and cover crops maintains soil fertility, prevents the accumulation of pests and diseases, and provides erosion control. These practices promote the long-term health of the soil and the environment.
- **Animal husbandry and management:** Organically certified farms rely on sustainable animal husbandry practices such as pasture management and the use of organic feed, which promotes animal welfare while protecting the environment.
- **Soil management:** Soil fertility is protected and promoted through methods such as composting, green manuring



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and reduced plowing. This helps to improve water absorption, nutrient storage and carbon sequestration in the soil.

- **Documentation and traceability:** To ensure compliance with organic standards, farms must keep detailed records of their cultivation methods and inputs. This ensures transparency and the verification of practices by certification bodies.

Certification is carried out by authorized inspection bodies, which ensure that operational practices comply with the specific standards. In the EU, this certification is based on the «Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and labeling of organic products».

Implementation Steps

1. Application: The producer submits an application for organic certification to an accredited certification body. This may include providing details about the farm, production methods, and planned organic practices.

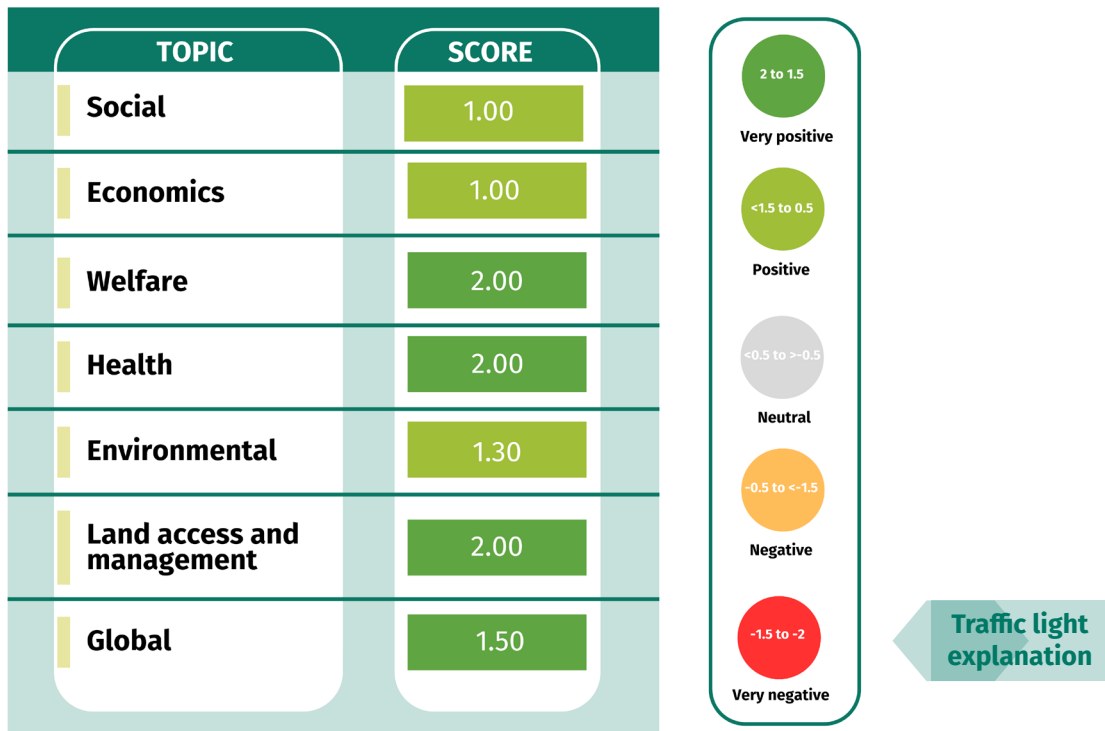
2. Compliance & Initial Inspection: The certification body reviews the application and conducts an on-site inspection to verify that farming practices comply with organic standards. This includes checking land use, feed sources, animal welfare, and input materials.

3. Conversion Period & Certification: All farms applying for organic certification must complete a mandatory conversion period, during which organic methods are already used, but the products cannot yet be sold as organic. The duration depends on national rules and varies by production type (between 1 and 5 years). Once the conversion is complete and compliance is confirmed by an accredited control body, the farm receives its organic certification.

4. Ongoing Compliance & Periodic Inspections: Certified farms must undergo regular inspections to ensure continued compliance with organic standards. Records must be maintained, and random audits may occur.

5. Financial Support & Subsidies: Farms in conversion and certified organic farms may be eligible for financial support under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including direct payments, eco-schemes and rural development measures to help cover the costs of the transition. Additional national or regional grants may also be available.

How Will this Solution Impact the Performance of your Farm?



Socioeconomics: This solution will support socioeconomic performance of your farm because, even though it offers potential benefits, some important nuances must be considered. The inclusion of horses in organic practices can strengthen the farm’s sustainable image, but the added requirements—such as stricter rules for feeding, veterinary care, and administrative tasks related to certification—may increase both physical workload and mental strain. Additionally, it can be difficult to differentiate organic products in the equine sector, limiting the potential for added value, particularly for sport horses.

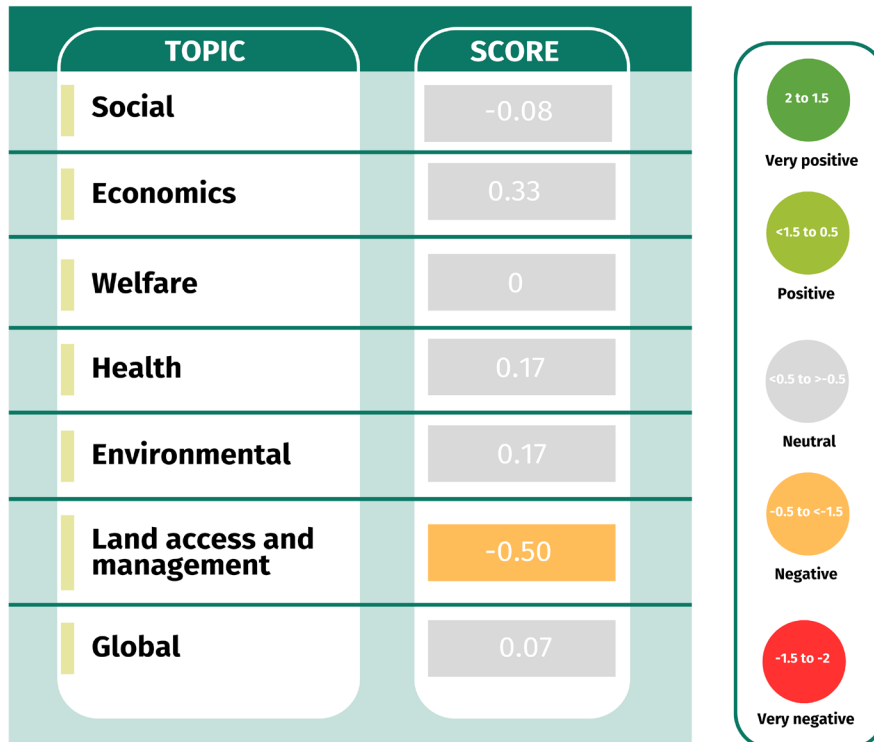


Health & Welfare: This solution would help the farm to perform better in health and welfare areas since more natural (pro-healthy) products would increase the health resistance of horses to diseases. Healthier horses are happier horses. Also, organic-related approach is an important issue of many owners and clients of livery yards, so having such a certificate may constitute an incentive for more aware (and wealthy) clientele to use the services of such a farm.



Environmental sustainability: This solution would help the farm to perform better in the areas of environmental sustainability and grassland management. No energy is lost in the production fodder, and the soil is not sterilized. This solution reduces the use of chemical inputs and the stocking rate per hectare.

How Will this Solution Impact the Resilience of your Farm?



Socioeconomics: This solution won't have any effect on socioeconomic performance of the farm facing external challenges because higher costs are involved without necessarily providing better value for money, and its impact largely depends on the farm's reliance on external inputs.

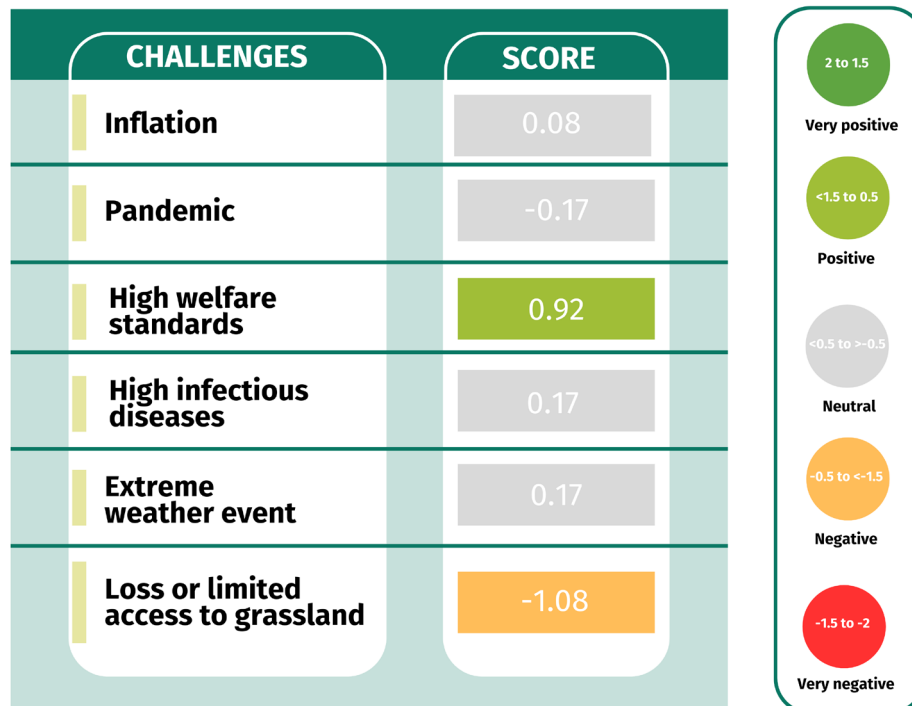


Health & Welfare: This solution does not directly improve welfare standards or the emotional state of horses, but it can support better overall health through improved feed quality and reduced exposure to chemicals. In case of need, European Regulation (EU) 2018/848 allows the use of veterinary treatments, including antibiotics, under controlled conditions, ensuring that animal welfare and health care are not compromised.



Environmental sustainability: This solution has little impact on the farm's ability to recover from environmental challenges and only a limited effect on pasture management. However, under organic regulations, animals must have access to grasslands during the grass-growing season, typically from spring to autumn, whenever weather conditions allow it. If conditions become unsuitable, animals may be kept indoors, but the final decision to justify restricted access lies with the certifying body. As a result, pasture management is less flexible and subject to external validation.

How can this solution help your farm to face specific external challenges to be more resilient?



Inflation & Social Crises: This solution has no significant overall effect on the farm’s performance when facing inflation or a pandemic. In times of inflation, organic farms are less exposed to rising fertilizer prices, since they do not use it. However, if they rely on purchased feed, they may still be affected by increased market prices. These opposite effects balance each other out, resulting in a generally neutral impact on overall resilience.



Welfare & Diseases: This solution can support the farm in the event of stricter animal welfare legislation, as Regulation (EU) 2018/448 already includes specific requirements for animal welfare and management. Organic certification therefore helps farms meet higher welfare standards more easily, since many of these criteria are already integrated into organic production rules.

In the case of disease outbreaks, the regulation allows the use of veterinary treatments, including antibiotics, when necessary, ensuring animal health is not compromised. However, the solution itself does not specifically improve resilience to infectious diseases, as biosecurity and health management remain the key factors.



Climate Change & Access to Land: This solution is neutral in terms of farm’s ability to cope with abnormally high temperatures or drought. This solution has, in fact negative effect on farm recovery in terms of loss/limited access to grassland. It does not compromise effects, of limited access to grassland on socioeconomics, animal welfare and health or environmental sustainability due to strict regulations.

Cost-benefit Analysis

The cost of organic certification depends on a number of factors, such as:

- **Farm size:** The larger the farm, the usually higher the cost of certification.
- **Type of production:** Certification of crop production differs in cost from certification of livestock production.
- **Certification body:** Different units have their own rates.

Cost of certification consist of:

- **Initial fee:** This is a one-off fee to start the certification process.
- **Annual fee:** The fee for maintaining the certification, which includes inspection and documentation costs.
- **Inspection costs:** Fees for carrying out on-farm inspections.
- **Additional costs:** These may include, for example, sampling, laboratory analysis or training costs.

Costs

Socioeconomics:

- **Certification costs:** Organic certification involves initial and annual fees, as well as inspection costs, which can be significant for small and medium-sized farms.
- **Yield variability:** Organic yields may sometimes be lower than conventional yields, depending on crop type, soil conditions, and management practices, potentially impacting profitability.
- **Market access challenges:** While organic certification opens new opportunities, entering premium markets can require additional marketing efforts and distribution networks.
- **Consumer education costs:** Raising awareness about organic farming and addressing misconceptions requires investment in marketing, outreach, and educational campaigns
- **Higher feed costs:** Organic feed, free from synthetic additives and GMOs, is often more expensive than conventional alternatives.



Benefits

- **Higher profitability:** Organic products generally command higher prices, leading to increased revenues for producers.
- **Market expansion:** Certification provides access to premium markets, both domestic and international.
- **Improved brand image:** Organic farming enhances a farm's reputation, attracting eco-conscious consumers.
- **Job creation & rural development:** Organic farming supports local economies by promoting sustainable agricultural jobs and rural revitalization
- **Access to subsidies & financial support:** Organic farms are eligible for financial aid through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), including direct payments, rural development programs, and eco-schemes. Additional national or regional grants may also be available.

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Cost-benefit Analysis

Costs

- **Higher labor costs:** Organic farming often requires more manual labor for weed control, soil management, and animal care compared to conventional farming.

Health & Welfare:

- **Nutritional balance challenges:** Some organic feed options may lack specific supplements or nutrients, potentially requiring careful dietary adjustments to maintain optimal equine health, (e.g. breeding-horses, sport horses).

Sostenibilidad medioambiental:

- **Risk of lower productivity per hectare:** If yields are lower, more land may be required to produce the same output, which could lead to increased land use.
- **Use of organic pesticides:** Although organic pesticides are generally less har

Benefits



- **Better living conditions:** Organic certification ensures higher welfare standards, including access to outdoor areas and organic feeding.
- **Reduced exposure to harmful substances:** Organic farms avoid synthetic pesticides and antibiotics, leading to healthier horses.
- **Improved nutrition:** Organic feed often contains higher-quality, chemical-free ingredients, benefiting equine health.



- **Soil conservation:** Organic farming improves soil health, prevents erosion, and maintains soil fertility.
- **Water quality protection:** Reducing synthetic fertilizers and pesticides minimizes water contamination.
- **Biodiversity enhancement:** Organic farms foster diverse ecosystems, supporting wildlife and pollinators.
- **Carbon sequestration:** Sustainable soil management helps store carbon, mitigating climate change.
- **Lower greenhouse gas emissions:** Reduced reliance on synthetic inputs decreases the farm's overall carbon footprint.

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Costs

Cooperation between farms

- **Logistical and coordination costs:** While collaboration between farms offers benefits, establishing supply chains, cooperative networks, and shared resources may require initial investments.
- **Potential competition among organic farms:** As more farms become organic, maintaining a competitive edge may require additional differentiation strategies.
- **Dependency on regional organic infrastructure:** If processing plants, feed suppliers, or distribution networks for organic farming are limited, farms may face higher transportation or operational costs.



Benefits

- **Knowledge sharing:** Organic farming encourages collaboration and exchange of best practices among producers.
- **Stronger local supply chains:** Cooperation among organic farms supports local feed production and shared resources.
- **Joint marketing opportunities:** Organic farmers can work together to market their products and improve sales strategies.
- **Community engagement:** Organic farming often fosters stronger relationships between farms and local communities.



Technical Sheet for Solution Implementation

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Additional Resources

Websites

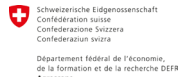
- IFOAM Organics Europe: <https://www.organicseurope.bio/>
- Organic Farm Knowledge: <https://organic-farmknowledge.org/>

Modell Companies and Case Studies

- **OK-Net EcoFeed:** An EU-funded project that aims to provide 100% organic and regional feed for monogastric animals (pigs and poultry). It provides case studies and examples of successful farms. <https://ok-net-ecofeed.eu/>
- **EU EIP-AGRI:** The European Innovation Partnership “Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability” offers a collection of projects and case studies to promote sustainable agricultural practices in Europe. <https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/node.html>

Further Information:

- **Regulation (EU) 2018/848** on organic production and labelling of organic products
- **EU Organic Awards:** These awards recognize outstanding achievements in organic farming across Europe. They offer inspiring examples and best practices for farms aiming for organic certification. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-action-plan/eu-organic-awards_en
- EU Organic Logo: Information about the EU organic label, its use and the requirements for certified products. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/farming/organic-farming/organic-logo_en_ecuestres



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Ideas to Animate a Workshop About the Solution:

- Ask advisor or certification body specialized in conversion to organic farming/become certified to sponsor the workshop.
- Find a model farm where the workshop can take place.
- Complete the required tasks and let the participants take part in these demonstration tasks so that they can get to know the system.

Proposed Structure for the Workshop on Guardian Animals in Horse Stables:

1. Introduction to Organic farming certification

- What is organic certification?
- Key features and requirements (e.g., standards, inspection process, labeling).
- Different types of organic certifications (e.g., EU organic, national standards, private labels).

2. Benefits of organic certification in horse stables

- Socioeconomic advantages (market access, subsidies, brand value).
- Environmental sustainability (soil health, biodiversity, emissions reduction).
- Better equine health and welfare (nutrition, reduced chemical exposure)

3. Practical Applications on Horse Farms

- Organic feed and pasture management – Use of certified organic feed, rotational grazing, and natural soil enrichment.
- Health and welfare practices – Restriction of synthetic medications, focus on natural treatments, and compliance with organic husbandry standards.
- Stable and waste management – Sustainable bedding materials, composting manure, and reducing environmental impact.

4. How to Choose the most suitable label

- Understanding certification standards – Compare national, EU, and private organic labels based on requirements and restrictions.
- Market and consumer expectations – Identify which labels have the highest recognition and trust in target markets.
- Cost-benefit analysis – Evaluate certification costs, inspection frequency, and long-term benefits for the farm.

5. Hands-On Demonstration

- Soil and pasture assessment – Evaluating organic soil health, composting techniques, and rotational grazing.
- Organic feed selection – Comparing different organic feed options and their impact on horse nutrition.
- Stable management practices – Demonstrating sustainable bedding, manure composting, and eco-friendly cleaning methods.



6. Maintenance and Troubleshooting

- Ensuring continuous compliance – Regular documentation, inspections, and adapting to regulation updates.
- Common challenges – Managing veterinary care under organic regulations, maintaining pasture quality, and dealing with seasonal feed shortages.
- Problem-solving strategies – Networking with other organic farms, seeking expert advice, and using support programs.

7. Case Studies and Real-World Examples

- Successful organic horse farms – Insights from certified operations and their key takeaways.
- Lessons learned – Overcoming challenges such as certification costs, consumer perception, and market access.
- Interactive discussion – Participants share experiences, discuss potential obstacles, and brainstorm solutions.

8. Cost Analysis and Return on Investment (ROI)

- Initial certification and operational costs – Comparing short-term expenses with long-term financial benefits.
- How to calculate ROI – Factoring in farm size, labor savings, increased market value, and subsidies.
- Financial benefits – Improved efficiency, reduced costs through sustainable practices, and enhanced revenue from organic products.

9. Q&A Session

- Open floor for participant questions – Addressing specific concerns and challenges.
- Clarification on costs and benefits – Discussing financial feasibility and market potential.
- Sharing experiences – Participants exchange insights and best practices.

10. Wrap-Up and Resources

- Summary of key takeaways – Recap of organic certification steps, benefits, and challenges.
- Further learning opportunities – Useful websites, certification bodies, and organic farming networks.
- Available support programs – Information on grants, subsidies, and industry partnerships.