

Organic Farming



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Awards Available:	MSc/PgDip
Awarding University:	The University of Glasgow
Mode of Study:	Online Distance Learning
Course Duration:	2-3 years
Start Date:	September

Course Overview

The organic food and farming sector within Europe is continuing to develop in response to governmental Action Plans and CAP policy development. Organic farming is widely regarded as a system with sustainable outcomes that is important for the future development of Scottish agriculture and the rural environment. The Scottish Government is committed to supporting organic production by supporting the sustainable growth of the organic sector in Scotland through delivery of appropriate and targeted policies.

Within the EU, organic farming support is highly regarded as a policy instrument to deliver a range of public goods. The recent CAP reform proposals reflect the importance given to organics as a policy tool, by stipulating a separate funding arrangement for organic farming under Pillar 2, and exempting organic farming from greening under Pillar 1.

The organic sector requires highly trained individuals to work as certification officers, advisers, agronomists, farmers, farm managers and livestock specialists. With organic prices providing a premium, the availability of public funding and CAP reforms potentially driving growth in the sector, this demand is likely to grow. The increasing emphasis on sustainable agriculture by government could also provide opportunities for employment in the research sector.

SRUC offers this programme to enable students with a variety of academic and working experiences to gain a fast-track understanding of the key technical production, marketing and management aspects of organic farming and food. This enables students to build on their existing expertise and aspirations, and to give them enhanced career opportunities as practitioners, promoters and facilitators within the sector. The organic farming course is offered on a part-time online distance learning basis to enable those in continuing employment or with family commitments to participate. Course participants come from a wide range of backgrounds, including farmers, growers, vets and other agricultural and food sector workers who wish to develop their career and businesses in the organic food and farming sector, as well as those from unrelated backgrounds wishing to increase their knowledge and understanding of organic systems.



On completion of the course graduates will:

- Be able to critically appraise organic farming as an agricultural system
- Have a good understanding of the organic sector
- Have a sound knowledge of the science underpinning organic farming
- Have an understanding of the marketing, business & quality assurance requirements for organic produce
- Have undertaken a work placement
- Have developed research skills (MSc only)

The course is accessible through its delivery by part-time online distance learning.

Programme Structure

The course modules comprise of a mix of technical production, marketing and management, and skills development modules. The programme is studied by part-time distance learning, with learning material presented online using SRUC's web learning environment which allows students to undertake the course from their own home or workplace.

Every term there is a weekend school where students attend SRUC Aberdeen for seminars, practical sessions and farm visits. The course also includes a study tour and a work placement module. Students following the distance learning course may gain exemption from the practical element of the placement but will still be required to complete a report of their work experience.

The PgDip is comprised of eight compulsory modules:

Organic Forage and Livestock Production

This module will provide an understanding of the role of forage legumes in organic systems and describe grassland management systems that maximise the contribution of legumes. Students will also be given an understanding of the organic approach to livestock production, particularly in terms of animal welfare, preventative health management and nutrition.

Soils and Nutrient Cycling

This module will aim to provide the students with the tools for optimal management of their soils. Ultimately, they should be able to describe soil properties, evaluate soil fertility and assess management requirements in the context of organic farming. The module provides an understanding of the chemical, physical and biological features of soil fertility and nutrient cycling and develops practical skills in soil assessment and whole farm nutrient budgeting.

Organic Crop Production

This module will explore a range of typical crop production methods, primarily for UK arable and vegetable field crops, within the context of the constraints of EU regulation. It will develop an understanding of the key components that make up a crop production system, including crop rotation design, methods of crop establishment, use of plant nutrients, methods of crop protection and the range of harvesting and storage methods for different crops.



Organic Farming Case Study

This module will improve the student's ability to undertake whole farm analysis and in particular organic conversion planning. Whole farm analysis involves a range of skills and examination of a wide range of issues: technical, financial, marketing and environmental. The module will require the student to integrate the knowledge gained in other modules, to provide an evaluation and plan for the conversion to organic production of an actual farm example.

Organic Farming Profession

This module will provide an overview of the philosophy, principles, history and development of the organic farming industry. The organic standards will be introduced and the ways in which they are used to regulate the organic food and farming industry at UK, European and global levels will be covered. The roles of the main UK organisations that influence the development of the organic sector will also be explored.

Organic Farming Work Placement

This module will allow students to become familiar with an organisation or business in the organic food and farming sector during a 6-week (or equivalent) work placement. The student will gather relevant and unique material to enable them to carry out a technical and business analysis and make recommendations for future development of the organisation or business in question. The material will also be used in class discussion and to contribute to group learning.

Issues in Organic Farming

This module explores the public goods delivered by organic farming. It develops an understanding of food quality and the role and application of Quality Assurance (QA) Schemes in the organic food sector to meet the needs of relevant legislation and consumer concerns. The module also provides an overview of the principles of environmental management in the context of organic agriculture, helping students gain an appreciation of the potential impacts of agricultural enterprises on the environment, measures for minimising such impacts, and opportunities for incorporating positive environmental management measures into farm business plans.

Marketing and Business Management in the Organic Farming Sector

This module will provide an understanding of the concepts, principles and techniques involved in marketing management and how they are applied in the context of the organic farming sector. Financial accounts are one source of information regarding an organic business, and aid the process of planning and control. This module will provide an understanding of accounts to assist in the process of setting goals within a business and assessing the financial consequences of alternatives.

MSc Project (taken following successful completion of taught modules)

The project provides an opportunity for in-depth individual research on a topic related to organic farming.



Study Tour

The study tour is used to visit a range of organic and conventional farms as well as businesses operating in the organic food supply and distribution chain. In the taught modules an element of student choice is often built in through the use of essay and other course work topics that cover areas of potential interest. There is also a Work Placement module.

The study weekends and short study tour are an integral part of teaching delivery and students are strongly recommended to attend these if they are to succeed in this course.

Time Commitment

The PgDip is a high level learning course taught at university post-graduate level. Students are required to complete all taught modules detailed above. Typically a student will study four modules per year and complete the PgDip in two years. This would normally take an average of 12 to 15 hours study time a week during 'term' time.

Students wishing to complete the MSc, and who reach progression standard, will then go on to complete a research project following successful completion of all the taught modules.

The time taken to complete the study is flexible but the PgDip must be completed in four years and the MSc in five.

Modules may also be studied individually for general interest or for CPD purposes.

Entry Qualifications and Applications

The normal entry requirement for the PgDip is a degree in a science or technology relevant to the sector. However, acceptance onto the programme is essentially based on an assessment of candidates' ability to benefit from the studies. While an adequate indication of ability to carry out academic study is essential, no absolute academic prerequisites are laid down. Applications from mature candidates with extensive work experience are particularly welcome.

The course is taught in English and students for whom it is not their first language must have achieved a minimum score of IELTS 6.5 or equivalent recognised English language qualification.

Apply online by visiting www.sruc.ac.uk/courses



Fees and Funding

For more information please see the [fees and funding section](#) of our website

Career Opportunities

In recent years over 90% of graduates have found relevant employment before or soon after graduating. Career choices have included:

- Advisors
- Certification Officers
- Inspectors
- Farming
- Consultancy
- Researchers

Student Profiles



Robby Gass (Year 1 Organic Farming 2014-15)

Robby's background is as an organic farmer of indigenous medicinal herbs in his native South Africa. He recently arrived in Scotland and has set up a new nursery for Enable Scotland to run as a Social Enterprise for training young people with learning difficulties to work in the horticultural sector.

With 35 years farming experience, of which 25 are organic, Robby said, "My aim is to increase my organic farming knowledge and to substantiate my experience, so that I may be considered a qualified expert for future consulting ability. I find the tremendously helpful attitude of all the staff at SRUC most encouraging".

Robby hopes to gain academic knowledge and research experience, as well as the opportunity to build up a working relationship with a network of active experts in organic farming.



Caithriona McCarthy (MSc graduate 2014)

Before signing up for SRUC's distance learning MSc in Organic Farming, Caithriona was teaching horticulture at a local training centre. The course primarily gave Caithriona academic knowledge, but it also opened up the organic network, which in Ireland is quite small.

She said, "The course improved my career as I moved from a Training Centre to lecturing at the local college, able to teach a wider range of subjects. The course also provided an ideal vehicle for me to set up a community project, the Edible Landscape Project, which provided material for both the PgDip Work Placement module and my MSc thesis. The course was the best – and the toughest - thing I've done in a long time!"

Course Contact Details

For further information, please contact:

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