
Organic nut production

What is organic agriculture?

A commonly accepted definition of organic agriculture is ‘farming without the addition of artificial chemicals’ but organic agriculture is far more than this. The intention of organic farming is to encourage natural biological systems to maintain soil fertility and prevent pest and disease attack, while excluding the use of synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. An artificial chemical is a chemical that has been chemically processed, for example, natural rock phosphate is an acceptable addition on organic farms but superphosphate is not because the rock phosphate in this product has been processed with sulphuric acid to make it more soluble. The challenge in doing away with artificial chemicals is finding alternate management techniques and natural materials that work successfully in a particular orchard. While not using artificial chemicals may mean a reduction in input costs, it may also mean more physical work in weed control. In addition, it may mean that it is not possible to ‘push’ trees to their production limits using highly soluble fertilisers. Organic agriculture is not old-fashioned farming or hippie gardening but an agricultural system that combines the best natural methods with the best of modern science.

Biodynamic agriculture was developed by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s. The aim in biodynamic agriculture is to treat a farm as a living system. The main farming principle is maintaining a healthy living soil by developing life-giving humus out of dead organic material. This involves using the horn preparation ‘BD500’ and other soil and plant activators. Another biodynamic principle is working to increase the cosmic formative forces that enhance plant and animal health and growth. Biodynamic farmers plant and harvest according to the phases of the moon.