



Farming Fact Sheets

Forestry Operations and Organic Farming

Organic certification relies on clean water and soil, free from pollutants. Therefore, the use of chemicals on adjoining forestry plantations can have important implications for organic farmers.

How will forestry operations affect your organic farm?

There are several initial steps you can take to manage the impact of nearby forestry operations on your organic farm:

1. Notification

If you become aware that forestry operations are proposed on land near your farm, the first thing to do is to notify the forestry operator and timber harvester that you operate an organic farming enterprise. You should write to them and provide information about your operation, including a farm plan showing crops, grazing areas and water sources and details of any specific sensitivities of the land.

2. Gather information about the proposed forestry operations

You should ask for a copy of any draft Forest Practices Plan for the forestry operation (see **Forestry Fact Sheets - Forest Practices Plans**) and look at the provisions relating to water quality, erosion, chemical application and streamside reserves. If a copy of the plan is not provided, you should ask for information about the proposed operation. Some good questions to ask the landowner include:

- When do they intend to start removing trees?
- Do they intend to conduct aerial or ground spraying? If so, what chemicals will they spray?
- Do they intend to use 1080 poison?
- What type of plantation do they intend to establish (i.e. pine or mixed forest)?
- Describe the fertiliser and chemical application regime throughout the entire life of the plantation.
- Will there be any buffer zones between your property (or your water source) and the area to be logged?

3. Ask for assurances

You should ask the landowner / harvester for a written assurance that the forestry operations will not adversely affect your organic farming certification. You could also ask for a written undertaking that the owner / harvester will not use any chemicals in your water catchment. Please note, they are not required to give such assurances.

4. Request a spraying control order from the Minister

The Minister for Primary Industries and Water can make orders controlling agricultural spraying to protect “susceptible plants and stock, the environment and trade”. You can write to the Minister and request that an order be made for your area, emphasising the government’s apparent commitment to organic farming (e.g Tasmania Together goals aim for a 700% increase in organic farming by 2020 and the government recently signed the Tasmanian Organics Industry Action Partnership Agreement to facilitate this).

Objecting to forestry operations

In Tasmania, there are few opportunities to formally object to forestry operations. However, the following options may be available:

- If the owner has applied for the land to be declared as a private timber reserve (see **Forestry Fact Sheet – Private Timber Reserves**) you can object to the application on the grounds that you will be ‘directly and materially disadvantaged’ (for example, that forestry operations will have an adverse impact on your organic farm).
- If you believe that the forestry operations will breach the Forest Practices Code, you can ask the Forest Practices Authority to investigate (see **Forestry Fact Sheet – Enforcement**).
- If soil, crops or water on your land will be polluted by the forestry activities, you may be able to apply to the Resource Management and Planning Appeal Tribunal for an order to prevent the activities under the *Environmental Management and Pollution Control Act 1994*.

Gathering evidence

If you decide to take legal action, you will need to be able to demonstrate:

- that the forestry operation is (or will be) an unreasonable interference with your enjoyment of the environment (for example, by reducing the quantity of water available to your property). What is “unreasonable” will depend on the kinds of activities that could reasonably be expected in your area and the volume, intensity and duration of the nuisance.
- the impacts of contamination on your organic farming enterprise (including environmental harm and economic loss).
- that these impacts have been (or will be) caused by the forestry operations.

It is a good idea to start collecting evidence of potential impacts as early as possible. This evidence can include:

- Objective scientific evidence of current chemical levels in your soil and water supply, upstream of the harvesting coupe and on the coupe. It is a good idea to contact DPIW for information about taking and testing soil and water samples.
- Details of your use of the land (e.g. numbers of stock, where they graze, where they draw their water from, details of crops). We recommend that you take photos and keep a diary of events in relation to any future chemical incidents (e.g. spraying, laying 1080 baits).
- Details of the levels of chemical contamination that would disqualify your property from organic certification.
- Information about the economic impacts of chemical contamination on your business. This could include letters from your main customers indicating that they would not purchase from you if you lost your certification.

For further information about legal options, contact the Environmental Defenders Office.

