

The Use of Composts and Digestate in Organic Systems

The SOPA Organic Standards for Production Issue 6 (2026) now permit the use of Composts or Digestates for the Use in Organic Systems under derogation, whether home-produced or bought-in. This Technical Note explains what is permitted and the permissions required to be approved prior to use.

Definitions	Type	Permitted Source Material	Not Permitted Source Material	Permission needed
<p>Compost is defined as decomposed organic matter, usually crop, garden or food waste.</p> <p>Digestate is defined as the digested product resulting from biodegradable materials that have digested in an anaerobic digester plant. The inputs to the anaerobic digester can include manures, slurries, crop matter, food waste and green waste.</p> <p>PAS100 is the industry Standard for Compost Certification.</p> <p>PAS110 is the industry Standard for Digestate Certification.</p> <p>PTE Potentially Toxic Materials (heavy metals) PTE levels under the Organic Regulation must not be exceeded. See over.</p>	Green Waste Compost	is usually compost made from green materials such as crop waste	must be green waste only	SOPA Derogation Form 4. Source Ingredients list PAS100 certificate, or if not PAS100 then a PTE declaration A GM Declaration is not required.
	Food Waste Compost including Household Waste	is usually composted food or waste from households or catering waste similar to household waste that has been separated at source. This can include materials from unsold food, or waste from meals prepared in catering establishments such as canteens and restaurants. PAS100 Food waste compost must be composted in a closed vessel	Trachea Gut contents Abattoir Waste Animal manure or slurry from livestock fed GM feed Manure/ Slurry from intensively reared animal systems	SOPA Derogation Form 4 Source ingredients list PAS100 certificate PTE declaration A GM Declaration is not required.
<p>Seeking Permission For Use of Any Compost and/or Digestate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request approval by submitting SOPA Derogation Form 4 (Non-Organic Manures) and include soil analyses and justification PAS100/PAS110 Certificate or If not PAS100 composts then a declaration demonstrating the PTE (heavy metal analysis) does not exceed the PAS100 standard. Supply a copy of the ingredients used in the compost/digestate. GM Declaration where required (see right) 	Food Waste Digestate including Household Waste	food or household waste as above that has been anaerobically digested.	Trachea Gut contents Abattoir Waste Animal manure or slurry from livestock fed GM feed Manure/ Slurry from intensively reared animal systems	SOPA Derogation Form 4 Source ingredients list PAS110 certificate A GM Declaration of the Digestate is required where manure or slurry is an ingredient
	Plant-Based Digestate	digestate comprising plant-based ingredients such as distillery waste, purpose grown crops, crop residues or plant wastes.	must be green waste only	SOPA Derogation Form 4 Source ingredients list PAS110 certificate, or if not PAS110 then a PTE declaration

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PTE (Potentially Toxic Elements) Limits

PTE	Organic Regulation Limit for fermented or composted Food or Household Waste	PAS100 Limit
Cadmium (Cd)	0.7 mg/kg of dry matter	1.5 mg/kg of dry matter
Copper (Cu)	70 mg/kg of dry matter	200 mg/kg of dry matter
Nickel (Ni)	25 mg/kg of dry matter	50 mg/kg of dry matter
Lead (Pb)	45 mg/kg of dry matter	200 mg/kg of dry matter
Mercury (Hg)	0.4 mg/kg of dry matter	1.0 mg/kg of dry matter
Chromium (total)	70 mg/kg of dry matter	100 mg/kg of dry matter
Chromium (VI)	0 mg/kg of dry matter	N/A
Zinc (Zn)	200 mg/kg of dry matter	400g/kg of dry matter

PAS110 PTE Limits

Total Nitrogen (N)	kg/t	<1	1-1.9	2-2.9	3-3.9	4-4.9	5-5.9	6-6.9	7-7.9	8-8.9	>9
Cadmium (Cd)	mg/kg	0.12	0.24	0.36	0.48	0.60	0.72	0.84	0.96	1.08	1.2
Chromium (Cr)	mg/kg	8	16	24	32	40	48	56	64	72	80
Copper (Cu)	mg/kg	16	32	48	64	80	96	112	128	144	160
Mercury (Hg)	mg/kg	0.08	0.16	0.24	0.32	0.40	0.48	0.56	0.64	0.72	0.80
Nickel (Ni)	mg/kg	4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36	40
Lead (Pb)	mg/kg	16	32	48	64	80	96	112	128	144	160
Zinc (Zn)	mg/kg	32	64	96	128	160	192	224	256	288	320