

## PGS and Legal Framework in Colombia: meetings and discussions

by Andrés Ramírez H, Pedro Guzmán



On 22 March, 2011, *Familia de la Tierra* (a Colombian PGS initiative that was introduced to our readers on The Global PGS Newsletter, April, 2011, Vol.2, p. 2) organized a national meeting with social, peasant and indigenous organizations in Colombia. The objective was to

develop strategies for promoting participatory certification as a legitimate alternative for local market and small holders. During the meeting supported by the NGO Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular - CINEP, the city of Bogotá and Swissaid, different initiatives implementing PGS in Colombia had the possibility to exchange experiences, discuss and address common issues, while considering pathways to political influence in order to have participatory certification included in local, regional and national legal frameworks.

*Red Colombiana de Agricultura Biológica - RECAB* and *Red agroecológica del Caribe - RECAR* were the most experienced and therefore leading organizations participating in the meeting. Their activities include: participatory assessments, development of indicators and market analysis, regional teams supporting crop planning, market promotion and alternative certification. They also perform training on internal control rules, monitoring for standards compliance, record keeping, inspection and standards development.

Other PGS initiatives participating in the meeting were:

- The producers' association for community development in *Ciénaga Grande del Bajo Sinú* – ASPROCIG. This organization is active in 9 municipalities helping families get involved and network with local production groups through a working group.
- The network of organic farmers markets in Cauca, which has developed

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a trust building process among producers, by adopting what they refer to as “Life Agreements”.

- *Resguardo Indígena Cañamomo Lomapieta* in Caldas, a network of internal associations grouping more than 1,500 producers families of indigenous peoples, and responsible for the organic quality control of the products in the area.
- AGROSOLIDARIA, a confederation of producers, processors, distributors and consumers active all over the country, with a set of procedures for field inspections and trust-building processes.
- *The Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas del norte del Cauca* - ACIN, an organization involving more than 25,000 families adopting organic practices.

One of the outcomes of the meeting was the recognition of the emerging need to build a national proposal to support and strengthen PGS, and to create a communication channel between the organizations. The aim is to advance with the coordinated work, taking advantage of the many different events being held by the organic and agro-ecological movement in Colombia, including the coming Latin American and Caribbean Producers, Producers, Innovators and Researchers in Organic Agriculture (ELAO) meeting, taking place in October.



PGS initiatives representatives discussing in Bogota

Another outcome was the decision to continue

to advocate for government recognition of the important role that these initiatives play in safeguarding social and community processes while constituting an alternative to third-party certification, particularly adapted for small-scale rural producers in Colombia.

In May, almost two months after the event, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, together with the Colombian Agricultural Institute (ICA), invited several organizations to participate in a meeting in Bogota. The main topic was the discussion of a proposal made by the Peruvian national agrarian health service – SENASA, for a possible Andean technical regulation for organic production.

ICA, Familia de la Tierra, MAELA and Daboon participated in the first part of the discussion and then the Ministry of Agriculture presented an institutional position. One of the outcomes was the proposal to use a common seal within the area of the Andean Community Nations (CAN) and free circulation of certified organic products within member countries. The Colombian government was urged to strengthen and recognize PGS as valid mechanisms to improve the quality of life of rural people and the supply of organic food in cities.

The organic Colombian movement now has the opportunity to approach the current government, that seems to be slightly more oriented towards rural issues and has surprised social movements by authorizing the development of rural initiatives such as the formation of “Peasant Reserve Areas” or the restitution of land to communities displaced by political and social conflicts in recent decades. Although it would be premature to think that this guarantees a strong and sustained support for rural communities, it is safe to say that the current political arena is suitable for presenting a proposal for the legal recognition of PGS in the country. This is a challenge that the Colombian organic movement faces now, especially acknowledging that consumers must be addressed, for the vital role they play in participatory certification and responsible sustainable consumption.

# Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) promotes PGS in Belize

By Flávia Castro



The news first arrived in 2010 that training in PGS had been taking place in Belize with the support of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA). On 25 June, 2010 at the University of Belize, a total of 31 participants representing various institutions and farmers groups attended the workshop, which presented PGS for local production. The scheme was based on similar schemes used in the region such as in Costa Rica and Colombia. After a presentation by Mr. Juan Tun, Chairman of the organic producer group “Greens, Vegetables and Legumes Cooperative”, discussions took place. Copies of the “Guide towards Organic Crop Certification” as well as of the “Organic Production Plan” form were handed out to the participants, since they were considered by the organizers to be “the key for transition to organic”.

Also during that meeting, elections were held for two important committees: the Ethics Committee and the Education Committee. The first was meant to oversee that the certification and certifications scheme were carried out, and the second to provide training and capacity-building to complement the certification scheme. The scheme was then in its early stages.

This year, the initiative Belize Organic Alliance - BOA was launched and it is now formed by farmers and consumers groups, cooperating with the purpose of providing a cost effective alternative for organic certification, while staff provides advice. This initiative counts on technical support from IICA and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of Belize. Also, farmers participate in administrative costs with a fee that they have agreed upon, in order to cover travel expenses, for example. Members receive training focusing on organizational skills, organic inspection, certification procedures and organic production practices.



BOA stakeholders on the field

BOA has adopted PGS for products that are traded locally but is also trying to comply with requirements for certification bodies in order to stand scrutiny by the national competent authority. In fact, BOA's intent is to be structured to meet the International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies (IROCB). This is a work in progress initiative and the difficulties related to the choice of complying with IROCB as a PGS are being explored. Nevertheless, BOA has recently completed the first assessment and inspection for 2 farms in the Cayo District and these were granted status of “transition to organic”.

We are very pleased to welcome this initiative and to share the news with our readers. If you

would like to have more information on PGS in Belize, please contact Juan Tun ([tun.juan@yahoo.com](mailto:tun.juan@yahoo.com)) or Maximiliano Ortega ([maximiliano.ortega@iica.int](mailto:maximiliano.ortega@iica.int)).

# MASIPAG leads PGS promotion at the Food Bowl Night Market in Manila

By Rowena Buena



In a bid to further promote local organic products, MASIPAG joined the Food Bowl Night Market (FBNM), a convergence of organic, biodynamic and natural farming producers working to make organic, natural and safe products available to consumers at affordable prices. FBNM is located in one of the busiest cities of Metropolitan Manila, Quezon City, where consumers are getting more conscious and aware of the importance of organic foods in their health and wellness.



MASIPAG unpolished red rice, M160-1

MASIPAG has actively participated since the FBNM launch last March 18, making available to the urban-based consumers a colored and unpolished variety of organic rice. More than marketing these products, MASIPAG also aims to promote the Masipag Farmers Guarantee System (MFGS), a form of PGS.

PGS is increasingly being recognized and adopted worldwide. The Philippines' organic law however, still lags behind in empowering farmers to conduct quality

control by themselves and to contribute to the growing organic industry.



Dr. Charito Medina, MASIPAG national coordinator, explains the benefits of eating organic unpolished rice to consumers.

MASIPAG believes that it is crucial to develop and support the domestic organic market. For seven years now, MASIPAG has been promoting MFGS all over the country not only as an alternative to expensive third-party certification but also to strengthen the developing domestic organic market.

The FBNM is open every Friday and Saturday, from 4 to 11pm where consumers can buy organic products and also learn about the organic practices and the advocacies of the convenors.

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## Continental news: What's new in...



### ...Africa

- **South Africa:** Siyavuna Development Center - SDC is a recently established NGO, focused on the promotion of a sustainable agri-marketing model. Their activities are based on a number of sound development practices regarding participation, local ownership, people's development and sustainable resource utilization. SDC has been granted funding to develop a PGS system in conjunction with their brand Kumnadi, a Zulu term for tasty or delicious. If you would like to learn more about SDC's PGS approach, please visit <http://www.siyavuna.org.za/>.



### ...Asia

- **The Philippines:** On May 27 MASIPAG's PGS experience was presented during a free lecture on organic certification, at the Food Bowl Night Market in (see article on page 4). The presentation was part of an advocacy campaign that is being held by the FBNM Convenors Group in cooperation with the World Agape Association Inc. and DS Pinoy. The Global PGS Newsletter team congratulates the organizers! Similar initiatives are crucial to promote understanding on the important role PGS plays for organic producers and consumers all over the world.

## Imprint

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