

## PGS for fighting Poverty: The state government of Tamil Nadu, India selects PGS for its poverty alleviation program

By Samraj Thonthai Gowder, Keystone Foundation



In the state of Tamil Nadu in Southern India, the state government has chosen PGS certification for its poverty alleviation program “Tamil Nadu Pudhu Vazhvu Project” (TNPVP) for small and marginal farmers in 15 districts. After initial negotiations with the Environment Specialist who coordinated the initiative, a three level training and orientation on PGS was organized by Keystone Foundation.

The first training session was held on the 18th of March 2014 in Ooty for the Facilitators and Agriculture Consultants. This was followed by a two-day training program in Madurai between 10th and 11th of April 2014 for the Assistant Project Managers (APMs) who are the implementing officials of the program. This session was conducted with hands on farm appraisal and farmer interactions. The final session was held on 21st of May 2014 in Salem for the District Project Managers (DPMs) who are in charge of the TNPVP in their respective districts. This one-day training was particularly interesting because of the DPMs apprehension and hesitation in taking up organic agriculture as an option for the farmers who are below the poverty line. But after hours of intensive discussions they were convinced about the merits of organic as an option well suited for small farmers and PGS certification as a means of getting better prices and access to markets.

The program will be implemented in the 15 districts (counties) of the state, which are classified as agriculture intensive districts. An action plan was drawn up for the implementation of PGS certification in which in the first phase 24 groups with 374 members who are already organic will apply for PGS certification. This will be done before the

---

*... after hours of intensive discussions they were convinced about the merits of organic as an option well suited for small farmers and PGS certification as a means of getting better prices and access to markets.*

---



### Table of Contents

PGS for fighting Poverty: The state government of Tamil Nadu selects PGS for its poverty alleviation program	1
Regulation of PGS in Brazil: Achievements and Challenges	2
The NOFA-NY Farmer's Pledge - An alternative to organic certification under the National Organic Program in the US	3
National Law of Organic Production in Mexico finally enters into force	5
Continental news: What's new...	6

end of June 2014. In the next phase 185 groups with 1786 members will apply for in-conversion to organic during August 2014. After the successful completion of this training the TNPVP has proposed a second phase of training for 10 districts in the state, which makes the total districts 25 out of the 32 districts in Tamil Nadu. With this initiative PGS will gain greater visibility and can generate positive influence also to other states of India where our partner NGOs are actively involved in

the promotion of PGS certification. After completing the first step of obtaining PGS certification, a mechanism will be developed to access markets across the state and to access institutional markets also. The following step will be the formation of women PGS groups who are involved in agriculture in small areas or in kitchen gardens. To learn more about the activities, please contact Samraj Thonthai Gowder from Keystone: [samraj@keystone-foundation.org](mailto:samraj@keystone-foundation.org)

## Regulation of PGS in Brazil: Achievements and Challenges

by Maria Alice F. C. Mendonça, Ph.D. student in Rural Development at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul/Brazil and Wageningen University/The Netherlands



The Brazilian regulation for organic and agroecological production was introduced in the 1990's in response to international restrictions on Brazilian organic products. Nevertheless, the agroecological movement stayed prominent and actively participated in discussions and negotiations with

the government. As a result of this interaction between government and the agroecological movement, a series of laws, decrees and federal regulatory instructions for organic and agroecological production was enacted, e.g. the Organic Law and its respective regulatory instructions. Moreover, the National Policy on Organic Production and Agroecology (Política Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica) and the National Action Plan for Organic Production and Agroecology (Plano Nacional de Agroecologia e Produção Orgânica) were released in 2012 and 2013 respectively. They settle the strategies for government investments in the expansion of agroecological production.

Currently, Brazilian farmers have three options to ensure the organic and agroecological quality of their produce: 1) Third-party certification; 2) Participatory Assessment Bodies; and 3) Social Control Organizations. These last two are systems operate at a local level and rely on the active participation of stakeholders. However, only the Participatory Assessment Bodies are considered as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in the legal sense and authorized for the use of the national organic label, which is required for non-direct sales of organic products. In contrast, the Social Control system does not grant the right to use the national label and allows only the direct sale from small-scale family farmers to the final consumers.

The recognition and regulation of the Participatory Assessment Bodies and Social Control Systems by the government is a big achievement of the agroecological movement in Brazil in

its struggle with the government. At the moment, there are around 13 Participatory Assessment Bodies and 90 Social Control Organizations registered at the Ministry of Agriculture. In terms of organization of the groups, the producers certified through a Participatory Assessment Body have more time-consuming and bureaucratic obligations to fulfill. They also have to register as a legal entity for assessment of compliance with the requirements. The challenge for farmers using the Social Control system is that they are required to prove their status as family farmers by presenting a special document called Declaration of Eligibility for the National Program of Family Farmers Strengthening (Declaração de Aptidão ao Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar). To acquire this document can be difficult, especially for urban farmers. For this reason farmers organized themselves to press for changes in the legislation, and consequently, the Ministry of Agriculture is now considering possibilities to include other categories of farmers.

---

*The recognition and regulation of the Participatory Assessment Bodies and Social Control Systems by the government is a big achievement of the agroecological movement in Brazil in its struggle with the government.*

---

The Brazilian case shows that the regulation of PGS can have a positive effect in promoting the interaction between the government and civil organizations with respect to the marketing of organic and agroecological products. Two present experiences<sup>1</sup> of agroecological farmers in Southern Brazil with Participatory Assessment Bodies reveal that the regulation

<sup>1</sup> The Participatory Assessment Body from the North Coast of the Rio Grande do Sul; and the Participatory Assessment Body from the Agroecological Farmers of the Metropolitan Area of Porto Alegre.

of PGS can also contribute to build an identity of the farmer members as agroecological farmers. The formal recognition has increased the visibility and acknowledgment of their work. Besides it has also contributed to the creation of new markets and resulted in better market access for the farmers. While throughout all the Brazilian states, various initiatives (consumer networks, local street markets and institutional markets) have been created in order to support agroecology and to shorten the value chains between farmers and consumers, the growing demand for new PGS groups (coming from farmers, consumers, micro-entrepreneurs, Non-Governmental Organizations etc. outside the existing groups), and the satisfaction of the majority of current members are signs of prosperity of the PGS and its regulation in the country.

One of the challenges PGS in Brazil is facing is the limited availability of technicians that can help farmers and supply them with information and advice. It also often remains difficult to establish the social conditions for the system to function. This means there is a considerable risk that only few groups of farmers are included into PGS, while many others are excluded. To mitigate this risk, some actions could be envisioned: 1) investment in training of technicians from government agencies, agricultural extension and health monitoring services for agroecological production; 2) encouragement of

greater involvement of farmers from the networks of NGOs and consumers in building PGS; and 3) promotion of education for the popularization of ecologically-based agriculture and of education of conscious consumers.

The government regulation of PGS carries also some risks and downsides, some of which can also be observed in the Brazilian context. The agroecological movement in Brazil therefore stresses the importance that the regulation of PGS must not constrain the expansion of agroecological practices, for instance by creating too many rules that might discourage farmers to be creative and innovative. Also, it emphasizes the importance of having multiple schemes of organic assessment and that among the participatory types of assessment, the “labelled” products should not always be considered as better or trustworthier than the “non-labelled” ones.

To conclude, the Brazilian example shows that the adoption of PGS and its recognition by governments can contribute to the development of the organic sector committed to the re-localization of agrofood systems. At the same time, experiences from the Brazilian case also show that the regulation of PGS should be connected with multiple governmental and non-governmental actions in order to assure the autonomy and the innovation capability of ecologically-based systems.

## The NOFA-NY Farmer's Pledge - An alternative to organic certification under the National Organic Program in the US

by Mark Dunau and Elizabeth Henderson



During the 15 years before organic certification became a government program in the United States, half the farms in the state of New York

that described their practices as organic chose not to be certified. With the implementation of the National Organic Program (NOP) in 2002, the US Department of Agriculture forbade the use of the word “organic” to describe farm practices unless a farm was certified by a NOP-accredited organic certification agency such as the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (NOFA-NY) Certified Organic LLC. The usurpation of the organic label by the NOP dismayed the Board of NOFA-NY in part because that deprived half of NOFA-NY's farm

members of the freedom to label their products. Some of these farms were the oldest organic farms in the state.

The NOFA-NY Board wanted to give these farms a means to describe their sustainable growing practices for the consumer without using the word organic. The Board was also attracted to creating a document about farming practices that could evolve over time without being subject to any authority but NOFA-NY members themselves. Thus, in 2003, NOFA-NY created The Farmer's Pledge as an alternative to organic certification under the NOP.

The Farmer's Pledge is a means for consumers to identify farmers who grow organically, but who are not certified organic. The Farmer's Pledge commits the farmers who sign it to agroecological growing practices and also socially just practices not covered by the NOP. Consequently, farmers who are certified organic also participate in The Farmer's Pledge. The Pledge is based on the farmer's integrity. Although the Farmer's Pledge

is not a PGS, it is based on a similar spirit that it is the community that verifies The Farmer's Pledge: any customer can request a tour of the farm by appointment to test the farmer's truthfulness. Customers can also lodge complaints and the director of NOFA-NY will investigate.

### What is in the Pledge?

The language of The Farmer's Pledge was mainly written by the two authors of this article. We are both organic farmers; Elizabeth's farming has been certified organic since 1985, while Mark chose to drop certification in 2002 when the NOP was implemented.

With the Pledge, farmers lay their integrity on the line with a promise to be true to agroecological practices such as these that closely parallel organic standards:

- \*Build and maintain healthy soils by applying farming practices that include rotating crops annually, using compost, cover crops, and green manures, and reducing tillage
- \*Serve the health of soil, people, and nature by rejecting the use of synthetic insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and fertilizers
- \*Reject the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), chemically treated seeds, synthetic toxic materials, irradiation, and sewage sludge in farming and all synthetic substances in postharvest handling
- \*Treat livestock humanely by providing pasture for ruminants, providing access to outdoors and fresh air for all livestock, banning cruel alterations, and using no hormones, GMOs, or antibiotics in feed.

The Pledge goes beyond production practices to include ethical trading, cooperation with neighbors, conservation of natural resources, processing limited to what you might do in your kitchen, food-safety practices, and reducing energy use. Pledge signers also promise to treat both their family members and their hired workers with respect, and to acknowledge their workers' freedom of association, a demand that the farm worker justice campaign has been making for many years.

### Many Reasons for Signing

The Farmer's Pledge works well for farmers engaged in direct sales on the farm and at farmers markets, CSAs, and restaurants, but it is not an effective label for sales on commodity markets. The heart of the Pledge is knowing the farmer and the consumer's judgment of the integrity of that farmer.

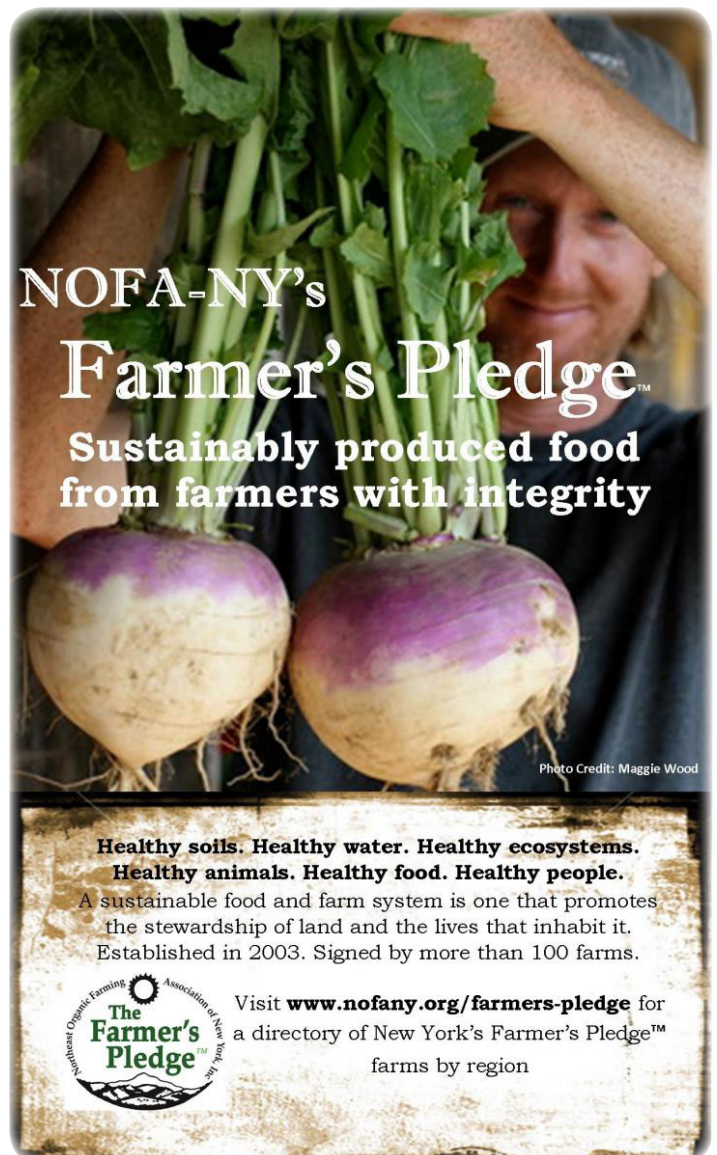
Over the past decade, farmers have used the Pledge for diverse reasons. Some farms find organic certification too costly. Other farms use The Farmer's Pledge because

they do not wish to give credibility to what they believe is a flawed NOP program. For example, one hot issue was the NOP decision to allow antibiotics to be sprayed on apple and pear trees at blossom time to control fire blight. (The latest meeting of the National Organic Standards Board has finally set a deadline of October 2014 after which even this limited use of antibiotics in organic production must come to an end.) And some farmers respect their NOP certification through NOFA-NY but also wish to attest to growing practices described in The Farmer's Pledge, but not covered by the NOP. Many of these farms also use The Farmer's Pledge as a concise tool to describe the broader set of values on which truly sustainable farming is based.

---

*The Farmer's Pledge is a means for consumers to identify farmers who grow organically, but who are not certified organic.*

---




**NOFA-NY's  
Farmer's Pledge™**  
**Sustainably produced food  
from farmers with integrity**

Photo Credit: Maggie Wood

**Healthy soils. Healthy water. Healthy ecosystems.  
Healthy animals. Healthy food. Healthy people.**  
A sustainable food and farm system is one that promotes the stewardship of land and the lives that inhabit it. Established in 2003. Signed by more than 100 farms.

Visit [www.nofany.org/farmers-pledge](http://www.nofany.org/farmers-pledge) for a directory of New York's Farmer's Pledge™ farms by region



The Farmer's Pledge has been adopted by Connecticut NOFA and the Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance. Most of the signers of The Farmer's Pledge make their living through direct sales. They don't need USDA's approval because it is their relationship with their customers, not a third party verifier that is most important. NOFA-NY charges an annual fee of \$70 and promotes pledge farms on its [website](#) and in its annual "Organic Food Guide". Signers of the Farmer's Pledge meet every year at NOFA-NY's annual meeting to discuss and implement changes. The Farmer's Pledge is evolving through the farmers that participate, as once was the case for certified organic.

The Farmer's Pledge was revised several times over the years, and recently the preamble to the pledge was rewritten. Please click [here](#) to read the Farmer's Pledge in full length. Visit us under [www.nofany.org](http://www.nofany.org).



## National Law of Organic Production in Mexico finally enters into force

By Luis Suarez, vegetable producer, Coordinator of the Local Committee of Participatory Certification of Tianguis Natural, Artesanal y Orgánico de San Miguel de Allende (TOSMA), Member of the National Committee of Participatory Certification of Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos.



On 7 February 2006, the Law of Organic Products (*La Ley de Productos Orgánicos*) was published in the Official Journal of the Mexican Federation. This law was passed to set the criteria and requirements for the conversion, production, processing, the packaging, storage, labeling and distribution as well as the transportation, marketing and certification of organic products and to promote them. In Article 3, the Law states that it shall fully enter into force within the following 6 months, issuing the final regulations and other additional correlative provisions.

Eventually four years later, on 26 March 2010, the regulation was published, informing that the Organic Guidelines of the Act (*Lineamientos de la Operación Orgánica*) shall be issued within the time frame of no longer than one year.

After three more years had passed, on 29 October 2013, the Official Journal of the Mexican Federation published the Guidelines for Organic Farming (*Los Lineamientos para la Operación Orgánica de las Actividades Agropecuarias*) and announced that they shall enter into force six months after the publication. Finally, on 29 April 2014, Mexico enacted its National Organic Regulation.

Among others, the organic regulation addresses small producers who supply local fairs and farmers markets with organic products and provides them with an alternative tool to obtain organic recognition for their produce: Participatory Certification, or Participatory Guarantee Systems.

Article 24 of the Law pledges that "[...] participatory organic certification of smallholders and family farmers will be promoted [...]" Furthermore, "[...] the agency, supported and advised by the federal council, will facilitate sufficient dispositions for the regulation of PGS with the aim to maintain the compliance of the produce with the Law so that PGS products may be sold as Organic in domestic markets [...]"

Now as the Organic Regulation has been enacted PGS initiatives will be supervised by an official authority that gives also support to the initiative in applying the Organic Guidelines for Participatory Certification. Every year, initiatives are required to report to the official authority about the organic producers that were certified through Participatory Certification.

The Mexican Network of Organic Markets and Tianguis (*Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos*) and other initiatives involved in PGS in Mexico consider the enactment positive as it allows them to retake their leading role as promoters of PGS in the country. On 23 April 2014, the Mexican Network of Organic Markets and Tianguis organized a workshop to present the Law and its Organic Guidelines. Thereupon, they were invited by the government to participate in a commission task force with the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (*Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación, SAGARPA*) to support and influence the standardization of organic production and to implement the necessities so that Participatory Certification can be a cornerstone in the development of rural smallholder farmers with limited capacities.

### **About the natural and artisan organic fair of San Miguel de Allende**

The natural and artisan Organic fair of San Miguel de Allende (*Tianguis Natural, Artesanal y Orgánico de San Miguel de Allende (TOSMA)*) in Mexico has been promoting and successfully implementing Participatory Organic Certification since its inception in April 2010. TOSMA is a member of the Mexican Network of Organic Markets and Fairs (*Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos*), itself an IFOAM member.

TOSMA is a farmers market that brings together over 90 families, local rural farmers, artisans, processors and promoters of renewable energy. They are all monitored, advised and accompanied by the Local Participatory Certification Committee, which is composed of producers, consumers and technicians. The committee ensures that the products circulating in the market are compliant with the organic standard.

Since its inception, TOSMA has been operating every Saturday from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Over 1300 clients visit the farmers market every week, of which 60 % are foreign residents, 10 % national and international tourists and 30 % local consumers. For more information on TOSMA and the organic regulation in Mexico please contact Luis Suarez: [lasgloriasdelhuerto@gmail.com](mailto:lasgloriasdelhuerto@gmail.com)

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



### **...in Africa**

**South Africa:** The Greenroad Project was recently launched. This is an EC-funded 3-year project, lead by Biodynamic Agricultural Enterprises South Africa (BAESA). The project aims to develop a sustainable community model involving short food supply chains and PGS. IFOAM will provide support to develop the PGS and for capacity building. To learn more about the project, please contact: Galia Du Toit: [galia.dutoit@opslogik.com](mailto:galia.dutoit@opslogik.com)



### **...in North America and Europe**

**USA:** Certified Naturally Grown will proceed with the development of an aquaponics certification program. The standards are being drafted in consultation with a new Aquaponics Advisory Council. Read the blog post with more background [here](#).

Certified Naturally Grown will be offering new marketing materials to their members: aluminum farm gate signs, and twist ties for bunching leafy greens with the CNG name a logo. These and the two new hand-drawn colorful bumper stickers are visible [here](#).



## ...in Asia and Oceania

**Nepal:** In mid 2013 The BAZAAR PGS was launched. It is on its way to become the second functional PGS in Nepal after HASERA PGS, currently the only PGS known to IFOAM in the country. The PGS was initiated by 'THE BAZAAR Agriculture Cooperative' in Kaski District of western Nepal and more than 300 organic small holders are involved. As it is a new beginning, a series of trainings to the farmer members were conducted, a profiling of the farmers is ongoing and the initial inspection of the farms is currently in the process. Also a management committee with 11 members, led by the District Agriculture Development Office (the local government body) is already formed and standards & working manuals are being drafted. They will be reviewed by the members for finalization soon. For more information about The BAZAAR visit their website: [www.thebazaar.com.np](http://www.thebazaar.com.np)

**Myanmar:** On 27 April 2014, the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association (MFFVPEA) carried out an organic seminar to educate their members and other farmers in Myanmar. Altogether about two hundred growers attended the seminar. During the seminar, two papers about organic farming were presented: Dr. Astrid Faust, International Advisor of MFFVPEA, explained the "Basic Principles of Organic Farming" and Dr. Than Than Sein, Vice Chairman of MFFVPEA talked about the "Organic PGS System Initiative in Myanmar" and shared information from the Regional PGS Workshop in Hanoi/Vietnam in March this year. The interest in PGS among the seminar participants was high and many Myanmar growers expressed their pleasure to know about the organic PGS system. They believe PGS has high potential in the country, especially because of its low cost. MFFVPEA is now considering to organize similar organic seminars and PGS trainings for small holders farmers in other regions of Myanmar, such as Shan State and Mandalay region. To learn more about MFFVPEA visit them on [Facebook](#).

**Laos/Thailand/Vietnam:** Following on from the GMS PGS Regional Workshop and Vietnam National PGS Workshop (March 2014) further National PGS Workshops were held as part of the ADB-IFOAM PGS project, in Laos (15 May) and in Thailand (20 May). Both workshops were well attended by a wide range of stakeholders and were supported with strong interest from key government departments in each country. The overall aim of these workshops was to lay the foundations for the development of PGS initiatives in each country by gathering both private, public sector and government groups to work together to build an appropriate infrastructure to develop PGS in each country. In order to demonstrate how PGS can develop and function at least 2 PGS pilots (in each country) will receive technical support from the IFOAM/ADB project team and later this year national workshops will be held in Cambodia and Myanmar and early in 2015 China.



## ...in Latin America and the Caribbean

**Costa Rica:** Happy Birthday Feria Verde!! Costa Rica's most popular organic farmers market Feria Verde in the district Aranjuez of San José concluded its 4th Anniversary on May 15, followed by a grand celebration party on Saturday, May 17. With the idea of creating a safe and friendly environment designated to the exchange of ideas, actions, participatory meetings and new connections as well as products and organic food, Feria Verde stakeholders are working hard to promote long-term health, sustainability and care within the Costa Rican food systems and communities. Check out the [video](#) that was recently filmed by a Dubai TV show team, visiting Feria Verde and meeting Faviana Scorza. If you would like to know more about the foundation of Feria Verde, please read the article *Realizing the Business Idea of Organic Smallholders: Feria Verde and PGS in Costa Rica* on page 5 of our [PGS Newsletter Jan/Feb 2014](#).

### Imprint

The **Global PGS Newsletter** is published bimonthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to [pgs@ifoam.org](mailto:pgs@ifoam.org).

The Global PGS Newsletter is a free electronic publication. To receive the newsletter, please write to [pgs@ifoam.org](mailto:pgs@ifoam.org). The newsletter is published by IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM website.

Editing: Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM  
Layout: Omkar Gopalakrishnan, IFOAM

#### IFOAM Head Office

Charles-de-Gaulle-Str. 5  
53113 Bonn, Germany

Phone: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 10

Fax: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 99

Email: [headoffice@ifoam.org](mailto:headoffice@ifoam.org)

Web: [www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org)

Trial Court Bonn, Association Register no. 8726

#### PGS Coordination at IFOAM

Cornelia Kirchner

Email: [pgs@ifoam.org](mailto:pgs@ifoam.org)

Phone: +49 - 228 - 92650 - 14

#### IFOAM PGS Committee Members' contacts

Europe: Eva Torremocha (Spain), [evatorremocha@hotmail.com](mailto:evatorremocha@hotmail.com)

North America: Alice Varon (USA), [alice@naturallygrown.org](mailto:alice@naturallygrown.org)

Oceania: Chris May (New Zealand), [biomays@clear.net.nz](mailto:biomays@clear.net.nz)

Africa: Marc Lewis (S. Africa), [cramlewis@gmail.com](mailto:cramlewis@gmail.com)

South America: Janet Villanueva (Peru), [jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe](mailto:jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe)

Asia: Mathew John (India), [mathew@keystone-foundation.org](mailto:mathew@keystone-foundation.org)