



 Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

Participatory Guarantee Systems – PGS

Inger Källander

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ISBN: 91 558 1561 8

Produced with economic support from Sida. Sida has not participated in the production of the publication and has not evaluated the facts or opinions that are expressed.

1. Executive summary

Participatory Guarantee Systems - PGS are based on the assumed integrity of the farmer, the peer review, support and responsibility within an association of farmers and some additional safeguards, and thus imply a shift in responsibility compared to third-party certification. The guarantee system is created by the farmers and consumers it serves, encouraging or requiring participation of consumers. They are often designed for small producers selling in local markets with the aim to involve less administration and lower costs than third party certification. The standards used are often the same as for the third party certified production. PGS emphasize the sharing of knowledge and experiences by supporting and encouraging producer groups to work together. Open information, transparent and systemized decision-making processes, capacity building and strengthening of farmers' associations are other characteristics.

PGS are spreading in developed and developing countries alike. They vary in their methodology and approach but work from the same core principles expressed in a common platform. They often address not only the quality assurance of the product, but are linked to alternative marketing approaches (home deliveries, community supported agriculture groups, farmers markets, popular fairs) and help to educate consumers about products grown or processed with organic methods.

Recognizing this crucial niche that PGS occupy, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Latin American Agroecology Movement (MAELA), in April 2004 jointly started an international discussion on this subject including several major workshops. A task force was appointed to develop, facilitate and encourage PGS around the world through various documents and participation in organised discussions. Some of the key issues for PGS development are

- Recognition by government legislations .
- How to get the international recognition of PGS without losing its core principles and key features.

For the time being, there are no international norms for what constitute a participatory guarantee system, and the variation in how they operate is large. Several Latin American countries, e.g Brazil and Bolivia, accept so-called 'participatory certification' within their regulatory system. In Europe and the USA, however, organic regulations prevent producers in those systems to market their products as organic, unless they are also third-party certified.

- A common platform defining what constitutes a PGS.
- How to assist groups in setting up and developing a PGS.

2. What is certification and why is it needed?

The idea of certification started in France as early as the beginning of the twentieth century when small wine producers decided to distinguish their products from the ones produced in a larger scale industrialised process. They then created a criterion that is still part of the product certification known as Conformity Brands.

Organic producers all over the world have been developing methods for guaranteeing the organic status of their product to consumers, processors, traders and increasingly also to governmental agencies in charge of food quality. The first certification systems for organic agriculture were developed in Europe and the USA more than thirty years ago. Mostly certification was organized by farmers' organizations with a simple set of standards and members who visited and approved each other. There are similarities between what is today known as Participatory Guarantee Systems and what was commonly practiced before the introduction of third-party certification and government regulations, although the end points are not necessarily the same.

The modern concept of certification is a set of procedures which guarantee certain added values characterised through norms or established standards. Certification was at an early stage found to be an important market instrument for organic products, enabling producers to access a special market, often with a premium price.

Since the 1970's the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has been developing an Organic Guarantee System (OGS) in a democratic process of consultations with the people involved in organics which has resulted in a sophisticated and effective structure. The OGS consists of IFOAM Basic Standards which is standards for standards, Criteria for Accreditation, the IFOAM Accreditation Program and the IFOAM Seal and has demonstrated its efficiency over the years, especially in the mass-markets of developed countries and in the ever gro-

wing international organic trade. IFOAM accredits certification bodies that need to comply with the Accreditation Criteria and Basic Standards and the OGS is based on a similar approach to quality assurance as the ISO norms (such as ISO 65 Guide). Information about the OGS is available on www.ifoam.org.

In general, the need for certification develops where there is a 'distance' between producers and consumers and the core issue is how to organise a system that builds trust. Third-party certification has become the most common, and for organic trade on international markets it is usually required. But parallel to third-party certification, groups of farmers, especially in different countries of the South, have meanwhile developed methods for guaranteeing the ecological status of their production, in a way that is more adapted to their realities. The reasons for these 'alternative' methods of certification vary, but are often a result of high certification costs, disagreement with the paradigm for ensuring credibility, or a need to strengthen farmers. In such cases the ISO 65 type certification results inappropriate.¹

1. From the statement of the international workshop in Torres, April 2004, organised by MAELA and IFOAM.

3. Different ways to guarantee that organic production standards are met

Third-party certification

Third-party certification is a model where another party than the buyer or the seller provides assurances that make both of them comfortable. In the case of organic certification buyer should be understood as also expanding to the end buyer – the consumer. There are many different ways to organize such a third-party certification system, but for organic production the IFOAM and ISO norms have become the norms, also codified in regulations such as the EU regulation 2092/91. Therefore the discussion here will refer to such third-party certification.

Group certification and Internal Control Systems - ICS

Group certification is a concept developed over the last 10-15 years to allow producers to organize themselves in groups with an internal control system. It is not formally recognized in most regulations, however through a consultative process by IFOAM, it has reached more or less global de facto acceptance, at least for producers in developing countries. With group certification the role of the external certification is mainly to verify that the internal control of the group is working, rather than inspecting the individual farmers. Through group certification, producers can get access to and assistance in the complicated organic certification as well as reduced costs. However, there are substantial demands for qualification and resources at the group level, which pose limitations to its applications.

IFOAM has developed a guide for the management of Internal Control Systems and training manuals. In some places, e.g. in South Africa, these organic ICS are merged with other quality management systems (e.g. EurepGap) and training programs are developed. The certificate holder is in almost all cases a commercial entity, a private company or a cooperative. The certificate holder is the one responsible for the ICS, but the management of the ICS can be by the producers themselves, a contracted NGO, government agencies or by staff from the certificate holder.

Most export operations in East Africa are certified as

groups with ICS. In almost all these cases the ICS is run by commercial exporters, which in a few cases are farmers' cooperatives. Groups vary on size from 20 farmers up to more than 20 000 farmers. In the cases of Latin America the majority of ICS groups are farmers associations.

Participatory Guarantee Systems - PGS

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are based on the assumed integrity of the farmer, the peer review, support and responsibility within an association of farmers and some additional safeguards, and thus imply a shift in responsibility compared to third-party certification. The guarantee system is created by the farmers and consumers it serves, encouraging or even requiring direct participation of consumers. They are often designed for small producers selling in local markets with the aim to involve less administration and lower costs than third party certification. The standards used are often the same as for the third party certified production. PGS emphasizes the sharing of knowledge and experiences by supporting and encouraging producer groups to work together. Open information, transparent and systemized decision-making processes, capacity building and strengthening of farmers' associations are other characteristics.

PGS and other non-third party quality assurances are spreading in developed and developing countries alike. They often address not only the quality assurance of the product, but are linked to alternative marketing approaches (home deliveries, community supported agriculture groups, farmers markets, popular fairs) and help to educate consumers about products grown or processed with organic methods.

For the time being, there are no international norms for what constitute a participatory guarantee system, and the variation in how they operate is large. Several Latin American countries, e.g. Brazil and Bolivia, accept so-called 'participatory certification' within their regulatory system. In Europe and the USA, however, organic regulations prevent producers in those systems to market their products as organic, unless they are also third-party certified.

4. Why Participatory Guarantee Systems?

Third-party certification has been an excellent means of guarantee for world trade of organic products. It provides an audit trail through every step of production – from purchase of seed to sale of the crop and it provides a system of legal liability protection to distributors, processors and retailers around the world. It certainly has contributed and continues to contribute to the strong expansion of organic products in international as well as domestic markets. There seems, however, to be an agreement that the systems established for the export market (and therefore subject to ISO 65 and IFOAM criteria) entails procedures and costs that are not going to be within reach of small groups or individual farms, unless they are subsidized by somebody.² Some argue that the mounting costs and inflexibility of the certification process create serious barriers to small-holder and family farmers being able to be certified as organic, especially in developing countries.

However, there were always farmers who didn't subscribe to the third-party certification, not only because of the costs and procedures involved, but also because of objections to the underlying philosophy. Some question the idea that you can safeguard the organic integrity with an annual visit by an external inspector, and claim that a better system is to build on the farmers' integrity as a group. This gave birth to what IFOAM today calls Participatory Guarantee Systems. In those systems the basic assumption is that farmers can be trusted to create a similar guarantee as the one given by third-party certification systems. PGS have developed parallel to third-party certification, especially in developing countries, but also in e.g the USA and New Zealand.

In these cases organizations which work with farmers and organic farming in the broadest sense have tried to elaborate guarantee systems appropriate to the local cultural and ecological conditions and traditions, emphasizing the

social and environmental aspects that are important for sustainable livelihoods. The working examples demonstrate that certification of organic products is not something that can be a one-fit-all system, nor can the current certification be considered a ready and forever perfect package or recipe to guarantee the quality and integrity of farming systems.

² Rundgren G., 2007. PGS in East Africa. IFOAM

5. The PGS concept

In 2004, Participatory Guarantee Systems was for the first time an issue on the agenda at a global level. A workshop co-organised by MAELA (the Latin American Organic Agriculture Movement), IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) and Centro Ecologico in Torres, Rio Grande do Sul in Brasil, presented and analysed a wide range of existing and functioning initiatives with different approaches to certification from around the world. As a result a concept document has been elaborated describing what these different systems have in common.

The PGS concept describes the basic characteristics and goals of PGS. An important principle is that a PGS should reflect a community's capacity to demonstrate trust through the application of different social and cultural control mechanisms, providing the necessary oversight to ensure the organic integrity of their organic farmers. Therefore the depth and complexity of different elements are further developed by each PGS and may vary a great deal.

The internationally agreed conceptual framework which is now described as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) can be found and downloaded at the webpage of IFOAM, www.ifoam.org. The concept document describes the philosophy, the fundamental values and basic elements and is meant to serve as a platform for discussion, development and analysis of PGS. The whole agreed document is quoted below:

Participatory Guarantee Systems - Shared Vision, Shared Ideals

There are dozens of Participatory Guarantee Systems serving farmers and consumers around the world. Although details of methodology and process vary, the consistency of core principles across countries and continents is remarkable. The elements and characteristics outlined here demonstrate our shared vision but are not meant to concretely direct existing or future PGS programs towards conformity or 'normalization.' The very life-blood of these programs lies in the fact that they are created by the very farmers and consumers that they serve. As such, they are adopted and specific to the individual communities, geographies, politics and markets of their origin. This document of Basic Elements and Key Characteristics is

then respectfully presented only to highlight those elements that do remain consistent across PGS systems – the Shared Vision and Shared Ideals that have brought them together.

PGS Philosophy grows from Organic Philosophy
Participatory Guarantee Systems subscribe to the same ideals that guided yesterday's pioneering organic farmers. PGS programs require a fundamentally ecological approach to agriculture that uses no synthetic chemical pesticides, fertilizers or GMO's, and further sustains farmers and workers in a cradle of long-term economic sustainability and social justice. The primarily local and direct market focus of PGS programs encourages community building, environmental protection and support to local economies in general.

Fundamental Values

Participatory Guarantee Systems share a common goal with third-party certification systems in providing a credible guarantee for consumers seeking organic produce. The difference lies in the approach. As the name suggests, direct participation of farmers and even consumers in the certification process is not only encouraged but may be required. Such involvement is entirely realistic in the context of the small farms and local, direct markets that PGS systems are most likely to serve. Active participation on the part of the stakeholders results in greater empowerment but also greater responsibility. This requires PGS programs to place a high priority on knowledge and capacity building – not only for producers but for consumers as well. This direct involvement allows PGS programs to be less onerous in terms of paperwork and record-keeping requirements – an important element, since PGS systems seek to be absolutely inclusive in bringing small farmers into an organic system of production. In stark contrast to existing certification programs that start with the idea that farmers must prove they are in compliance to be certified, PGS programs use an integrity based approach that starts with a foundation of trust. It builds from there with an unparalleled transparency and openness, maintained in an environment that minimizes hierarchies and administrative levels.

Basic Elements

1. Shared Vision

A fundamental strength of the Participatory Guarantee System lies in the conscious shared vision that farmers and consumers have in the core principles guiding the program. While PGS programs may vary in the level of actual participation, they thrive because of the active awareness of why, how, and not least of all WHO is being served.

2. Participatory

Participatory certification is based on a methodology presupposing

intense involvement by those interested in the production and consumption of these products. Principles and rules for organic production are conceived and applied with the contribution of all stakeholders – producers, consultants and consumers. The credibility of the production quality is a consequence of participation.

3. Transparency

All stakeholders, including farmers, must be aware of exactly how the guarantee mechanism generally works, the process and how decisions are made. This does not mean that every detail is known by everyone but rather a basic understanding of how the system functions. People should be aware about the criteria of how decision on certification is made, especially the reason why some farm cannot be certified. This implies that there must be some written documents available about the PGS and the documents are made available to all interested parties.

Privacy and commercially sensitive information of producers gathered during the operation of PGS must be treated with confidentiality. But such confidentiality should not be used to compromise the transparency principle. This may seem in conflict with transparency but a line must be drawn between privacy and commercially sensitive information, on the one hand, and access to information for the purpose of transparency.

4. Trust – ‘integrity based approach’

The advocates of PGS hold to the idea that farmers can be trusted and the organic certification system should be an expression of this trust. It should reflect a community’s capacity to demonstrate this trust through the application of their different social and cultural control mechanisms, providing the necessary oversight to ensure the organic integrity of their organic farmers. Thus, a variety of culturally specific (local) quantitative and qualitative mechanisms for demonstrating and measuring organic integrity are recognized and celebrated. These are integral to the certification process.

5. Learning Process

The intent of most PGS has been to provide more than a certificate, also aiming to provide the tools and mechanisms for supporting sustainable community and organic development where the livelihoods and status of farmers can be enhanced. It is important that the process of certification contributes to the construction of knowledge nets that are built by all the actors involved in the production and consumption of the organic product. The effective involvement of farmers, consultants and consumers on the elaboration and verification of the principles and rules not only leads to the generation of credibility of the organic product, but also to a permanent process of learning which develops capacities in the communities involved.

6. Horizontality

Horizontality means sharing of power. The verification of the organic quality of a product or process is not concentrated in the hands of few. Ideally, all involved in the process of participatory guarantee process have the same level of responsibility and capacity to establish the organic quality of a product or process.

Key Features

Norms conceived by the stakeholders through a democratic and participatory process, but always in accordance with the commonly understood sense of what constitutes an organic product. The norms should stimulate creativity, which is a characteristic of organic farmers, instead of inhibit it.

Grassroots Organization: The Participatory Certification should be perceived as a result of a social dynamic, based on an active organization of all stakeholders.

Suitable to smallholder agriculture: The participatory nature and horizontal structure of the programs allow for more appropriate and less costly mechanisms to generate credibility. It actually highlights, celebrates and encourages consumers to seek out smallholders.

Principles and values that enhance the livelihoods and well being of farming families and promote organic agriculture.

Documented management systems and procedures: There may be minimal paperwork required of farmers but there will be ways in which they are expected to demonstrate their organic commitment and integrity. These ways should be documented by the PGS.

Mechanisms to verify farmer’s compliance to the established norms, which are able to stimulate participation, organization, and which allow a learning process for all the stakeholders.

Mechanisms for supporting farmer to produce organic products and be recognized as organic farmers, to include field advisors, newsletters, farm visits, web sites etc.

A bottom-line document, for example a farmer’s pledge stating his/her agreement with the established norms.

Seals or labels providing evidence of organic status.

Clear and previously defined consequences for farmers not complying with standards, actions recorded in a data base or made public in some way.

Drafted example of an Organic Farmer's Pledge based on PGS programs globally

I PROMISE THAT IN MY FARMING I WILL follow the organic standards to serve soil health, the environment my family and community.

1. I will not use synthetic pesticides such as insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, fertilizers, chemically treated or genetically modified seeds.
2. I will work with our fellow farmers and attend meetings to expand and share my knowledge of the standards and organic production techniques.
3. I will check with the Local Group before using any product that I am unsure of.
4. I will work to build the soil through ecologically sustainable farming practices such as crop rotations, composting, cover crops and green manures.
5. I will care for my livestock in ways that ensures their well-being.
6. I will only use bags and containers that are clean and clearly labelled 'organic only' to harvest, transport and sell our organic products.
7. I will work to prevent contamination by suitable buffers and other means.
8. I will encourage biodiversity through my farming system.
9. I will sell products as Organic only when they are grown on certified land, and have been grown in accordance with organic practices.
10. I will ensure that on the farm during storage, processing, transport and sale there is no contamination or mixing of organically grown with non-organically grown produce.

11. I accept the decision of the Local Group in regards to my certification status.
12. I will participate in appraisals on other farms as per group norms.
13. I will report even minor or unintentional non-compliances to the organic standards on my farm to my Local Group.

All information I have provided on the application and during my farm appraisal is correct and accurate, and I will keep my information up to date with any changes.

Printed Farmer Name(s) [Note: all decision making parties on the farm must sign]

Signature(s)/Thumb Impression

Date Local Group ID#

Printed Name of Witness(es)

Witness(es) Signature/Thumb Impression Date Witness Contact information

6. Differences between Internal Control Systems (ICS) and PGS

The concepts of Group Certification/Internal Control Systems (ICS) and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are often confused. They may look quite similar on the surface, but in theory and approach there are some key differences.

There are similarities between the systems that can make it possible for PGS users to obtain ICS group certification in order to take advantage of international export opportunities.

Despite the differences in concepts, they derive mainly from the social and commercial background. There is nothing preventing an ICS system to operate fairly similar to a PGS system or for a PGS system to operate similar to an ICS. Indeed some PGS systems (e.g. Ecovida in Brazil) have been recognized as an operational ICS by external certifiers.

PGS	ICS
Community decision to build a system that everyone can trust and understand.	External certification body prescribes the process and delegates the inspection activity.
A transparently documented decision making process that involves many stakeholders.	Assurance is largely focused upon an audit of the document trail by an external inspector.
PGS is more than just a system of certification. Vital importance is placed on building networks and peer support systems for sharing of techniques, ideas and general farmer capacity building. Considerable time is spent in this regard.	Capacity building and peer support not required. Some ICS groups however also integrate substantial training and capacity building into their work.
PGS is a certification system for the whole farm, allowing farmers to sell all the crops from the farm as certified organic.	ICS certification is often limited to exportable products – the remaining locally saleable products may not be sold as ‘certified organic’.
PGS is locally focused and often includes local consumers in the certification process in the hopes of developing and expanding local markets and awareness of organic systems of production.	ICS is generally focused on commodity and export products. To save costs, ICS is often limited to exportable products – the remaining locally saleable products may not be sold as ‘certified organic’ even if they were produced under a system of organic agriculture.
No ‘Common Point of Sale’ requirements which allow small PGS certified farmers more market empowerment; they are free to sell their crops individually to whoever offers the best price. However, some PGS solutions assume common marketing as they are an integral part of an organic marketing scheme.	ICS farmers must operate under ‘Common Point of Sale’ requirements.
Final certification decision is taken by the PGS committee. PGS empower the farmers by putting them in control as key decision-makers of who is and isn’t certified in their own local group. This means increased responsibility, but encourages social control as an important compliance mechanism.	Decision making process for final certification is external. Some of the verification measures are ‘delegated’ to the ICS. ICS-certified farmers sometimes find themselves united against an outside ‘enforcement body’, which can impede reporting of non-compliance by individual farmers in the group.
Each producer holds a certificate and can sell to whom they choose.	The certificate is owned by a trader or by collective ownership.

7. Functioning examples - the best guide

With the growing interest in PGS around the world an increasing need for advice in how to set up such a system is expressed. It lies in the basic idea of a PGS that guiding documents on how to build and work with a PGS cannot be a common set of rules and procedures. It has been agreed during the development of the PGS concept and the discussions around it that the best assistance to those interested in starting a PGS is documentation of well functioning examples. Only a few cases have been documented for this purpose, four of them are presented in the IFOAM report ‘Participatory Guarantee Systems’, with the aim to serve as a source of information, ideas and inspiration to others.

This short presentation of three examples gives a notion about how a PGS can work, the similarities in approach, differences in set-up and the importance of exchange of information between different PGS. The cases chosen are Ecovida network in Brazil, Certified Naturally Grown in the USA and the Participatory Organic Guarantee System for India.

1. Ecovida Agroecology Network - ‘Developing Credibility’

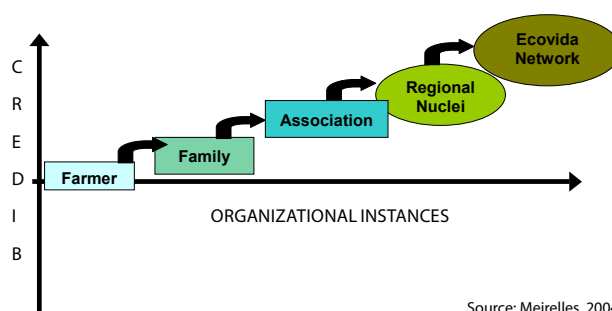
The guarantee system of Ecovida is defined as a process to develop credibility through commitment and participation between farmers, technicians and consumers with the common interest in assuring the final quality of the product and the production process. The network functions with defined principles and aims a) to strengthen agroecology in its amplest aspects, b) to generate and spread information among its participants, c) to create legal mechanisms of credibility and d) to create mechanisms for the processes of guarantee developed by its members.

Open air markets are the commercialization initiatives most stimulated by the network, but members of Ecovida also export and sell their products in the institutional market and cantinas of public schools, hospitals and official institutions are excellent marketing alternatives. Most of

what is exported is additionally certified by another internationally recognized certification body.

The credibility is generated by the information given by the farmer family. The certification socially legitimizes itself, in a cumulative process, through the different organizational procedures that the family is part of. The first procedure is the declaration by the farmer and his or her family. The truth of the family’s declaration is confirmed by the Ethical Committee of the group to which the farmer belongs. This group in its turn has its work confirmed by the co- responsibility and work of the Nucleus Ethical Committee of the regional nucleus to which it belongs. The products produced in this group are supported and confirmed by all other nuclei as they share common rules and keep minimum thresholds of functioning. This enables them to mutually recognize each other through the Ecovida network.

Generation of Credibility of Ecological Products in Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia



Source: Meirelles, 2004

Common criteria for the organization and functioning of the network were developed as well as the general norms for production and certification. These are condensed in a booklet published by the Ecovida network called “Booklet for Capacity Building in Participatory Certification of Ecological Products”. The educative and pedagogical process is a vital characteristic, because it is performed by individuals and organizations which are close to local reality,

who know the situation and can contribute to improvement and necessary changes. It is important that the certification contribute to increasing the understanding of all actors that participate in the development of agroecology.

The monitoring is performed yearly. The Ethical Council uses the conversion plan or farm plan as an instrument to evaluate the continuous use of the label. Where there is suspicion that the rules and agreements are not respected, the Ethical Council is asked to evaluate and report. In case of misconduct the following procedures are adopted:

- Immediate cease of the certificate and the use of the label.
- Orientation to modify procedures of production or processing according to the report of the Ethical Council.
- The unit can regain the certificate by requesting to the regional nucleus and proving the compliance with norms and required changes.
- Re-incidents will be evaluated by the Regional Nucleus.

In a general perspective the work with organic agriculture has always followed the international standards for organic. More recently, the Normative Instruction (Instrução Normativa) 007, established in 1999, is the reference to define an organic product in Brazil. In December 2003, Law 10831 was passed, but so far it has not yet been implemented. In summary one can say that Brazil has never had a legal frame that regulates the production, processing, certification, and commercialization of organic products.

In 2006, the Ecovida network had 24 Regional 'Nuclei' in different stages of organization, connecting 180 municipalities and including 2,800 farmers' families (around 14,000 persons involved in production). The families were organized in 290 groups, associations, or cooperatives, and there were dozens of small processing units and commer-

cialization units for ecological products. Other members were technicians, professionals, and support and partner organizations. Ecovida is an informal network without legal representation. The financial resources of the network come from the annual fees of its members, institutional projects of NGOs, the Federal Government and volunteer work.

During the elaboration of the Brazilian law on organic products there was intense participation of different Brazilian actors involved with this sector. It focused specifically on certification and commercialization of organic products. This work had an effect, so that there is a space in the law for Participatory Certification. As a result Ecovida has been invited to share their experience in Latin American countries, where it affects the way the organic certification laws are written.

Steps to certification:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Be a member of Ecovida.
The group joins the Ecovida network through the nucleus.</p> <p>2. Request of certification to the Regional Nucleus
The nucleus must have a working Ethical Council.</p> <p>3. Fill in the form to require the certification
For each production unit it is necessary to fill in a form with information about the production process.</p> <p>4. Address to the Ethical Council
According to the internal dynamic of the group the forms are addressed to the Council for analysis.</p> | <p>5. Analysis of the forms by the Ethical Council
The Council may require more information if it is needed to better understand the production process.</p> <p>6. Visit (inspection) to the production unit
The number of units visited should be equivalent to the number of members of each group.</p> <p>7. Report of the Ethical Council
Approval or rejection. The necessary improvements are pointed out.</p> <p>8. Consent of certification by the nucleus
The nucleus approves the certification and authorizes the use of the label. The nucleus can emit certificates and declarations for the members.</p> |
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2. Certified Naturally Grown – ‘PGS on the www’

Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) was created as an alternative to the USDA Organic Certification program, which was scheduled to take effect in October, 2002. The CNG concept received quite a bit of national publicity and quickly expanded to become a national program. What is perhaps most unique about the Certified Naturally Grown program is that it is administered almost entirely online via the internet. CNG started as a grassroots regional marketing label created by and run for small, direct market organic farmers in the Hudson Valley Region of New York State in July of 2002. By May of 2007 650 farmers in the US had registered as ‘Certified Naturally Grown’ and PGS programs in the UK and Canada are also using, or planning on using, the online management software created to administer the program.

An informational website of the concept was created where the goals of the program were publicized as well as a summary of acceptable growing practices in harmony with generally accepted international organic principles, a three-page online application and a notarized affidavit along with the plan for peer inspections. No central organization was in charge of the process at this point. It grew very ‘organically’ with many people contributing and changing pieces.

Every change was added to the public web site, and then new contributors would respond with additional changes.

CNG provides certification only to small farmers that primarily sell their farm products locally and directly through farm stands, farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture, CSA’s, direct to restaurants or even to locally focused natural food stores or cooperatives that highlight the local nature of the produce they sell.

The interactive *online application* is the key administrative feature of the CNG application process. The online application is used in part to collect data on the farm and operation, but even more importantly, it is meant to provide a process that leads the farmer through an *interactive self-evaluation* of their growing practices to make sure that they understand exactly what they are committing to.

The online application program is designed to give *instant feedback* to applicants as to acceptable and non-acceptable growing practices in a much more effective fashion than just having the applicants read over the growing practices and click on a single “I agree” check box at the bottom. By systematically requiring them to read through multiple statements and actively choose or type their answer, every farmer must seriously consider and review the statements

and declarations they are making.

A custom program accepts, reviews and distributes new member applications to the appropriate human reviewers, connects farm members to each other both regionally and individually for peer inspection purposes and offers consumers complete transparency into any particular farm member's certification documents. *Inspections* take place at an appropriate time during the growing season, and all farmers applying for CNG Certification state their agreement to complete an inspection on another CNG farm.

Most recently, CNG has divided administrative work into regions. Initial reviews of new farmer applications are being automatically distributed to CNG farmer-volunteers in that local region as are the logistics of collecting and uploading regional inspection reports. There are still no required fees, although farmers are encouraged to make a donation, and no paid staff. Distributing the work-load is being done to continue the volunteer/grassroots nature of the organization and minimizing the natural hierarchies that occur if a central support staff were to develop.

Currently CNG is managed from a central location on a volunteer basis, but as the program has grown, that is no longer practical. Use of the internet allows non-localized, distributed management of new farm applications and outreach. In the spring of 2005 farmers comfortable with the internet and email began to take on a more active volunteer administrative role including review of online applications, inspection report follow-ups, and answering questions from new farmers, consumers and the press. The online administration program was modified to effectively facilitate this new style of management.

CNG started out with its own simplified organic standard based on a compilation of many existing published organic standards. Later a switch was made to using the National Organic Program (NOP), which is what is used today. Using the existing, generally accepted USDA standard allowed CNG to save costs in maintaining a private standard. With

this adoption of the NOP standards, CNG growers could find ready-answers to their questions on the internet and from other organic growers, which saves support time. It also simplifies communication to customers and encourages organic and CNG farmers to share ideas and materials.

CNG is not officially recognized and no formal relationship exists with NOP certification agencies. However well respected environmental and health advocacy organizations have endorsed the CNG program.

CNG was started as a reaction and small-farmer criticisms and concerns about the NOP's impact on small, direct-market organic farmers. Today it is very clear that CNG could not exist without USDA NOP. The programs are actually very complimentary which has mutual advantages. The NOP provides the bureaucracy, hierarchy and overhead necessary to maintain a third party certification program suitable for processors, distributors and wholesalers. CNG is then free to focus on and promote small farms selling directly to consumers in their own communities. Third Party certifiers are relieved of the burden of having to deal with many small growers. Certifiers make less money on small growers, and often end up having to do more work.

Steps to certification:

1. Enter farm and farmer contact information.
2. Read through and acknowledge understanding of Organic norms and practices.
3. Complete interactive online application and self-evaluation with details of farm, management practices, equipments and markets.
4. Print, sign and mail in customized Grower's Declaration.
5. On Farm Inspection takes place at an appropriate time during the growing season.
6. Farmer applicant completes and does inspection of another CNG farm (but not the farm/farmer that inspected them, i.e. no "trading" inspections).

3. A Participatory Guarantee System for India

In March of 2005 an evaluation of the situation in India began, and a year later it was clear that the key features they were looking for matched up very well with the Participatory Guarantee System model of certification. After a national workshop in September of 2006, pilot PGS programs were launched in 14 regions of India. A national level workshop took place in April 2007 with a third workshop attended in October 2007. Procedures and farmer documentation have been translated into many of the regional Indian languages and thousands of farmers have already begun the process of PGS Certification.

In the program PGS and third party certification are seen as complimentary systems of certification and the use of both will bring the most farmers into a system of committed organic production. The number of farmers seeking third party certification is calculated to increase rapidly as the pool of committed organic producers grows and looks to explore export opportunities. PGS programs adhere to the strictest organic standards, but the compliance mechanisms used are specific to small diversified farmers selling into local and domestic markets. Certification schemes based on paperwork and isolated inspections do not provide a credible guarantee for tight-knit groups of illiterate small farmers selling to diversified local markets where record keeping and receipts are rarely used. As such, PGS are considered to offer a needed and complementary system of organic guarantee that builds the organic movement, educates farmers and consumers and provides domestic and local market access to organic products.

The India PGS program builds on an organisational structure, used in functioning PGS in other countries, where the different levels of groups have different responsibilities (and organisational complexity) and where no group has enough control to dominate the process as a whole. The key group levels are the farm family, the local group, the regional council and a national coordination committee.

The farm family develops an understanding of the organic standards, make sure that the farm practices are compliant and make a pledge that they adhere to the organic standards. They participate in appraisals/inspections of other farms and in trainings and they allow consumer visits and attend local group meetings sharing information to improve the capacity of the group as a whole.

The local group of farmers and consumers interact regularly and are the real core of the PGS because it is the first contact point on organic and PGS for interested farmers and because it decides which farmers are to be certified and takes actions on non-compliance. The local group coordinates the sign-offs on appraisals/inspections with at least three people present. It is also the core support network in terms of advising on farming problems etc. This is also where the main paperwork lies; the group collates the pledge and appraisal report for each farmer and reports the yearly situation to the regional council. The local group can be a grassroots group of farmers or it can be started by an NGO or a government agency working with farmers, but it can also be an existing self-help group or farmer field school etc.

The regional council ensures transparency of the certification process and mutual recognition and support for the various groups and farmers and thus builds trust and credibility in the system as a whole. Generally started and coordinated by an existing NGO or state agency it registers with the national committee for paperwork, procedures and certification IDs. It confirms that the local group's summary worksheet is conscientiously maintained, distributes annual organic certificates and provides local groups with guidelines for non-compliance sanctions. It also provides trainings and field-days on standards and compliance at the local group level.

The national coordination committee consists of a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture, consumer groups, appropriate NGOs and an unlimited number of qualified regional councils. Among many other tasks the

committee coordinates regional council trainings, approves new regional councils, provides appropriate and updated documents and policies for the 'organic guarantee' and maintains and updates the 'Basic organic standard'. Another important role is to facilitate a positive relationship with APEDA and third-party certification agencies which helps to link local groups to global markets through ICS.

Steps to certification:

1. Individual farmer learns about organic standards and signs a pledge.
2. The farmer is inspected by peers from the local group. A minimum of 3 peer inspectors must be present to sign and validate the appraisal form.
3. A decision is made by the local group as a whole about which farmers will and won't be certified. The farmers' pledges and endorsed appraisal paperwork are checked for completeness and a local group summary worksheet is sent to the regional council. Note that the regional council does *not* make a decision to include or not include specific farmers based on the information provided. They can only sanction or not sanction the certification of the local group as a whole.
4. The regional council enters summary information for every local group into a national publicly available database and sends a paper certificate for each individual farm.
5. A small percentage of farms are selected for random pesticide residue testing each year and the results may impact the certification status of the local group as a whole.

8. Who is a PGS and who is not?

It is a challenge to describe a PGS model without losing their most important characteristics; that the rules and procedures grow from the grass-roots and is based on the local social, cultural and ecological realities and not from a fixed set of standards or guideline. The borders are often not clear, making it difficult to identify whether a group is working in a PGS or an ICS/third party system. A reason why some groups which identify themselves as a PGS but which are not successful, may be that they actually don't have the key features of a PGS. The IFOAM PGS TF developed an idea to solve this dilemma by elaborating a system for self-evaluation/registry system. This self-evaluation is meant to serve as a tool for a group to analyze whether it fulfils the criteria of PGS. The questionnaire below is a draft version that is currently discussed:

Registry and Self-Evaluation

DRAFT

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to provide information about your Participatory Guarantee System (PGS).

The purpose of this voluntary questionnaire is both to create an international registry of Participatory Guarantee Systems with notes on operational procedures as well as to provide PGS programs with a "self-evaluation" for how they compare to other PGS programs around the world.

While there is enormous diversity in how groups implement the various functions of a PGS, the basic characteristics are consistent around the world. As a result, while all functioning PGS programs will generally answer "YES" to the questions below, the specifics of "how" the questions are answered may vary considerably from program to program.

The order of these questions generally tries to follow the order of the "PGS Concept Document" that can be found on the www.ifoam.org website for more information. It also is linked wherever possible to the new IFOAM PGS Manual.

It may be educational for your group to have as many stakeholders

as possible answering the questions including farmers, consumers, facilitating NGO's as well as national or regional level coordinating staff (if any).

The results from this self-evaluation will be maintained and kept updated online at the www.ifoam.org website.

How it works

Not all questions in this self-evaluation require YES answers however some do because they are so central to core PGS Principles. Not all PGS program will be able to answer even the required questions as "YES" but all programs will be listed in this registry as long as they commit to working towards including all core PGS principles in their programs.

THE IFOAM PGS Task Force hopes that this registry/self-evaluation document will inspire PGS groups to learn from and share with each other, as well as to educate other groups new to PGS about the many ways that PGS groups around the world have implemented core PGS values in ways that are culturally appropriate to their region.

PGS name and contact information

Name of the PGS: _____

When program was launched: _____

Country Being Served: _____

Region Being Served: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

Nominated Contact Person for the PGS: _____

Standards and norms

1. Is your program based on generally recognized organic principles? (Requires YES)

2. Is it based on a national or international standard (International examples include the IFOAM IBS, Codex, national standards include USDA Organic, JAL, EU, Indian NPOP or national private standard) (Yes/No. Please elaborate)

3. Are the Organic norms agreed on by the key stakeholders involved in your PGS? (Requires YES. Either no comment or list key stakeholders involved)

4. Are your norms easily available and accessible to all stakeholders or other interested parties. (Requires YES. Please elaborate on how we can get access to the them)

5. Do you have mechanisms in place to ensure that farmers fully understand what they are agreeing to (examples may include short summary of the standards, regular trainings, regular meetings or place they can contact for more information about practices or allowable materials)? (Requires YES)

Procedures to verify farmers' compliance and understanding

6. Is information created and maintained for each farm? (Requires YES. Please elaborate the type (paper application, video, etc))

7. Does this information include specific questions about farm operations to ensure procedures on the farm are in accordance with your accepted organic standards? (Requires YES)

8. Do your farmers take a pledge, declaration, oath or promise that they will follow the standards (written, verbally stated or documented in some culturally appropriate way)? (Requires YES/Please elaborate)

9. Are annual on-site reviews/inspections carried out for every farm in your PGS? (Requires YES)

10. Do farmers take part in the annual onsite review/inspection process?

11. As a policy, can consumers or other stakeholders visit the farmers (Open gate Policy)? (Requires YES)

Documented Management Systems

12. Is the following information maintained for your PGS?

12a. General Information about each farm (Requires YES)

12b. Farmer's Pledge (or record if Verbal Pledge) (Requires YES)

12c. Record of onsite inspection/review (Requires YES)

12d. Record of attendance at local meetings (YES/NO)

12e. Record of certification for each farm (Requires YES/NO)

12f. Is this information accessible to members of the public? (Requires YES/Please elaborate)

13. Have efforts been made to minimize paperwork necessary to certification? (YES/NO)

14. Are the steps to certification process publicly available to all stakeholders? (Requires YES)

15. Can stakeholders easily find out who is certified? (Requires YES)

Horizontality

16. Is decision and policy making about PGS procedures made by either farmers or regularly elected farmer representatives? (Requires YES)

17. Are there mechanisms in place to regularly review and improve PGS procedures and policies? (Requires YES)

18. Are farmers or farmer representatives directly involved in the final decision about who is certified? (Requires YES)

19. Are your PGS Procedures appropriate to the cultural context in which they are used? For example verbal pledges and video documentation in areas of low literacy) (Requires YES)

20. Are Farmers the primary decision makers about which farmers are to be certified? (as opposed to a third party or separate organizational group) (Requires YES/Please elaborate)

21. If it's a national program, is there room for local and regional variations to the rules and operational procedures of the PGS as long as main functional points are maintained? (For example, maybe the on-site inspection can be changed or added to so long as they stick

to agreed basic standards)(YES/NO/Not Applicable. Please elaborate, give examples)

22. Are Social Justice Principles including gender equality and fair wages embraced by your PGS? (YES/NO/Please elaborate)

Consumer involvement in the PGS

23. Do consumers have the option of being active members of the PGS Group? (YES/NO)

24. Are consumers able to be included in the Regional and National decision making bodies? (YES/NO)

25. Are consumers able to be included in the Certification Process? (YES/NO)

26. Is your PGS program endorsed by any consumer group? This could include environmental organizations, health advocacy organizations, etc (YES/NO)

Systems for managing non-compliance

27. Are there prescribed consequences for non-compliance? (Requires YES)

28. Is there a system for managing non-compliance? (Requires YES)

29. Are farmers in the PGS involved in the system for managing non-compliance? (Requires YES)

Mechanisms for supporting farmers

30. Is there a system for farmers to participate in trainings or sharing meetings with other local member-farmers of the PGS? (Requires YES)

Seals and labels

31. Is there a seal or logo available for your farmers to use? (Requires YES)

32. Does each farmers receive an individual certificate or some proof of their certification status? (Requires YES)

33. Does the PGS own or control the seal? (Requires YES)

Additional voluntary questions on Sustainability of the Program

- How is your PGS program funded?

- If farmers pay a fee to be certified, do they feel it is a fair fee?

- Do farmers and other stakeholders participate in the operation of the PGS to keep costs and overhead down?

- If there is outside funding to maintain the operation of the PGS is it secure for the next 3 years?

- Can the PGS be entirely self-funded in the future?

9. Development of the PGS model – initiatives and milestones

Even if ‘alternative’ or ‘participatory’ systems for certification and guarantee have existed for as long as the more commonly practiced third-party certification, it is only in the last few years that a strong international interest and a need for a coordinated discussion around them have been aroused. Probably there are two main reasons for this. While certification has become increasingly bureaucratic as a part of international regulations and codes, there is a growing need to go back to the roots of organic with a more down-to-earth, farmer-controlled and understandable system where the core values and identity of organic can be expressed. The other reason is the growing number of small, resource poor producers in developing countries, but also in the developed world, who sell their products through local channels and don’t see the benefit of being certified according to the expensive and complicated mainstream system. Not being certified they feel unjustly marginalised in the market and deprived of the right to call themselves organic and want to recapture their identity as organic farmers.

Since 2004 PGS has been strongly promoted by the growing number of practitioners and supporters within the international organic movement to make a place for PGS in the ‘certification family’. Some major events have contributed to a strong development:

The Torres Workshop

In April 2004 a workshop facilitated by IFOAM and MAELA and hosted by Centro Ecológico in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, gathered examples of ‘alternative’ systems around the world. More than 20 examples of such initiatives were represented with the aim to identify and synthesise key elements and characteristics of these alternatives to third-party certification. Another purpose was to identify weaknesses and strengths of such systems and to discuss the potentials for development. One result was the formation of a working group which was endowed the task to elaborate a concept of what was henceforth named Participatory

Guarantee systems. IFOAM offered to be a platform for the working group to facilitate this work, to host a broad discussion and to spread information about PGS. The working group was integrated in the IFOAM structure as a task force and PGS was devoted a space in the IFOAM web site.

FAO support to PGS development

In May 2004 the FAO carried out the project in five Latin American countries (Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) called “Apoyo al desarrollo de la agricultura orgánica y fortalecimiento institucional de la certificación orgánica” (“Support to the development of organic agriculture and institutional reinforcement of organic certification”). One of the components of the project was PGS.

Concept development by the IFOAM PGS Task Force

From the results of the Torres workshop the PGS Task Force elaborated and presented a concept document describing the basic philosophy that underpins PGS. This basic document provided a ground for analysis, discussion and consultation among the organic movement at several important international workshops, e.g. the IFOAM World Congress in September 2005. In addition a document presenting in detail four case studies of PGS from different parts of the world and with different organisation was also produced. The description of PGS was generally well received and appreciated.

Since the Brazil workshop, interest from the organic sector stakeholders has been significant. The realisation that there are groups and organisations already operating successfully around the world has been a surprise to many. It appears to have triggered the idea that PGS may reinvigorate organic product guarantee systems with an integrity based approach. The assumption that an organic certification system could be an expression of trust in the farmers/producers seems to have plucked at the heart strings of many of the stakeholders in the organic sector worldwide.

FAO and India Government program to promote PGS in India
Under the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), India has developed an internationally accepted third party certification system for the export of organic products, providing a tremendous export opportunity for India's farmers. The government also recognized the need to support and encourage organic for domestic consumption - specifically from hundreds of millions of India's small diversified farmers. For most of these farmers (many who are illiterate), third party certification is not seen as practical. In the spring of 2006, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, in consultation with farmers, NGOs and state government officials began working on a model PGS program specific to India. The initiative is a national scale program to serve as a complement to the APEDA program.

PGS in East Africa - IFOAM study and workshop

Despite the fact that many farmers in Africa are farming organically, the local markets experience a lack of supply of products. There are almost 100 000 farmers in third-party certification systems, almost all of them in group certification schemes managed by an exporter. Because of the nature of such schemes and their export focus, these farmers can't sell their products as certified organic in the local market. The national organic movements, KOAN (Kenya), NOGAMU (Uganda) and TOAM (Tanzania) have all made local market development a key strategic objective, and believe there is a need for assurances that organic standards are followed. However, they consider that existing certification systems are not adapted to the realities of African small-holders and have developed own quality assurance schemes, based on farmer groups, supported by NGOs.

Commissioned by IFOAM in the spring of 2007, local quality assurance programs in Africa were assessed against

the framework for PGS. The report 'PGS in East Africa' served as a guiding document for a workshop held in Tanzania in April 2007. The discussions were focused on the key issues and findings in the report, with the aim to advance the understanding of PGS and the role they might play within the developing organic sector of East Africa.

Second MAELA and IFOAM workshop in Brazil

With the aim to follow up and exchange experiences, to identify strategies and actions to extend PGS adoption and acceptance, MAELA and IFOAM promoted another seminar. It was hosted by Centro Ecologico in Antonio Prado, Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil in October 2007 and attended by 50 participants from 16 Latin American countries. The explored three main issues; the international recognition of PGS, legal frameworks for PGS and PGS and markets development. The participants concluded that "PGS are valid mechanisms to generate credibility of organic products and a necessary tool to provide market access to all stakeholders involved in organic production and consumption as well as an efficient tool to build knowledge networks"³.

3. Letter of Antonio Prado, Brazil, October 26th 2007

10. Future potentials of PGS – and challenges!

The rapidly growing interest in organic farming worldwide and the explosive interest in PGS the last few years, show that there is a need for alternatives to the third-party guarantee systems. The intention of the work to create a platform for the development of PGS is to provide recognition of an approach that already exists, that has been proven to work and from which others may be encouraged to adopt ideas that are appropriate to their local needs. But there are still a number of issues for discussion and development.

PGS assessed in East African study and workshop

The recent IFOAM study of PGS in East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) is a systematic assessment of PGS cases against the IFOAM framework. The key issues of the study, which were also emphasized in the workshop, were *participation*, *transparency* and *accountability* as well as the practicality of having a PGS that is *affordable* to small-holder farmers. The ‘PGS East Africa Report’ highlighted the fact that the Kenyan and Ugandan PGS were very much ICS (Internal Control Systems) orientated. Even if these activities describe the East African situation specifically the findings are most probably applicable to many PGS initiatives under development around the world.

- The workshop dealt with the theme of participation with various examples to demonstrate ways stakeholders can participate in PGS to include key roles in the design and implementation of their PGS. In the concluding discussion participants were able to articulate a good understanding of the ‘P’ in PGS and the ways in which it could be expressed.
- On the question of accountability and particularly financial sustainability of PGS, the discussion was less conclusive and there seems to be still some way to go in order for PGS and even the national organic associations (NOAMs) to be able to stand alone without external support.
- Discussions around the close links between the NOAMs, other NGOs and other funding providers highlighted the need for the NOAMs to be mindful that the agendas of external organizations could confuse the development and the dynamics of PGS. The NOAMs must develop clear PGS focused objectives and ensure that other project partners understand and where possible embrace these objectives.
- On the question of transparency the group appeared comfortable around the idea that their systems should be documented and processes open to external scrutiny, for example consumers and traders could take part in farm assessments (inspections).

Both the study and the workshop concluded that there is a clear need to develop PGS in East Africa. In particular it seems to be relevant and applicable for smaller groups of farmers with joint marketing. The development must involve the farmers and preferably other local stakeholders and should result in systems that they feel comfortable with. The following recommendations were made to move the development process forward:

- KOAN and NOGAMU should review their existing PGS in order to build their systems procedures that enable and encourage all their key stakeholders to take part in the design and implementation of their PGS.
- A follow-up meeting for East African PGS stakeholders at which their ‘new’ PGS, both process and systems, can be presented and discussed.
- For the NOAMs it is important that they develop their PGS so that overtime they can become independent from external influences and financially viable.
- The IFOAM PGS Task Force must continue to actively facilitate the development of resources to help support the development of PGS around the world.

Possibilities for legal acceptance – seminar in Antonio Prado, Brazil 2007

As a follow-up of the discussions in Torres in 2004, the seminar in Antonio Prado continued to look at the PGS development and in particular to investigate the possibilities for recognition and acceptance. The aim was to find answers to some critical questions:

- For which scale of market is PGS suitable?
- Should PGS seek recognition in the international and/or national markets?
- Is it possible to achieve recognition by legal authorities, certification bodies etc without losing identity?

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis helped the navigation in these issues, and to formulate some recommended measures and important conclusions. Some of the problems that PGS are facing and that came out of this analysis were:

- Lack of economical analysis hampers the design of strategies for economical viability of the system.
- Need for improved self-evaluation mechanisms and internal control of the documentation.
- Consumers are not always present in the system and their participation is not easy to achieve.
- With the exception of Brazil, there is still no legal recognition.
- Need for constant education of stakeholders on all levels.
- Several factors inhibit official acceptance such as lack of information causing lack of trust in the system, fear that PGS will confuse export routines and third country requirements, and lack of priority in the development of local markets.

A result of the seminar was the following recommendations:

- To create a group to facilitate the development of PGS.
- To systematize experience exchange between different countries in order to maintain updated information on PGS progress, including the legislation situation.
- To enhance cooperation between the PGS groups who participated in the Torres seminar in 2004 with the goal to gain recognition.
- To utilize all relevant communication channels to disseminate existent information on PGS.
- To try to achieve a common definition and conformity assessment of PGS, a basic PGS structure and criteria to use for norm setting.
- To continue the participation of the network competent authorities in the different for a dialogue, IFOAM and Maela should also continue to participate.
- To promote capacitation on PGS in all Latin American countries.
- To continue the discussion in international fora like ISOCASCO, IFOAM, ITF, FAO, UNCTAD, FORAGRO, CIP.

The participants of the seminar were convinced of the need for official recognition on a national level of all countries as a conformity assessment procedure. There is not a clear consensus on the limitations for the applicability of PGS; for some it is sufficient to apply this system for local or national markets, while others claim that recognition should be sought on a global level. The latter therefore also stress the importance of the participation of official competent authorities in meetings like this seminar. Likewise representatives of PGS should be called to participate in the meetings of these authorities. The information exchange that takes place in these forums thus contributes to build mutual trust.

Future Challenges

On a global level there are three overall major issues which need consideration for a future successful development of PGS as a part of a credible organic guarantee system:

1. How to assist groups in setting up and developing a PGS.
2. Recognition by government legislations.
3. How to get the international recognition of PGS without losing its core principles and key features.

Guiding without prescribing – is it possible?

Many organisations and groups worldwide have asked for a manual so that they can set up a PGS and start the guarantee mechanisms as soon as possible. But there lies an interesting challenge or even a contradiction in making a PGS guide or manual. The aim of defining a PGS platform has been to document and reflect the dynamics of PGS but *not* start a process of prescribing or setting rules. It seems however in many ways easier to take a ready set of rules and try to follow them than to go through the whole process of building something new and totally adapted by and for the group itself. The IFOAM PGS Task Force, mindful of this condition, acknowledged that through the process of describing the concepts and common elements they may have begun the process of putting a ‘box’ around PGS. Several of the Task Force members have also participated as facilitators at different workshops and events to assist in the building of PGS, e.g. in East Africa, India and several parts of Latin America. This too may have contributed to the ‘harmonisation’ of PGS worldwide.

Since the need for guiding material is strongly expressed, a PGS manual is under elaboration and will be ready by the end of 2007. The aim is to discuss and give examples how to implement the different criteria of the concept in a more technically detailed way. But even if very much needed as a tool for new PGS groups a manual is probably not enough. In India during the implementation of the PGS program the

participants expressed the need for consultants to hold workshops. A video that visualizes the process in a PGS group is also on the wish list and could help groups understand the dynamics and find their own ways.

Recognition within reach?

In some countries like Costa Rica, Brazil or Bolivia, national legislations on Organic Agriculture allow for alternative ways of organic product verification than the formal third party/ISO type certification¹. Producers are in this case allowed to label their products as organic if they belong to a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Other countries like India, Uruguay and Chile are considering or working on adapting their national legislation on OA to be inclusive for PGS.

In the case where government authorities are creating new national legislations on organic agriculture, it is crucial that they do not ‘accidentally’ create regulations that prevent or limit the potential for PGS to develop in their countries. To explore the possibilities for recognition and to facilitate such a development IFOAM is conducting a study on the recognition of PGS at the national legislative level. The study will guide governments and other interested stakeholders providing experiences and examples of successful inclusion of PGS in national/regional organic agriculture regulations.

So far PGS have primarily been developed to stimulate local or national trade of organic products. For the time being, there are no international norms for what constitutes a participatory guarantee system, and there is great variation in how they operate. Before PGS can become a recognised ‘guarantee’ in the global trade of organic it is necessary to develop and demonstrate the credibility of the system. An international definition or set of criteria which distinguishes PGS from other systems will probably also be required.

An additional challenge in these efforts is how to get the international recognition of PGS without losing its core principles and key features.

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The Participatory Guarantee System - PGS - is created by the farmers and consumers it serves, encouraging or requiring participation of consumers. The system are often designed for small producers selling in local markets with the aim to involve less administration and lower costs than third party certification. The PGS concept describes the basic characteristics and goals of PGS. An important principle is that a PGS should reflect a community's capacity to demonstrate trust through the application of different social and cultural control mechanisms, providing the necessary oversight to ensure the organic integrity of their organic farmers. Therefore the depth and complexity of different elements are further developed by each PGS and may vary a great deal.

It is a challenge to describe a PGS model without losing its most important characteristics; that the rules and procedures grow from the grass-roots and is based on the local social, cultural and ecological realities and not from a fixed set of standards or guidelines.

The rapidly growing interest in organic farming worldwide and the explosive interest in PGS the last few years, shows that there is a need for alternatives to the third-party guarantee systems. The intention of the work to create a platform for the development of PGS is to provide recognition of an approach that already exists, that has been proven to work and from which others may be encouraged to adopt ideas that are appropriate to their local needs. But there are still a number of issues for discussion and development.

This is a summary of the situation, the problems and possibilities. It is supported by The SSNC, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and it is ment to promote and develop the discussion and future for PGS.



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