

## Developing supporting policies for Organic Agriculture and PGS: new tools available!

By IFOAM PGS Team



Following various requests for tools supporting the development of national organic support and regulatory policies, IFOAM-Organics International has engaged in this area in the past two years.

In 2015, a global study on public policies and programs in support of organic agriculture resulted in the **Organic Regulation Toolkit**. This toolkit presents an overview of the voluntary and regulatory instruments that can be used to support the development of appropriate frameworks where there is a national ambition to develop the organic sector. Among these instruments, the **organic regulation template** for countries with emerging sectors is a tool that serves as guide for developing organic regulations that include PGS recognition.

Later on, in 2016, with funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), IFOAM-Organics International conducted the first-ever global study on public policies and programs

supporting organic agriculture. In this process, hundreds of cases of policy measures supporting the organic sector worldwide were collected and analyzed. The study identifies interesting examples from more than 80 countries, and draws on the main lessons learned. This **Global Policy Toolkit on Public Support to Organic Agriculture** fills the previous gap in terms of consolidated knowledge on this subject at the international level, responding to the needs of and providing guidance to policy makers and advocates wanting to promote organic agriculture development.

The cornerstone report of the **Global Policy Toolkit on Public Support to Organic Agriculture** is accompanied by a set of case studies, slide presentations, policy summaries, links to external resources and other elements. The focus is not simply on the details about *why* organic agriculture should be supported. Most importantly, the toolkit answers the question of *how to do it*. It presents a

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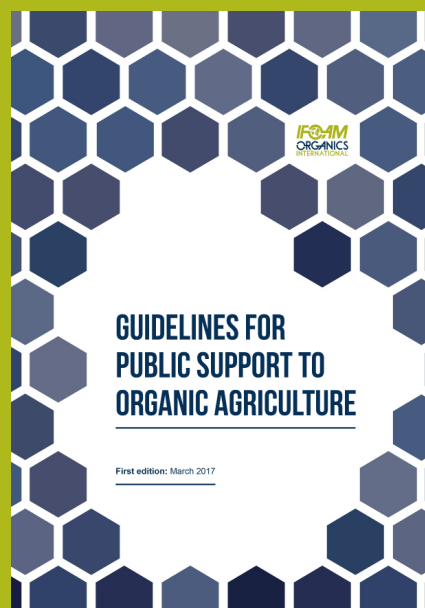
variety of possible policy measures including those that boost supply, those that enhance demand and those that create an enabling context for the development of the organic sector.

The policy summaries are particularly interesting: in a condensed document, they outline options for providing support on specific topics, followed by country examples.

**“The Policy Summary on Government Support for Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) Development is one such tool that is especially relevant for PGS practitioners and advocates”.**

Elaborating on the policy options to support PGS development identified, with measures that range from financial and technical support to legal

recognition, it includes documented experiences from various countries. Practical to share with policy makers and carry to meetings, this and all Policy Summaries can be accessed online, free of charge.



## Dealing with water quality issues: the PGS approach.



By **Federica Varini**,  
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The IFOAM Standard for Production and Processing identifies water as a resource that organic farming methods should aim at conserving and improving, focusing on water quality and its responsible use. Availability of water is tightly linked to water quality. The pollution of water sources due to increased discharges of untreated sewage, agricultural runoff and inadequately treated wastewater from industry poses serious problems. Despite its continuous growth, organic farming represents less than the 2% of the global agricultural land (FiBL, 2015) and organic farmers are negatively affected by water contamination, especially due to runoff of pesticides, that they did not contribute to create. Conventional

farmers often have very few incentives to undertake measures that prevent pesticides from ending up into water sources and the situation is further compromised in those countries where there is a lack of infrastructures and awareness regarding correct disposal of hazardous substances.

Whether you are a third party certified or PGS certified farmer, water quality concerns you, since you can face problems with contamination that is beyond your control. This is particularly true when farmers are obliged to use water coming from lakes and rivers to irrigate their production sites. Even though they might be contaminated, these sites are

often the only reliable source of water during the dry season when wells and ponds do not provide sufficient amount of water.

So what can we learn from how PGS initiatives deal with this issue? In the best-case scenario, PGS initiatives start their operation performing a water test. At Bryanston Organic and Natural Market PGS, in South Africa, testing for borehole water is required during the initial visit. Thereafter, any further tests are decided by the group visiting the farm and are dependent on whether or not there are developments in the area that may contaminate the water.

Wherever water management is a public service, PGS initiatives can ask the competent authorities to perform water tests, most likely at an affordable price. For a PGS it might be useful to get this type of tests, even though they are usually looking for microorganisms rather than chemicals. Engaging and discussing about chemical contamination with the local authorities is important for a long-term strategy.

However, depending on the location, water testing might not always be affordable or available. In these cases the PGS initiative can start by asking

around and evaluating what chemicals might be in the water, in terms of upstream agriculture (i.e. irrigated cotton, paddy rice, etc.) but also farmers preparing and washing their spray pumps and empty containers of pesticides and herbicides directly in the water. Partially, this problem can be avoided by raising awareness among those using the water body.

In countries where paddy rice cultivation is widespread, the fields that are located in a lower position are always the most susceptible to water contamination coming from conventional rice fields located upland. That is why PGS Vietnam has decided to certify only organic vegetables, since they can be grown using only water coming from ponds or wells, so farmers have full control on the water system and quality. Rice requires a higher amount of water which has to be taken from rivers and streams: highly available but beyond the farmer's control.

A simple practice that can help PGS initiatives decrease the risk of using contaminated water is to have a closed well away from the dam. This already helps to substantially reduce contamination, since some chemicals dissolve very well in water.<sup>1</sup>

Farmers also need to consider how the water is used. In most cases, applying the water through the soil -



<sup>1</sup> Find more information about options for simple on farm water treatment here: [www.who.int/water\\_sanitation\\_health/wastewater/FLASH\\_OMS\\_WSHH\\_Guidance\\_note4\\_20100729\\_17092010.pdf](http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/wastewater/FLASH_OMS_WSHH_Guidance_note4_20100729_17092010.pdf)

and not with watering cans over the leaves - strongly reduces contamination. When farmers want to use watering cans, and particularly wash the produce after harvest, borehole water should be used: not only to reduce contamination with chemicals, but also with microorganisms. Lately, there has been increasing interest in using water plants for biological filtration or phytoremediation, and some farmers are experimenting with it.

Overall, **PGS leverage on their core characteristics when it comes to dealing with water quality issues: peer review, knowledge sharing activities and trust based relationships.** Sharing best practices among farmers is crucial for the group to learn how to avoid and deal with contamination. Also, the relationship with the consumer is pivotal. It is important to show consumers that the PGS farmers have done what was necessary to avoid contamination. Thus, farmers take all possible precautions to prevent contamination and have discussions with peers as part of the PGS process. If there is still a chance of any type of contamination occurring, then the issue can be pre-declared to the consumers through

transparent periodic testing or openly debating the issue. PGS are based on trust, so if transparency is maintained, then the trust value increases.

For instance, Good Market PGS, Sri Lanka, after a long discussion between farmers and consumers, decided to introduce a specific evaluation regarding the water systems used in the farm. The evaluation goes from 0 points, when the farmer has not taken any measures to improve the quality of the water supply, to a maximum of 5, when the ideal conditions are in place (See fig. below). Consumers' main concern is that producers think about where their water is coming from, and that they try to make improvements over time.

Until the polluter-pays-principle is not internalized in the current agricultural paradigm, organic farmers cannot promise a completely contamination-free production. The strategy that PGS initiatives adopt is to be truthful to their consumers, involving them in the process so that they are aware of the realities of producing organic food.

	0 POINTS Standards Not Met	1 POINT ★	2 POINTS ★★	3 POINTS ★★★	4 POINTS ★★★★	5 POINTS ★★★★★	SCORE
<b>3. SEPARATION OF INDUSTRIAL &amp; ORGANIC AREAS</b>							
3.3	Using chlorinated tap water or potentially contaminated irrigation water. No plans for change.	Using chlorinated tap water or potentially contaminated irrigation water. Plans for treatment or alternative water source.	Using chlorinated tap water or potentially contaminated irrigation water. Basic biological filtration.	Using chlorinated tap water or potentially contaminated irrigation water. Physical and biological filtration system.	Using filtered water, harvested rainwater or well water. No water testing.	Using surface water, filtered water, harvested rainwater or well water that has been tested and is free of all contaminants.	

Section of the Good Market PGS evaluation form focusing on water

## SHORT NEWS

### Africa

**Senegal:** In July, the spokesperson of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development welcomed the organic market organized by members of the National Federation for Organic Agriculture (FENAB) with the support of the Swiss NGO Heks Eper in one of the most animated squares in Thiès. The market grouped producers certified through PGS. The ministry has reiterated its commitment to support FENAB setting the PGS label "Bio Senegal". Read the full article in French [here](#).

### America

**Brazil:** At the beginning of July, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) awarded the work of Terra Indígena Xingu Association (Atix) with the **Equator prize 2017**. The work of the association allowed communities to jointly produce every year some two tons of PGS certified organic honey in the Xingu indigenous territory within the Brazilian Amazon forest. Atix operates the first indigenous PGS in Brazil which received government accreditation in 2015.



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**USA:** Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) has recently revised and published the updated version of its Apiary Standards. These **updates** were prompted by feedback from experienced beekeepers and they have been reviewed and recommended by their Apiary Advisory Council. Changes involve management of Varroa mites, but also apiary location, and queen and bee sourcing. You can access the full standards **here**.

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## Asia

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**Vietnam:** On July 4 2017, the Embassy of Belgium in Vietnam, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the Hanoi University of Public Health (HUPH), co-organised a workshop on the theme *“Scaling up the trust networks for food safety with small farmers”*. During the workshop, PGS has been presented as one of the solutions to restore consumers’ trust in the food system and enable small-scale farmers to participate in the transition towards reliable safe food networks. Read the full article **here**.

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## Europe

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**Spain:** The Inter-American Commission on Organic Agriculture (ICOA) and INTERECO, a Spanish non-profit association of Organic Public Control Authorities, signed a framework agreement to deepen the knowledge of public certification systems for organic production. The actions planned for the triennium 2017-2020 will focus on organic inputs, training in accordance with the European organic production regulations, as well as the systems of public certification and PGS. Read the full news **here**.

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## Oceania

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**Tahiti:** PGS Bio Fetia is the only body accredited for issuing organic certificates in the archipelago and today it certifies around 20 farmers. To lighten administrative procedures and upscale organic farming in the region, the association plans to be able to certify not only single farmers but rather a perimeter of land devoted only to organic farming. The idea is that farmers registered in the land certified as organic can access the organic label automatically. Read the full article **here**.

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## Imprint

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Contributions to the newsletter are welcome at any time. Please send your PGS-related articles in English, French or Spanish to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio).

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