

The Global PGS Newsletter

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“Certified Naturally Farmed” starts its activities in Australia

By Geoff Simmons



The initial reason for commencing the Certified Naturally Farmed group in the Capricorn Coast area of Australia was to help counter problems small Organic and Biodynamic Growers were having with the increasing mountain of paperwork and ever increasing

cost of being Officially Certified. Presently the cost of such Certification is prohibitive for most small organic or biodynamic growers in the Capricorn Coast and probably elsewhere in Australia.

However it soon became obvious we should also work towards establishing a small group of both Growers and Distributors in our local area to embrace the simple concept of providing locally grown, nutritious, ‘chemical-free’ fresh produce to local consumers and reduce, as much as possible, the ‘food miles’ travelled by the time it is consumed.

To give the Certified Naturally Farmed project a good start it was also obvious we should include both existing Certified Organic and Biodynamic local growers as part of the group, together with new growers who could benefit with mentoring by already skilled growers of crops produced without the use of any harmful water soluble fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides or fungicides

known to leave persistent residues or otherwise damage soil health and fertility

The Certified Naturally Farmed (CNF) project has been put together as a simple structure and has strict guidelines to reassure our local community that we’re producing clean, nutritious food without the use of artificial chemical fertilisers, herbicides, insecticides or fungicides.

The CNF produce is aimed fairly and squarely at being sold to our local community through several local organic retailers, a home delivery service and at local markets, so all customers will get fresh nutritional food with low “food miles” and a minimal carbon footprint to boot. We don’t ignore the environment either, our farmers are expected to put aside significant but reasonable areas of their properties for the conservation of native flora and fauna as well as ensuring that their practices don’t pollute the local water catchment.

The CNF standards can be found on the CNF website (<http://certifiednaturallyfarmed.org.au/>). The CNF handbook can be requested by email to simorg@iinet.net.au.



Is the use of “formal” an appropriate term for third-party certification?

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The use of the word “formal” has become common to specifically refer to third-party certification systems. The term made me wonder if the denomination of “formal” might imply that other organic guarantee systems, different from third-party certification and particularly Participatory Guarantee Sys-

tems (PGS) are, consequently, “informal”? If so, what would be the policy-making implications?

To answer this, I searched for the meaning and implications of “formal” and “informal” processes in the context of organization, management and learning systems.^{1,2} What I found lead me to two conclusions:

1. PGS have characteristics and elements of both “formal” and “informal” processes.

For instance, a “formal” characteristic of PGS is that they have structure and function through clearly articulated organizational schemes. To ignore this structure is to support the myth that PGS lack a coherent organization. Further, PGS use various means of documentation, including written forms, where appropriate. Conversely, “informal” characteristics of PGS imply a flexible, locally adapted, dynamic and grass-root orientation (mainly to farmers and consumers).

1 Wikipedia definitions of “Formal organization” and “Informal organization”. Available at <http://www.wikipedia.org>, accessed on March 8, 2010.

2 Colardyn, D.; Bjornavold, J. 2004. Validation of Formal, Non-Formal and Informal Learning: policy and practices in EU Member States. *European Journal of Education*, 39 (1): 69-89.

2. PGS have as much relevance to decision-making as any purely “formal” guarantee system.

Referring to third-party certification systems specifically as the “formal” approach to guarantee systems³ implies that others—among them PGS—have less significance for decision-making.^{4,5} That implies that PGS are by default “informal”, conveying an inaccurate framing of their value to policy. In reality, PGS are legitimized by the social dynamic that they generate, and are increasingly recognized in national organic regulations and as a valuable component for rural development by strengthening local organization, organic knowledge networks, healthy food systems and local organic markets. Therefore, PGS certainly have a legitimate place in decision and policy-making within the organic sector.

In summary, referring to third-party certification as the “formal” guarantee system excludes other systems (e.g. PGS), which combine both “formal” and “informal” elements from having policy-making relevance. As a result, the formal/informal terminology implies an inaccurate framing that weakens the policy-making value of other organic guarantee systems.

Hence, my proposal is when referring to organic guarantee systems, one should avoid the use of the term “formal certification”, and instead use “third-party certification” to avoid inaccurate qualifications.

3 IFOAM, __. PO2 Position on the Full Diversity of Organic Agriculture. Available at <http://www.ifoam.org/press/positions/pdfs/Full-Diversity-Organic-Agriculture.pdf>

4 Colardyn, D. 2002. From formal education and training to lifelong learning. In D. Colardyn (ed.), *Lifelong Learning: which ways forward?* Utrecht: Lemma.

5 Liepins, R.; Campbell, H. 1998. Social dimensions affecting the development of organic agriculture: Knowledge, gender and stakeholder relations in the initiation and implementation of organic farming, Canterbury 1996-1997. MAF Policy Technical Paper 98/7

Interview with Miguel Castro Hernández, competent authority for the promotion of organic agriculture in Costa Rica

Costa Rica has done a lot of work to promote organic agriculture, both for the export market and for the domestic market. The Costa Rican Organic Agriculture Movement (MAOCO) is widely recognized. Costa Rica has obtained “third country” status with the EU (meaning equivalency status for their organic regulations) and yet recognizes PGS in its legal framework. Costa Rica is the only Latin American country with a Competent Authority (regulation aspect) and a Promotion Authority (development aspect) for organic agriculture. Miguel Castro Hernández, in charge of the promotion authority (and its national program for organic agriculture, the PNAO), accompanies the development process of PGS in the country. Jannet Villanueva (member of the IFOAM PGS Committee) is interviewing him for us.

Jannet: *How is the organic movement in your country? What vision do you have as head of the promotion authority?*

Miguel: MAOCO is growing. It has established producer committees in most of the six regions of the country and has about 4,500 producers as members. It receives funds from international cooperation agencies. As part of its programs, it develops the local markets and currently develops a national organic mark. Recently it established a market-



ing unit which offers marketing services to its members. It promotes the production, conservation and exchange of seeds. It also promotes the creation of GMO-free municipalities. It has been one of the drivers behind the law 8591 of promotion of organic agriculture. MAOCO is a member of GALCI (IFOAM) and MAELA. The legal arm of MAOCO is ASO-MAOCO (Association for the organic agriculture movement of Costa Rica).

From my perspective, I would say that MAOCO needs a bigger support from the government. Hopefully the new government will give increased importance to the movement. Meanwhile, the promotion authority is part of the national committee of MAOCO and de-

velops annual work plans in close coordination with the needs identified within MAOCO. The vision for the future is to try to get agreements and commitments from the government to give logistical and financial support to implement the law 8591 [Law entitled “Development and promotion of organic agriculture activities” in August 2007. Its rules were published in June 2009]

Jannet: *Are there PGS experiences in your country? How do you perceive this process from your point of view of promotion authority?*

Miguel: Since 2004, with the support from CE-DECO, several pilot projects have been initiated. The PNAO has been monitoring these, especially lately to accompany their presentation to the control competent authority (E. Ramirez) so that it can validate and register the PGS under the protection of the Law 8591. We hope that, thanks to these efforts, this will materialize this year and that we will see an extensive development of PGS, especially among small organic producers (around 4,500 in Costa Rica).

Jannet: *Is there a regulation on the use of the word “organic / biological / ecological” on products?*

Miguel: yes, the three terms are regulated under various laws (Organic law, national rule 29782, law 8591 and its implementation rules). In essence it is said

It is clear that the regional development of PGS will depend heavily on what is being done in Costa Rica.

-Miguel Castro Hernández

that whoever uses these words to identify agricultural products needs to be backed-up by a certification. If this is not respected, it is up to the consumers to report the infringement to the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade so that the law on Consumer protection can be applied.

Jannet: *what about an organic logo? Is this something you are thinking about?*

Miguel: at the moment, there has only been a big discussion on the need to create an organic national logo. In 2007, an organic mark was created “Orgánico Que Rico”, which is actually more a slogan. This is a task on the desk of the marketing unit of MAOCO but so far no concrete proposal has been developed.

Jannet: *How are PGS perceived in your country? Costa Rica has “third country” status with the EU and exports a lot of products with third party certification, and now it starts working on PGS. I can imagine that this process has not or is not easy; however, it is being done with a lot of enthusiasm and dynamism. What can you say about this experience?*

Miguel: Since 2004, several pilot projects are developing, especially in the regions Chorotega, Península

de Nicoya, Turrialba, Región Central and Huetar Norte. The PGS of the Turrialba association of organic producers (APOT) and the one from the north region are now in the last step of the process, that is to say the presentation to the competent control authority for approval. At the beginning it has been a slow process, but with growing experience and the back-up of the law 8591, the process is accelerating and the demand for PGS is growing. [...].

Jannet: *How do you see the development of PGS in the region (Central America)?*

Miguel: I don't have so much information on the development in the region. However, it is clear that the regional development of PGS will depend heavily on what is being done in Costa Rica. For example, for 3 years there has been work on a regional regulation for organic production that would substitute the national laws. The ministry of agriculture participated actively in this process. The issue of PGS has not been included yet. Therefore, it is likely that if PGS develops a solid base in Costa Rica, we could make a specific proposal for it to be included in the regional document that will be crucial for Central America.

See www.agriculturaorganica.org/maoco.htm for more information.

Special offer: all IFOAM PGS-related publications available for free download on the IFOAM website

To increase dissemination of PGS materials, IFOAM is having a special limited offer to make all PGS-related publications available for free download in the PGS section of its website (careful, the publications are still sold for a price on the IFOAM bookstore, as per the usual policy!). For the first time, you can download the PGS cases studies or the PGS guidelines in all available languages at no cost!

Rush to http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/All-PGS-Publ.html to take advantage of this limited offer!



First PGS developments in Argentina: “Bella Vista PGS”

In November 2009, the Municipality of Bella Vista in the Province of Corrientes (Argentina) approved the Municipal Ordinance Nr. 919-09. The ordinance benefits a group of family farmers from several colonies of the department of Bella Vista working with the agroecological approach for more than 10 years. Agroecological products for the ordinance are defined within the scope of the Organic Agriculture Law of Argentina (Law 25.517) but includes additional attributes such as social inclusion, community and family production especially seeds, associative experiences, local markets and food sovereignty. To accomplish their objectives they have created the PGS Council for agroecologi-

cal products comprised by representatives of organic farmers, the municipality, NGOs, Ministry of Rural Development and Family Agriculture, Northeast National University among others. The Municipality of Bella Vista has been assigned a role for promotion and commercialization of agroecological products in their jurisdiction. “Agro Eco Red” is the name and seal for the agroecological quality supervised under a control system designed and implemented by the PGS Council of Bella Vista.

V Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on Organic Agriculture, year of Biodiversity, Peru, September 2010

In September 2010, will be held in Perú the V Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on Organic Agriculture, gathering organic producers involved in field experimentations as well as organic researchers. It follows a series of events happening since 2003 on this theme in various countries of the region and promoted, among others, by FiBL, the Research Institute for Organic Agriculture based in Switzerland. The objective of these meetings is to promote organic farming as a means to improve the quality of life in harmony with nature, through the exchange of experiences between producers, researchers and other organic players.

Topics of this V event will be:

- Agro-biodiversity, climate change and food sovereignty
- Promotion of organic farming
- Market access, including discussions on PGS and the PGS Latin American Forum.

The meeting seeks to bring together a wide diversity of actors in the agro-ecological movement in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an emphasis on the presence of farmers and farmer experimenters. The organizers are doing efforts to secure funding to provide scholarships to enable small producers and organic agriculture promoters from the region to attend the meeting.

PGS stakeholders from Latin America and the Caribbean, mark your agendas!

In Peru, the national committee of the event is composed by organizations members of the Consorcio Agroecológico del Perú. More information on: www.sudamericarural.org/files/i_convocatoria_v_encuentro_latinoamericano.pdf.



Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **Malta:** The IFOAM EU group will have its board meeting on the 18th and 19th of March in Malta. On the agenda is a first discussion about PGS, including a presentation by IFOAM Head Office PGS coordinator to educate all board members on what PGS is.
- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown has revised its self-evaluation. The new version is on the IFOAM PGS platform.
- **Spain:** Agroecologists from Brasil, Mexico, Colombia, Holland, Bolivia, Argentine and Spain met at an international seminar on "Agroecology and public policies" on the 16th and 17th of March in Granada. The seminar was organized by the University of Granada, with PGS part of the program. Eva Torremocha, member of the IFOAM PGS committee, held a presentation on PGS.



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **India:** The PGS Organic India Council met in Ranikhet from 11th to 13th March at the office of Grassroots. There was time for interaction with farmers in the villages as well as with staff of Umang Producer Company, the group that has been registered for production and marketing of organic and fair trade produce. Last month, they added 256 members under 20 local groups. The total number of groups in the India PGS system is now 302 with 3,679 producers. The meeting included discussions on organic standards for processed products and organic standards for wild / natural produce.



...LATIN AMERICA

- **Argentina:** a PGS Council has been created in the municipality of Bella Vista (see article).
- **Brazil:** since the publication of the Normative Instruction that regulates PGS according to the Brazilian law, (instruction nº19 on the 28th of May 2009), new PGS groups are forming rapidly in Brazil. Many producers are interested to enter the system. The deadline to comply with the law is December 2010, which leaves a few months for these groups to get approval from the government and authorization to use the Brazilian organic seal.



...AFRICA

- **Morocco:** The NGO Terre et Humanisme Maroc is initiating a project for local production in which PGS is one component. The project has been approved. For more information, contact Lucile Zugmeyer at terreethumanisme.maroc@yahoo.fr.
- **South Africa:** In February, the Limpopo Organic Farmers Association invited Raymond Auerbach to explain the SA PGS Network proposal to them during February, and they have agreed to join the network. The Limpopo Department of Agriculture has also expressed interest in PGS, and agreed to host a future meeting of the South African Organic Sector Organisation. In March, Raymond gave a presentation at the Ashoka International Workshop on Social Innovation that took place on the 8th to 12th of March in Johannesburg. It was agreed that the South African PGS Network is potentially a "System Changing Idea". For more information, contact Raymond Auerbach at raymond@rainman.co.za.

Imprint

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