

The Global PGS Newsletter

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Association la Fierucola in Tuscany Looks into PGS



By *Eva Torremocha*

La Fierucola is an Italian association working on the development of a local economy and small-scale organic farming. It has been working on certification matters, trying to solve third party certification inconveniences such as its expensive cost and paperwork load. Auto-certification has been implemented within the group in a first experimental period, but it was found that farmers get isolated on their farms and consumers lacked trust in this system. This work has led them towards Participatory Guarantee Systems, particularly due to their strong aspects of trust and knowledge exchange. La Fierucola has also shown interest in the PGS approach combining farmers and consumers, as a way to work together and to build their own experience to produce and consume local and organic products.

La Fierucola had discovered PGS through IFOAM documents, but was looking for more information on the subject. The Tierra Futura fair, held in Florence from the 27th to the 29th of May, has been the occasion to organise a seminar on PGS, together with ASCI, an Italian association working for rural solidarity that

also participates in the AIAB pilot project on PGS in Liguria. Eva Torremocha, as IFOAM PGS Committee member, was invited to lead the workshop, which took place on the 30th of May, with about 20 participants including producers, consumers, technicians and public servants.

After a brief presentation of the global PGS situation by Eva, participants discussed the PGS systems already in place in other parts of the world and reflected what model could be built in Tuscany. Already organised as



A few participants of the workshop on PGS on 30th May in Florence

a farmer and consumer group, La Fierucola has demonstrated a good maturity to implement a PGS on its territory. The seminar included group work sessions, using PGS tools developed by IFOAM. The next step will be the organization of a presentation on certification legislation matters to citizens in Florence.

Let's hope that the PGS concept will find a good acceptance in Tuscany and that it will establish cooperation channels with the AIAB experience in order to strengthen PGS in Italy.

PGS Concept Used Beyond the Organic Sector



By Claire Julien, Coordinator at the Nature & Progrès Federation

PGS come from civil society, whereby producers and citizen-consumers agree on the objectives of the guarantee (conformity with a code of conduct or standard) and on the means to reach there (evaluation criteria, inspection management and collective evaluation of the reports, support and experience exchange for improving practices). In this context, PGS can guarantee the fulfilment of organic agriculture standards, but not only. In France, PGS initiatives emerge and are getting themselves organized as an alternative to third party certification beyond the organic agriculture world.

The AMAP movement¹ (AMAP means Association for the Maintenance of Peasant Agriculture in French), which is a French adaptation of the Japanese Tekei, organizing solidarity partnerships between producers and consumers, has been looking into PGS for several years. Indeed, the AMAPs are essentially groups where trust, direct exchange and involvement of the stakeholders make it a guarantee system in itself. The AMAP code of conduct includes criteria for production but also for the functioning of the AMAP itself, such as horizontally, experience exchange, or democratic structure. AMAP networks organize themselves to better formalize the evaluation of the way the code of conduct is being implemented and to improve their practices collectively.

Organizations working on the concept of 'fair economy' are now experimenting with PGS.

In view of the steamroller of intensive agriculture, small producers are feeling more and more desperately isolated. The network "Cohérence" in Brittany has therefore invented a 'participatory identification' aimed at rewarding and encouraging efforts done in favor of the environment by peasants without official certification. The idea is to give some recognition to peasants who are obviously not perfect but who try to go into a sustainable approach. The PGS that has been set up verifies certain nonnegotiable criteria (no GMO, low density for animal raising, etc) but does not impose a static list of control points. Visits in the farms serve to identify positive and negative points and to propose improvements. Delivery of the participatory identification does not influence the sale price of the products, but recognizes the work done by the peasants.

Organizations working on the concept of 'fair economy,' whose formal definition and guarantee systems have been mostly inspired by the organic agriculture sector (technical standards and conformity assessment by an independent certifier), are looking into other guarantee systems and are now experimenting with PGS as well. The association MINGA in France, has organized its 'Participatory Guarantee and Improvement System'² since 2006, with the particularity that it includes a supply chain approach. This system evaluates not only the practices of the final operator (the distributor in France), but also those of all the intermediaries up to the production. In this PGS system, the focus is on the improvement process generated by the collective evaluation of each case. It is truly a tool for improvement and exchange, whose objective is not the delivery of a seal or a commercial quality label, but really the construction of economic relationships that are ethical and ecological.

1 miramap.org/articles.php?pg=art4

2 www.minga.net/spip.php?rubrique56

Another sector where a need is emerging for a participatory alternative to official certification and industrial normalization is of eco-construction sector. Members of the Ecobâtir ('Eco-building') network are linked by a standard that includes environmental aspects (energy conservancy of the buildings, use of natural materials without over-exploitation of resources, etc), health aspects for users and builders, aspects related to the integration of the construction works into the local economy, to the use of traditional know-how, to the respect of construction cultures, etc. The network is already functioning as a place for exchange and improvement through thematic workshops and could possibly be the beginning of a PGS.

These different movements unite with Nature & Progrès and its PGS in a struggle against industrial normalization that deprives the citizens, be they peasants, craftsman, shopkeepers or consumers, of their

right to participate and decide on the norms that are being adopted at the national and international levels. Through PGS, which are independent guarantee systems set-up by professionals and consumers themselves, we are all contributing to a participatory alternative. The objective is to promote respect for the living (the Earth and mankind) through the set-up of responsibility and trust channels to change production and consumption behaviors.

Let's hope that this broad emerging social movement, made visible by IFOAM through organic agriculture, will be able to develop without losing its soul and its values³: a common vision, participation of all actors, transparency, trust, learning processes and horizontality.

3 www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/pdfs/IFOAM_PGS_WEB.pdf

Australian Producer Organization Adopts IFOAM Standards in its PGS



By Gary Hooley

The Sapphire Coast Producers Association (SCPA - pronounced 'scapa') in South East NSW (Australia), which has been active since 1993, provides an Organic Certification program for its' member producers.

The SCPA Organic Certification System (SOCS) was established in 2001 by SCPA producers primarily to offer an effective, member based and dynamic certification scheme at an affordable price. From the outset SCPA established its' own local Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), though at the time we were unaware of the term (PGS) promoted by IFOAM. SCPA sees a valuable synergy with the IFOAM standards and IFOAM as a structure that informs and allows us to provide input. Currently the SCPA Organic Certification System has 14 members growing or producing organic fruit, vegetables and livestock. Our members are at various stages of organic certification. SCPA is developing a local food production industry in the South East and organic practices are central to market acceptance, ethical standards of business development and long term soil health. SCPA has over 150 members with a range of products and interests. We have de-

veloped and supported projects such as rural tourism, producer markets, seed savers, vermiculture and small species animal production, processing and marketing. The SOCS member practices have been based on the Australian Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce, a defacto standard on which the more formal Australian Standard AS6000 was based. This latter standard was published in October 2009. Unfortunately the AS6000 is strictly copyright protected and relatively expensive to purchase. The new standard also attempts to reinforce existing third party certification bodies as the only means of certification. At a recently convened SOCS meeting, consensus was reached amongst our members that we adopt the IFOAM Basic Organic Standard (IBS) as an informative guide to organic principles and practices. Where the IBS and AS6000 significantly differ and the latter standard potentially provides a higher quality of produce, then SOCS members will be informed by supplementary publications and be required to meet that higher standard. It was highlighted that the AS6000 standard offered little benefit to practical organic farming, the most useful elements being the lists of allowable substances. A practical guide to composting was needed and reference was made to the 'Grower's Production Guidelines' freely published by Certified

SCPA sees a valuable synergy with the IFOAM standards and IFOAM as a structure that informs and allows us to provide input.

Naturally Farmed (CNF), another Australian PGS. Like other PGS we use a peer evaluation process to audit and guarantee the application of these standards. Annually each SOCS grower/producer performs an audit on another SOCS member. The audit requires a written response to a standard set of questions, followed by a physical inspection of the property under certification, along with a check of the producer's records and accounts. The paperwork includes an Organic Management Plan, which includes a farm map with details on what is grown, where and how. Before non-Certified Organic inputs such as seeds and seedlings can be used, a declaration describing the required input source and reason for use must be submitted to our Certification Committee for evaluation and possible allowance within the scope of the prescribed Standard. All paperwork is sent to SCPA and passed on to the Organic Certification Committee which currently has 3 core members, but is open to all members to join. We encourage all members to participate in assessment and decision making processes, particularly our annual assessment of individual inspection reports. To enter the Organic Certification process soil tests

must be taken from a cross-section of sites and soil-types over the areas to be certified. If soil tests show no traces of herbicides, synthetic fertilizers or harmful chemicals, and an initial inspection finds the property and practices suitable, SCPA will accept the grower and property as part of SOCS. Organic practices that meet the prescribed Organic Standards must be demonstrated over the first year before the grower/producer may claim 'In Conversion' status, followed by another two years meeting those Standards. Therefore it takes 3 years to attain the full status of 'Organic Certification'. The SCPA Organic Certification process is suitable for small producers, primarily supplying local or regional markets. It is an independent brand that relies on the integrity of member producers. The SCPA Organic Certification System adds value to the regional SCPA brand and enables us to share the knowledge of organic farming practices in a dynamic agricultural setting with member producers and the broader community through our communication networks. Through this expanding network and sharing the PGS structure and IFOAM standards, SCPA will stimulate more growers and draw markets and producers together. SCPA believes that the net carbon emission in the food supply chain is an important consideration to augment standard organic practices in the future, leading the way in promoting local produce direct to consumers.



Some SOCS members who attended the meeting on the 29th of May.

Report Considers Alternative Organic Guarantee Systems for the E.U.



By Joelle Katto-Andrighetto

The project CERTCOST, a European research project supported by the European Commission, published its latest report entitled “The European Regulatory Framework and its implementation in influencing organic inspection and certification systems in the E.U.” (available at http://certcost.org/Lib/CERTCOST/Deliverable/D14_D11.pdf).

The project runs for three years, from September 2008 to August 2011, and is lead by organizations such as the University of Hohenheim and other European universities, FiBL, ICROF (the International Centre for Research in Organic Food Systems), but also certifiers such as IMO and ICEA. The main project objective is to generate research-based knowledge on how to improve the organic food certification system in terms of efficiency, transparency and cost effectiveness.

This last report contains one chapter on “Alternative Organic Guarantee Systems,” category in which the authors include both group certification through internal control systems and PGS. The report recalls the key features of PGS and then concludes “PGS alone does not authorize a group to sell products as certified organic into organic trade chains. However, there is anecdotal evidence that PGS work very well in terms of effective quality control, and it may be an option to also develop external evaluation procedures and minimum requirements to allow external certification based on a PGS instead of an ICS...Both models, ICS and PGS, could represent ways to minimize certification costs for farmers also in Europe, especially for producers who market directly to consumers. This would be comparable to e.g. the USDA’s requirements that “a production or handling operation that has \$5,000 or less in gross annual income from organic sales is exempt from certification. This exemption is primarily designed for those producers who market their product directly to consumers” (USDA, 2002, Sub-part B, Applicability: Exempt & excluded operations).”

The authors (many of whom come from a third-party certification background) show an openness towards PGS. However, PGS practitioners and critical readers could object to a few ideas, notably:

- **that PGS would be primarily a way to reduce certification costs for the European farmers.** Experienc-

es with pilot projects conducted by IFOAM and others have shown that the issue of costs is unlikely to be the main advantage of PGS in the European context, especially if combined with an external certification procedure as suggested by the authors. Rather, the primary benefit of PGS in Europe is the re-creation of local linkages and collective dynamics, involving producers and consumers into an organic guarantee system that cultivates organic values at all levels. PGS should be seen also for their potential to address the current trend which more and more leaves all isolated actors subject to anonymous market forces, which are increasingly proving to fail to foster the public good.

- **that the U.S. exemption for < 5,000 USD a year is a less than desirable model of a PGS-friendly provision.** Clearly, no one in the U.S. or Europe can make a sustainable living on 5,000 USD in sales a year. This provision is mainly of interest to part-time organic gardeners or conventional, professional farmers with plots of organic crops. Moreover, this provision exempts producers from “certification” altogether. For those who regard PGS as a type of certification (see “PGS Basics” p. 7), this exemption is problematic.
- **that putting ICS and PGS together into what will serve producers who market directly to consumers is a shortcut.** The current concept of group certification through internal control systems works well for cooperatives and vertically integrated groups of farmers whose members produce the same commodity, usually sold through one common bulk market channel. There is no current evidence that the group certification system is well adapted to the certification of very diverse products through diverse and direct marketing, at least in its current form.

Despite these weaknesses in the argumentation, the effort to look at these two systems (which are successfully implemented outside the E.U.) in a research project that aims to improve the organic certification system in Europe is welcome. The authors mention that there will be further research on this topic during the project. Hopefully the PGS community will get a chance to input this process.

It may be an option to also develop external evaluation procedures and minimum requirements to allow external certification based on a PGS instead of an ICS.

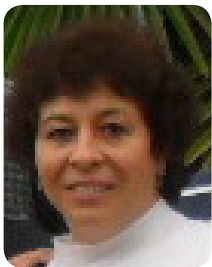
-CERTCOST report

Bolivian Government to Invest 8 Million U.S. Dollars in Organic Agriculture Projects, Including PGS

Mainstream media channels in Bolivia reported the launch on the 2nd of June of the Organic Production Strategy led by the National Organic Production Council (the CNAPE), a strategy with an 8 million U.S. dollars fund for 3 years, funded by the Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency (AECID). The strategy will fund projects to develop organic production in 7 districts and 20 municipalities, which should benefit around 5,000 producers. The

press reports that, in the case of producers who are not organized or who cannot access organic certification due to its high cost, the National Organic Production Council will set-up a PGS without certification costs which “will enable a higher participation of peasant and indigenous agriculture into the organic production so as to supply the national market with healthy products accessible for the consumers in the country.

PGS and the Legal Framework in Latin America



By Jannet Villanueva

PGS in Latin America is consolidating as a reality emerging from the efforts of organic producers, consumers, local and regional governments, NGOs and other actors. It is now a reality, and as such can no longer be ignored and must be addressed in the frame of constructive dialogues.

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One of the strategic elements in this dialogue is the legal frameworks. The main question is: How are PGS getting integrated into the norms, laws and regulations of various Latin American countries? Most of the time we start with a situation where third party certification is basically the “official option”, in legal terms. In this context, PGS appears as something new, insecure, and as a reality which, as long as it is not included in the legal frameworks does not really exist. We have seen cases where small producers who participate in the organic market with PGS certification receive written threats and denunciation from the government, which considers them outside of the law, that is to say, illegal.

Within the PGS Latin American Forum (which includes producers, consumers and public and private institutions) and the IFOAM PGS Committee, we have started analyzing and reflecting on this situation. As a first step, we have reviewed the legal frameworks on organic agriculture in the various Latin American countries.

The analysis has been done, using the following question for each country:

- Is there a law or regulation to control organic agriculture?
- Is there a law to develop or encourage organic agriculture?
- Does the law include PGS?
- Does the law include public certification?
- Does it include other alternatives?
- Is there a national logo for organic agriculture?
- In the regulation system, do the PGS have the same status as other guarantee systems?
- Is PGS considered for the external market?
- Are there PGS initiatives in the country?

A summary table (currently available in Spanish only) has been uploaded on the blog page of The Global PGS Newsletter: http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/18479.php. It contains the answers of various countries to the above questions. We invite you to review it and send all comments and questions based on your experience and knowledge. We are only at the beginning of this process, and your input would help us improve this work. Please contact Laercio Meirelles (laerciomeirelles@gmail.com or laerciomeirelles@terra.com.br) and Jannet Villanueva (jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe) for any feedback, or post comments on the blog directly. Many thanks in advance!

PGS BASICS

PGS is certification!

A few people use language that opposes “PGS” and “certification”, or that includes PGS-certified products in the category of “non-certified products”. However, it is much more exact and fair to recognize that PGS is a kind of certification. Here is why:

The American College Dictionary defines “certified” as “guaranteed or reliably endorsed”. In general, there are three levels of assurance that can be provided through certification: first, second and third party.

In first party certification, the individual or organization providing the good or service is the one offering that guarantee. It is basically a self-claim based on some internal control procedures.

In second party certification, an association to which the individual or organization belongs provides the assurance. It is incumbent on these associations to monitor the quality and skills of individual members to ensure the reputation of the organization as a whole. PGS is a case of second party certification.

In third party certification, the assurance is provided by an independent party, in case of organic certification, by a certification body.

It is therefore proper to speak of “PGS-certified producers”, “PGS-certified products” and to distinguish PGS, not from certification but from “third party certification”. PGS also do deliver organic certificates to their certified producers. The IFOAM definition of PGS says it “They certify producers”. PGS are sometimes referred to as “participatory certification”.

Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **Philippines:** Two months ago, the country passed its first Organic Agriculture Act (Republic Act No. 10068). Unfortunately, despite the lobbying efforts of MASIPAG, the main local PGS, and of IFOAM World Board Representatives from the region, the final document is clearly unfavorable to PGS, stating that “Only third party certification is allowed to be labeled as organically produced”. Local stakeholders are still hoping that implementation rules and regulations might be more flexible than the Act, but this will not be an easy case to defend.
- **China:** Thanks to the presence of Claude Avars from OFAI (India), PGS was mentioned at the International Workshop on Food and Sustainable Agriculture which was held at Renmin University, Beijing, China, from March 12th to 15th. The report of the event has just been published and is available at www.eu-china.net/web/cms/upload/pdf/materialien/eu-china_2010_hintergrund_05.pdf.
- **Solomon Islands:** PGS activities are getting re-started after bad weather conditions. The major institutional buyer (a hotel) visited the groups and gave a lot of recommendations concerning desirable product quality and delivery requirements. Groups visited each other to exchange about production techniques. The PGS executive is working on the organization of peer review assessments, with the challenge of defining an individual's holdings on land that is essentially communal land. For more information, contact Grant Vinning at grant.vinning@gmail.com.

Huánuco, ciudad con el mejor clima del mundo, los espera

"Propiciando el trabajo participativo para garantizar la producción ecológica de los pequeños productores"

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Inscripciones: Los interesados sirvanse regularizar su inscripción mediante:
 ➤ Llenar el formato de inscripción y enviar al correo electrónico secretariatecnica@sppagroecologia.org confirmando su participación.
 ➤ La colaboración para participar en el evento es de (100 \$/) por persona.; el cual se deberá efectivizar el día de inicio del evento; cualquier información complementaria comunicarse al correo electrónico secretariatecnica@sppagroecologia.org o a los teléfonos 062-516988 (IDMA Huánuco).
 ➤ No incluye las actividades del 10 de julio.

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...LATIN AMERICA

- **Brazil:** From May 11th to 13th, the Brazilian PGS Forum held its second meeting in Mossoró, northeast Brazil. After discussing how to make their systems stronger, they decided to work on three main points: 1) Share all their documents; 2) Contract a consultancy to do an analysis about these documents in relation to the Brazilian law; 3) Invite all OPAC (participatory organization of conformity assessment) and OCS (social control organization), the two legal forms of PGS in the Brazilian law, to enter into the forum. For more information, contact Laercio Meirelles, laerciomeirelles@terra.com.br.
- **Mexico:** The Secretary of Agriculture of Mexico and the Network of Tianguis of Mexico have signed an agreement whereby the Mexican State will support a budget that aims to develop skills and promote PGS nationally. For more information, contact Rita Schwentesius, rschewent@prodigy.net.mx.
- **Peru:** The PGS Technical Secretary is organizing an event to share PGS experiences on July 8th and 9th in Huánuco- Perú (see *ad above*). Laercio Meirelles will share the Brazilian and other experiences as keynote speaker. The aim is to create another space for exchange of experiences between different PGS actors from the region. The results of this event will be fed into the meeting of Agroecological Entrepreneurs and Researchers (taking place in Peru in September 2010) and the PGS processes that are developing on the continent. All those who wish to attend are welcome. For more information and to receive the complete program, contact Jannet Villanueva, jvillanuevascudero@speedy.com.pe.
- **Ecuador:** Discussions among the actors and with the government is ongoing. The second extended PGS national meeting took place in May. Participants established some consensus about "PGS minimums". The government has also shown interest in the subject. The sector is proposing to begin with a broader agenda including policies to promote organic agriculture and strengthen local markets. PGS could then come as a natural fit into this agenda. For more information, contact Benjamin Macas, redagroecoloja@yahoo.es.
- **El Salvador:** a new version of the law on organic production has been produced. This new version is more complete and includes new aspects such as PGS, national certification and public certification. This new law has been elaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and the national organic agriculture movement (MAOES) but still needs to get final approval from the presidential house. For more information, contact Beatriz Alegría, beatrizalegría@integra.com.sv.



...EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **Belgium:** the First International Summer School in Agroecology will take place from the 25th to the 27th of August in Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium. One session will be about “Social movements and Agroecology: the role of Civil Society in establishing the Participatory Guarantee Systems”. Chris Claes, Co-ordinator Sustainable Agriculture & Chain Development at Vredeseilanden (VECO) and a long-term supporter of PGS initiatives, will give this presentation. For more information, please contact Chris Claes at Chris.Claes@vredeseilanden.be.
- **Italy:** AIAB, the Italian Organic Farming Association, carries on its PGS work with 2 pilot projects in the Rome and Genoa (Liguria) regions. Farmers and consumers are now reflecting on their own PGS proposal in these 2 regions. Proposals will serve as a point of the departure for the elaboration of an Italian PGS proposal by AIAB by the end of October 2010.
- **France:** The network of AMAPs (Associations for the maintenance of peasant agriculture, the French equivalent of the CSA concept) in the French department of Ile de France (Paris and its surroundings) is working on a PGS model as a tool to improve farmers’ knowledge and to reinforce links between farmers and consumers.



...AFRICA

- **Namibia:** The Namibia Organic Association (NOA) was launched early June. NOA’s mission is to provide leadership in the coordination and promotion of organic agricultural development, networking and marketing. It is expected that this association will be the framework to discuss and develop PGS in the country, as in Africa, such associations are often the hosts of PGS processes.

Imprint

The Global PGS Newsletter is published monthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to pgs@ifoam.org. Deadline for submission of articles is the 30th of each month for the following month’s issue.

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