

The Global PGS Newsletter

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India launches government-supported national PGS system

By *Joelle Katto-Andrighetto*

After several years of discussion and efforts, the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation of the Indian Ministry of Agriculture, under the National Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) has approved the launching of a national organic PGS program under the Government patronage. The National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF), headed by Mr A.K. Yadav, has prepared a draft operational manual of the new system. According to Mr Yadav, NCOF based its work on previous inputs from an FAO-supported project including consultancy by Ron Khosla, IFOAM PGS committee member, on IFOAM PGS documents and guidelines, and on experience earned through the implementation of the NPOP program (National Program for Organic Production). NCOF is now broadly consulting on the draft operational manual and will hold 3 consultation workshops in September and October in various Indian locations.

The manual recalls the guiding principles of Participatory Guarantee Systems and their advantages and limitations, and describes the structure of the new envisioned national system, with the roles and responsibilities of the different key stakeholders, including the farmers, the local groups, the facilitating

agencies and regional and national councils. The certification process is also described step-by-step and a four-page national PGS organic production standard is proposed.

IFOAM reviewed and commented on the draft document. The Manual reveals a good understanding of PGS by the NCOF and an ambitious vision for its up-scaling throughout India. The existing NGO-led Indian PGS system could easily be integrated into this new government-supported program and thereby benefit from political, financial and administrative support in the long run.

IFOAM applauds the government of India in general, and NCOF in particular, for their bold approach to PGS support, the quality of their draft, and the extensive consultation process that accompanies its development, giving a chance to all concerned stakeholders to give input.

For more information or to obtain the draft manual, please contact the NCOF (nbdc@nic.in) or Miguel Braganza from the PGS Organic India Council (braganza.miguel@gmail.com). For more information about IFOAM's detailed comments on the draft manual, please contact Joelle Katto-Andrighetto at pgs@ifoam.org.

Basket scheme goes PGS in Belgium: interview with the new PGS Coordinator



“Les Grosses Légumes” is a recently established basket scheme operated in South Belgium by the local association “Solidèrèment”, which is also running a very small consumer cooperative grocery shop in a village of 900 inhabitants. The basket scheme supplies 249 families with organic vegetables from the region. This year, “Les Grosses Légumes”

is experimenting participatory certification. They already have a very informative website with the list of producers and their certification status, the calendar of the visits and who participates, etc. Simona Serba, from the University of Liège (Belgium), interviews for us Ms. Françoise Urbain, PGS coordinator at “Les Grosses Légumes”.

SS: Can you present your activity in relation to PGS and “Les Grosses Légumes”?

FU: We have a group of 17 vegetable producers. They bring their harvest to our main depot; and we make the baskets to be distributed to the other 10 depots all over the region. Among these producers, 7 are certified by Certisys (third party certifier), others are in conversion and others are not certified. This year, we started participatory certification. Out of the 17, we will only visit 11. We have excluded some of them of the visit program, because some producers are already certified by Nature & Progrès, and because visits take a lot of time and everybody has to pay for their own transportation. This year, we have already done 6 visits, and 5 remain to be done. It is our first year and it is far from being simple.

SS: What are the reasons for adopting a participatory guarantee system?

FU: For what concerns me, it is the refusal of the idea that the person who is controlled has to pay for it. I understand that historically, there were the producers wanting to differentiate their produce from the others: they demanded the certification. But today, it has turned completely against them: they must pay, and they are controlled and distrusted whereas it is them who invented the system. Another reason is that certification bodies sometimes make “compromises” with their biggest clients because they don’t want to lose them: I do not accept this. So, what’s left to do? We certify ourselves. But in fact, if the consumers were very participative, they would go to see their

producers directly and there would be no need for certification.

SS: How did the project start? Who had the idea?

FU: The idea came from one of the producer, who was selling to an organic wholesaler, and who was sick and tired of it, because sometimes he would accept his merchandise, sometimes not. And so, he came to us and wanted to associate, so we found other producers and started the network “Les Grosses Légumes”.

SS: Before starting PGS, did you use a different system for certification?

FU: We exist for only 2 years, and the first year, there was nothing. Last year, 80% of the producers were certified by Certisys. This year, we accepted new ones. We believe that our mission is to bring more producers to grow organic vegetables, so obviously we won’t require them to be certified first: our ambition is to bring them here!

SS: How do the visits work?

FU: The control committee is usually composed of 2 peer producers, 2 consumers of the basket scheme and if possible someone from the outside who is knowledgeable about organic agriculture, plus the people from our office who organize the farm visit. The control committee visits the farm, with at hand the supply contract, which mentions the crops and the quantities to be produced for the network. The committee takes a look at every crop. At this point, the producer explains his practices and the visiting committee asks him different questions related to that. This is also the occasion of an exchange of advices and impressions between the farmers. I prepared a sort of questionnaire for the visits. First I had prepared a questionnaire very similar to the one of Nature & Progrès and I proposed it to 2 or 3 producers of the group with whom I have good contact. They told me that I shouldn’t ask so direct, precise questions and that it was better to ask vague and general questions and let the producers speak. If the producers are comfortable, they will explain themselves how they produce the vegetables. So we ask 4 general questions:

1. How did you come to grow organic vegetables (family background, studies, purchase of the farm with or without loan, etc...)?
2. How do you grow your vegetables?

3. Do you find that your efforts and the risks you take to produce these vegetables are worth the pleasure and the money you get?
4. What is the importance of our basket scheme in your business and in your farm?

So, we ask these general questions and several people take notes of the answers. Eventually, we try to put them in the format of a more standardized questionnaire that looks like the one of Nature & Progrès, but we lack many answers. Then we send them to the people who did the visit to see if they agree or if they have comments, and then we send it to the farmer whom we visited.

SS: To conclude, what are the main challenges to setting-up a PGS?

FU: To make people come, that is the big challenge! For the rest, it is too early to say, because we have only done 6 visits and we don't know yet how the visited farmers will react to the conclusions. What is improved is that we know each other better and we see better where the producers' problems are. For me, this is the main advantage.



Visiting one of the vegetable producers of Les Grosses Légumes, July 2010.

PGS on Wikipedia

PGS is now well featured in Wikipedia, the most commonly consulted online encyclopedia. Articles on PGS in English, French and Portuguese versions have been created. Look [here](#) to see the English version. Wikipedia is the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit. Therefore, feel encouraged to contribute to the PGS page(s) with additional information, links, pictures, etc, and to create the corresponding articles in other languages (especially in Spanish, which is currently missing, yet important, in the PGS world!).

IFOAM urges Central American countries to leave a door open for PGS in their new regional organic regulation

Competent Authorities of Central American countries have released the first draft of the new *Regional Organic Regulation for Central America, the Dominican Republic and Panama*, and invited comments. IFOAM has reviewed the document and released an official comment to the authorities and other regional stakeholders, pointing at the fact that the current draft denies the possibility, for participating countries, to recognize and approve Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as certification organizations for the local market. Chapter 14 of the current draft requires all certification to be carried out by certification bodies following the ISO 65 approach. This development is particularly unfortunate considering that Costa Rica, one of the countries concerned by this new regulation, has been working since 2004 to develop PGS pilot projects and that the Costa-Rican competent authority is about to start registering and approving PGS under the protection of the Costa Rican current organic promotion law 8591.

IFOAM has proposed concrete amendments to the first draft of the regulation, including addition of the following paragraph in Chapter 14:

“Competent authorities can approve two categories of certification organizations:

- a. Third party certification organizations that comply with the ISO 65 / EN45011 guidelines.
- b. Alternative certification organizations such as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) complying with requirements established by the competent authority on the basis of the PGS definition, key elements and characteristics established at the international level by IFOAM. Certification by these certification organizations may be limited to small family producers and to the local or regional sale of their products.”

For more information on the process of development of the regional standard, please consult the GOMA website at <http://www.goma-organic.org/regional-projects/central-america>. For more information about IFOAM's comment, please contact Joelle Katto-Andrighetto at pgs@ifoam.org.

A French consumer perspective on participatory farm “inspections”

By *Kristen Lagadec*

Nature & Progrès is not a typical organic label. First of all, it is an association of which anyone can become a member. Secondly, it is an independent label, which is not affected by the watering down of the E.U. regulation under the pressure of lobbies. Finally, farm inspections are not performed by professionals employed by private companies, but instead by producer or consumer members of the association, through a Participatory Guarantee System.

This system is based on field visits conducted by a producer and a consumer or by a mandated “inspector”. The results of field inspections are presented to the local commission - also composed of local producers and consumers. The control system works because the producer has the technical competencies and the knowledge of the standards, while the consumer ensures transparency and impartiality.

It is in this context that, at the beginning of last April, as uninitiated consumer, I had the opportunity to participate in a one-day training, organized on the farm of one of the Nature & Progrès producers, and aimed at training new consumer inspectors. This happened alongside a participatory inspection to renew the certification of this producer.

I was amazed at the diversity of this farm: Aubrac cows [a local breed], local breed sheep, “peasant” ce-

reals (old varieties of wheat, barley, rye, buckwheat, mixed cropped cereals) and milling of the above. This made the farm “inspection” all the more challenging.

Indeed, for each kind of production (livestock, crop production, processing, etc.), there was a specific questionnaire to be filled out with the producer, referring, whenever necessary, to the corresponding standard. There are currently 14 different sets of standards for obtaining the Nature & Progrès label, depending on the type of production. Of course, we could dream of a more holistic approach that would not need to slice the agricultural activity into production sectors, but these standards are still quite light and look more like good practice compendiums than narrow dogmatic norms.

Before or after the questionnaire, the group takes a tour of the farm, looks, smells, listens, touches, asks questions and engages in discussion. Our host had such an impressive array of experience and passion for his job that all our questions were raised out of curiosity and not related to our status of “inspector”.

I find absolutely brilliant the idea that consumers can participate in such farm visits, and I strongly encourage others to contact their Nature & Progrès local group to see if they need consumer inspectors. After all, the demand for organic products is growing fast because of us, the consumers. It makes sense for us to roll up our

PGS BASICS

Shared Vision, Shared Ideals (Part 2)

“Shared Vision, Shared Ideals” is a well known sentence among the PGS community. It is the title of perhaps the most important founding document for the “PGS movement”: a document established by the international PGS task force following the first global event on PGS: the International Workshop on Alternative Certification that took place in Torres, Brazil, in 2004.

Shared Vision, Shared Ideas is a 4-page document which described for the first time what various PGS initiatives across the world have in common. It identifies 6 key elements and 10 key features of PGS. Here are the 10 key features:

1. Norms conceived by the stakeholders
2. Mechanisms to verify farmer’s compliance
3. Grassroots Organization
4. Mechanisms for supporting farmers
5. Suitable to smallholder agriculture
6. A bottom-line document
7. Principles and values
8. Seals or labels
9. Documented management systems and procedures
10. Clear and previously defined consequences for noncompliance

The full document describing in more details the key elements is available on http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/All-PGS-Publ.html.

sleeves and help enable a maximum number of farmers to be part of the Nature & Progrès network.

When visiting the farms, the consumer learns. He learns where his food is coming from, how it grew and with what. He learns how much work and courage is required from the farmer. He learns what he should always have known if a wall of ignorance and indifference had not emerged between us and our food.

By visiting the farmers, the consumer understands. She understands the constraints and the worries of the farmer. She understands the farmer's difficulty of earning a living without working herself to the bone. She understands that the plants and animals we eat represent only the tip of life, which starts with the biodiversity and the soil.

By visiting the farms, the consumer is on the watch. He makes sure that nobody forgets the essential purpose of food, which is to nourish those who will eat it. He makes sure that the detail of the norm never prevails over the organic spirit. He makes sure that nobody rests on his gains and that the idea of a truly sustainable agriculture is always taken a step further.

So the next time you will see the Nature & Progrès label on a product, you will remember that it is somebody like you and me who went on the farm to learn, understand and be on the watch.

Translated from an article published on [Kristen Lagadec's blog](#) in French.

Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **Italy:** The 2010 Terra Madre Meeting will take place in Torino from the 21st to the 25th of October. More than 5,000 representatives from the worldwide Terra Madre network are expected for the event. On Friday the 22nd, at 15.00, there will be a session on PGS entitled "New certification models: Participatory Systems". This workshop, organized in collaboration with AIAB, the Italian association for organic agriculture, will look at different experiences and approaches to PGS. For more information visit: <http://www.terramadre.info>.
- **Italy:** AIAB is organizing training courses on participatory certification in organic agriculture, for producers and consumers (individuals and associations). With a total of 20 hours of lessons, the main themes covered will be: Principles of Organic Agriculture, European regulation on organic certification, AIAB standards and Participatory Guarantee Systems. The courses will be a combination of theoretical sessions and on-farm practical training. Courses will take place during September, in Rome and Genoa. For more information, please contact: Cristina Grandi (c.grandi@aiab.it) or Alessandro Triantafyllidis (a.trianta@tin.it).
- **France:** The AMAP network (AMAP is the French equivalent of Community Supported Agriculture) is setting up PGS pilot initiatives in 3 regions of France to accompany the implementation of the AMAP code of conduct.



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **India:** see front page article: the Indian National Center for Organic Farming, a governmental institution, is launching a major PGS-supporting program.
- **New Zealand:** "Organic Farm New Zealand" held its Annual General Meeting on August 28th. An important issue discussed was the question of which standard OFNZ should use. OFNZ has been using the private production standard of BioGro NZ, an IFOAM-accredited certifier, based on an agreement between the two organizations. As BioGro is changing its standard to ensure that it complies with the USDA and EU regulation, the question is whether OFNZ should also adopt this new more export-oriented standard. OFNZ sees great value in having a standard that is maintained and supported by an organization that has integrity and a strong technical support team. For BioGro NZ, the benefit is that they are supporting smallholders but also, that should a smallholder wish to move to export, then the conversion period can be reduced to 1 year.



...AFRICA

- **South Africa:** A proposal for a 3-year project entitled “Siyavuna Agri-SCIP Project”, submitted by the Rainman Landcare Foundation to the Belgian Development Agency (BTC), has been approved. The project aims at establishing a more professional organic sector in the KZN South Coast of South Africa. One of the 4 expected outcomes of the project is the establishment of a PGS-supported organic label in that region. For more information, contact Raymond Auerbach at raymond.auerbach@mmu.ac.za.



...LATIN AMERICA

- **Bolivia:** under the responsibility of the National Council for Organic Agriculture (CNAPE), a body within the Ministry of Agriculture, stakeholders are developing a so-called « Joint Plan » in which a new rule under the Organic Development law is being drafted, including processes to develop and implement PGS at the national level.
- **Peru:** The « V Encuentro Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Agricultura Ecológica » (5th Latin meeting on organic agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean) will take place from the 5th to the 8th of September in Lima. PGS has an important place in the program, with the sharing of experiences from Costa Rica, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay. Alongside this event will also take place the second meeting of the PGS Latin American Forum, with among the main points on the agenda the issue of public policies and legal frameworks in relation to PGS. For more information, contact Jannet Villanueva at jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe.
- **Central America and the Caribbean:** both regions have embarked on developing regional standards for organic agriculture. Although it is not yet clear whether these standards will become compulsory regulations for the countries involved, the first drafts published are not supportive of PGS and could become a major constraint to PGS initiatives in the region. IFOAM has submitted official comments to the concerned organizations, urging them to take into account PGS in these processes.

Imprint

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