

Why (I believe that) PGS can solve problems of stagnation in the organic sector in Japan

By Cornelia Kirchner, OGS & PGS intern at IFOAM



Japan has a long history of organic agriculture. With the spreading of the Teikei-Networks¹, a sort of Community Supported Agriculture, organic agriculture started to gain nationwide influence already in the early 1970s. Today, 40 years later, the Japanese equivalent for organic *yūki* is recognized by the majority of the consumers and organic products mastered their way into most of the food distribution channels.

However, even though the demand for organic food and its recognition have been growing, organic agriculture in Japan has been experiencing persistent stagnation over the last decades and many organic farmers today struggle to sell their produce. Due to changing lifestyles and consumer behavior, even well-established Teikei-Networks are suffering a constant decline of their consumer members. Against this background it has become more and more apparent that for the growth of the organic sector in the country organic certification and market oriented forms of distribution play a key role and deserve great attention.

In 1999, with the adoption of the national organic JAS Standard, a third party organic certification system was finally introduced to Japan. Today however, the number of farmers officially certified in the organic JAS system is still not more than a mere 0.2 percent of all Japanese farmers. This is a lot less than the actual number of farmers applying organic production methods. As a matter of fact, this certification



Boxes being prepared for distribution at Teikei "Na no hana kai", in Kobe.

¹ The emergence of serious environmental and health issues provoked by the excessive use of chemicals in conventional agriculture in the late 1960s in Japan drove thousands of consumers in the Japanese cities to organize in groups and to build direct relationships to farmers in order to buy organic products from them. Today these Teikei-Networks exist all over Japan. Teikei is a sort of direct food distribution system characterized by a very close relationship between the consumers and the producers. Consumers usually agree to buy a complete share of the production of the farm while the producers make their cropping plans in consultation with the consumers.

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system includes a range of serious problems that prevent many organic farmers from joining. The small scale of most farms results in proportionally high certification costs. As a consequence of the vast range of crops produced on many farms, record-keeping becomes very demanding and time-consuming. The non-availability of organic resources (e.g. fodder, seeds, etc.) makes it difficult for many farmers to meet the requirements of the standard.

A particularly big challenge lies in the fact that most Japanese organic products simply can't compete with cheaper imports on the market. Since the introduction of the JAS system, imports of organic products jumped while the certification rate of Japanese products never picked up. This shows the urgent need for an alternative system like PGS that, on one hand, relieves the burden from the Japanese organic farmers and, on the other, strengthens and reinforces local products and local markets.

I believe that PGS is highly suitable to the Japanese case and that it can complement the existing Teikei-Networks and the organic JAS certification system to revive the organic sector and to finally overcome the long period of stagnation. This is not only because PGS fits the structure of many organic farms in Japan much better than third party certification, but also because the organic movement in Japan is strong and

already has a deep philosophical background based on elements that are also common to the concept of PGS. Many people in the organic movement in Japan oppose very strongly to the organic JAS system and to a market

system where consumers and producers are completely disconnected from each other. The large number of farmers, consumers, NGOs and researchers already actively involved in the

organic community in Japan can function as an ideal basis for building up a strong PGS network.

Until recently, the awareness of PGS was still very low in the country. But thanks to some conferences in Asia that featured PGS, like the URGENCI International Symposium in Kobe/Japan (2010) and 17th IFOAM Organic World Congress in South Korea (2011), some knowledge about the concept is starting to spread. The Japan Organic Agriculture Association recently set up a PGS research group and is now considering the set-up of a model case.

These initiatives are still very much at an early stage, though. Hopefully, the success of PGS initiatives around the world will inspire Japan to also develop and apply new approaches on how to build trust in organic products, so that organic agriculture in the country can be strengthened and finally become an influential force in the agricultural sector.

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News from the Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and Participatory Guarantee Systems

By *Hervé Bouagnimbeck, Organic for Africa! Coordinator at IFOAM*



IFOAM is carrying out a global comparative study on interactions between social processes such as seed conservation systems and Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). The study is conducted in the framework of the project "Ecological and socio economic intensification for food security in smallholder agriculture in Central Andes, Peru". In-depth case studies are conducted by different local researcher

teams among the following 8 selected cases of groups using PGS and social processes around the world: Nature et Progrès (COMAC Lozère), France; Keystone Foundation and Green Foundation, India; Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos, Mexico; Ecovida (CETAP), Brazil; MASIPAG (Association of Sustainable Agriculture Practitioners of Palimbang), the Philippines; Bryanston Organic & Natural Market; and the National Association of Ecological Producers in Peru (ANPE).

The results of the study will be documented in a detailed research report including recommendations for farmers, policy makers, researchers and the organic

movement to provide guidance on how PGS can be further developed by addressing social processes and to demonstrate the positive role of PGS in improving food security and livelihoods of small holders. More importantly, emerging PGS initiatives can build on the experience of successful PGS groups, even if their situation might be different and require the development of a PGS that is specific to their region or community.



Maria Eugenia Manrique collecting data at COMAC Lozère

For each case, local researchers have been selected, coached and trained by IFOAM according to a defined

.....emerging PGS initiatives can build on the experience of successful PGS groups

plan. So far, the training of local researchers has been successfully conducted in India, Philippines and South Africa. In addition, Hervé Bouagnimbeck, coordinator of the study, and Maria Eugenia Manrique, PGS & Academy Intern, have recently collected the data for Nature et Progrès (COMAC Lozère), France. Maria will write her master thesis based on this case-study. The data collected in France draw from interviews with representatives of the Nature et Progrès Head Office in Alès and in-depth interviews with women and men who are PGS farmers in the Cevennes, Lozère.

Nature et Progrès is one of the first PGS in the world. It has developed its own comprehensive private organic standard, its own certification procedures, but is not allowed to call its products “organic” due to the third party certification requirements of the European Union regulation. However, the Nature et Progrès label is recognized positively by many organic consumers and some shops such as Bioocop are buying the N&P products (for reference, see [The Global PGS Newsletter, February 2012](#), V.2, N. 15, p.1).

The trainings of local researchers do not only enable face to face exchanges with local researchers, thus improving the communication, but also enable the coordinator of the study to visit the different local PGS groups, discuss with farmers and local stakeholders involved in the development of the PGS. For example, some visits in the Philippines included:

- Visit of the MASIPAG Biodiversity Center, which is located in the province of Bukidnon on the island of Mindanao.
- Discussion with Roberto D. Gajo, the Provincial Agriculturist of the Province of Quezon, the only region in the country officially recognizing PGS as a viable organic verification system, complementary and alternative to third party certification.
- Visit of the PGS market in Quezon and a newly formed PGS group in Luzon.

During the different meetings and discussions, many stakeholders were preoccupied with the same question: How can a Cameroonian, being based in Bonn/Germany, conduct a study in the framework of a Peruvian project? It was always a pleasure for the study coordinator to answer this question, as it provides a good opportunity to introduce the international collaboration within IFOAM and the activities implemented in/for Africa. This was very much appreciated by the local stakeholders.



Hervé at the MASIPAG Biodiversity Center

PGS as an alternative for building the foundation of trust and markets for Rattan (cane)

With contributions from Matthew John, IFOAM World Board Member and IFOAM PGS Committee member

A workshop on Rattan Eco-Certification took place in Bogor, Indonesia on March 6 and 7, 2012. Stakeholders from all along the value chain were present – farmers, traders, ministries of trade and forests and many others made up the discussion group. This workshop was organized through a collaborative effort between the Non-Timber Forest Products - Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP), the Indonesian Organic Alliance (AOI) and

the Consortium for Community-based Forest Management Systems (KPSHK).

Sessions on certification provided space for different ways of certifying rattan. Thibault Ledecq, from WWF, Laos gave an example of how they had gone through a Forest Stewardship Council process, which gave access to markets in Europe. Mathew John, from Keystone, shared about PGS and the progress it has made over the past few years – examples of India and Brazil allowed a debate to take place on whether such a system would fit in for a “wild plus cultivated” produce. Indro, from AOI, presented their efforts in establishing PGS in Indonesia through the system called PAMOR Indonesia. One of the speakers also presented the draft NTFP generic standards being developed by the Eco Labelling Institute (LEI).

Many of the participants agreed that PGS can be seen as a logical and simple system to get communities together and in turn, build the market. There were concerns about its acceptability nationally and internationally, but this would not keep the groups from exploring this scheme. The expectation is that, further down the line, a PGS scheme for rattan may receive more recognition in domestic and global markets. For a detailed report on the workshop, please visit this [link](#).

PGS Basics

“Shared Vision, Shared Ideals” is a well-known slogan among the PGS community. It is the title of an important founding document for the PGS movement, also referred to as the PGS concept document. The International PGS task force developed this document after the 2004 International Workshop on Alternative Certification, in Torres (Brazil), which was the very first global event on PGS.

“Shared Vision, Shared Ideals” is a 4-page document describing 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.

These are the key elements:

1. Shared vision
2. Participatory
3. Transparency
4. Trust – “integrity based approach”
5. Learning process
6. Horizontality

These elements are key to understanding the difference in approach in PGS, as compared to third-party certification.

The full document with a detailed description of the key elements of PGS is available on the IFOAM PGS Portal, free of charge. [Click here to download!](#)

Continental news: What’s new in...



...Europe

Italy: Eva Torremocha participated, as a member of the IFOAM PGS Committee, in a steering committee promoted by Urgenci, to organize an European CSA encounter which will take place in Milan, in October 2012. The CSA and PGS movements are working together to strengthen their links and deepen direct relationships among farmers and consumers. On Monday, April 2, Eva also took part in a meeting in Palermo, Italy. Several consumers and farmers organizations came together to discuss the possibility of creating a PGS network in Sicily.



...Asia and Oceania

French Polynesia: In January 2011, with the Law 2011-1 LP countries, the country recognized PGS at the same level of third-party certification. The Commission of Organic Agriculture (*Commission de l'agriculture biologique* - CAB) examined, on March 28, 2012, the record of incorporation of the PGS initiative Bio Fetia, composed of producers and consumers. After a meeting, the CAB issued a positive opinion which will be forwarded to the Cabinet. This opinion is only advisory. The government should decide within two or three months after confirmation of the inclusion of the PGS Bio Fetia in the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCOM). A POETCOM delegation is also expected in Tahiti next May. Once formalized the PGS Bio Fetia, currently covering Tahiti and Moorea, would support other local groups of organic small farmers.



...Latin America

Bolivia: During the third meeting of the Latin American Forum on PGS (La Paz, November 22 - 25, 2011) it was decided that a Facebook group would be created to gather stakeholders and facilitate communication online. This group is now active and if you are a user of the social network, just look for „Foro Latinoamericano Spg“. It is necessary to ask to join the group if you would like to participate in the discussions, which are mostly in Spanish. A good video overview (also in Spanish) of the last meeting of the Forum is also available online, [just click here](#).

Paraguay: The national agency for Seeds and plant Quality and Health (*Servicio Nacional de Calidad y Sanidad Vegetal y de Semillas* - SENAVE) and the Organic Producers Association (Asociación de Productores Orgánicos - APRO) of Paraguay have recently signed an agreement of cooperation. The agreement is part of an initiative led by the Department of Organic Agriculture, aimed at building an alternative system for organic certification suitable to small farmers: participatory certification. The Coordinator of the APRO, Genaro Ferreira, said „The technical assistance from SENAVE is a guarantee for APRO, because we intend to expand our range of activities (...). The association brings together about 400 members and over ten years producing organic products more than one thousand families have benefited.“ Celso Cubilla, Director of Organic Agriculture at SENAVE, mentioned that SENAVE's intention, as national competent authority, is to follow and guide this alternative system, which they would like to extend to other associations of producers. For more details, [visit this link](#).

Imprint

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