

“Greening” the grassroots: Small-scale farmers’ movements join hands

By Hans van Willenswaard (hans@schoolforwellbeing.org)

In honor of IFOAM’s 40th anniversary, celebrated last fall, the Thai Green Market Network and Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise responded to IFOAM’s “Birthday Wish List” with an offer to facilitate an IFOAM PGS Committee meeting at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The meeting is arranged to coincide with a gathering of the newly formed URGENCI Asia group. URGENCI is the network of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives, which are the most direct approach to farmer-consumer partnerships. The Steering Committee of the “Towards Organic Asia” (TOA) project, with pioneering partners from the Mekong region and Bhutan, will also be convening. All events and exchanges will take place during the **International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets**, in Bangkok, Thailand, from 7-12 May 2013. The aim of this forum is to create markets for small-scale organic farmers (or those in transition to organic) by connecting producers with mindful consumers and their organizations.

Over the years IFOAM has contributed to the remarkable growth of the organic sector all over the world. But this growth tends to be based on high-end markets and exports, characterized by prices far higher than conventional industrial agri-business products, which discourages many consumers, especially in domestic markets of countries with a less developed organic sector. PGS places the responsibility for quality support and control in the common hands of the diversity of stakeholders involved. This helps make the practice of guaranteeing their produce more affordable than third-party certification, the higher costs of which cannot be met by small-scale farmers.

Social enterprises that help facilitate building partnerships based on PGS have a special role to play in the development of an alternative market in different areas of the world, but especially in Asia. The promotion of PGS revitalizes the grassroots origin of IFOAM, which was founded in 1972 in Versailles, France, with support of Nature et Progrès, the federation that at that time already promoted PGS and is still recognized as an important reference for PGS and the broader organic movement.

La Via Campesina, the International Peasants Movement representing millions of farmer members all over the world, will participate in the forum. The hope is that the forum will offer the opportunity for these major organizations to join hands and build partnerships towards creating alternative markets, aimed at constituting a new economy based on food security, food sovereignty, and sustainable development.

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The last two days of the forum will be held as public events in conjunction with the Organic & Natural EXPO and annual Green Fair at the major exhibition center of Bangkok. The theme of the 6th Green Fair is “Community Organic – Organic Agriculture for all”.

The forum is free, and it is not too late to participate! For more information and to register for 2- or 4-day participation packages, please contact: Rita Phetphudhong rita.innovationforum@gmail.com or Thanapol Kheolamai thanapol@schoolforwellbeing.org

PGS in South Africa and the class dynamics

By Marc Lewis, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee

The *Malusi Food and Herb Co-operative* is a state-supported project (free use of land and water resources) on approximately three-quarters of a hectare of land in inner-city Johannesburg (South Africa) that has been in operation for the past six years, and provides a base for a diverse set of livelihoods for a group of six of Johannesburg’s poorer urban residents. In the past, produce was sold to the informal sector through garden-gate sales, as well as to small food retail outlets through less informal channels. Local residents would purchase leafy greens (e.g. pumpkin leaves, spinach, and kale) while passing the garden on their way home from work. The garden is ideal for such sales as it is located alongside one of the city’s busy public transport hubs. Yet, its clientele are mainly unemployed or the relatively poorer of the population and the produce is sold at a minimum price. The project has always employed organic production methods, but the members could not ask the price premium that certified organic receives in South Africa’s formal retail chain.

In December 2011, *Malusi* was assessed and received PGS Natural Assurance endorsement by the Bryanston Organic and Natural Market. More than a year later, Malusi delivered its first produce to the market that is located in a well-resourced middle-class suburb of Johannesburg. An important success, but what kept the group from accessing the potential benefits of a growing consumer market before that? This article will explore some of the difficulties of informal producers linking up to established formal markets in the South African context, and whether PGS can play a role in poverty alleviation.

While Malusi’s produce supported a local food network, the members working the garden were not able to tap into the more lucrative markets servicing middle-class South Africa, they were limited in their mar-

keting choices. My research¹ suggests that this dependence on the informal sector is a microcosm of the broader social divides that are inherent within the South African context and which perpetuate high levels of food insecurity, poverty and exploitation – further perpetuating the class and race divides that are a legacy of apartheid South Africa. In Malusi’s case, an inability to conceptualize the potential value of organically produced food, and lack of middle-class norms such as transport and access to information (e.g. internet) were the main hindrances to accessing the middle-class market situated about 30km away. Due to the limited size of the productive space and the consequent limitations on productive capacity, hiring transport became economically unviable. Producers were restrained in their marketable potential and continued to just get by on local sales, though only just.



Malusi Food and Herb Co-operative with the Ponty Tower in the background.

So how did Malusi manage to expand its market? It was the involvement in the project of a retired middle-

1 Thesis title: Social dynamics and sustainability in three community garden projects in the City of Johannesburg

class civil servant, Gladys,² and her social and financial capital that catalyzed this change³. With her networks, contacts and knowledge she was able to arrange transport, access to the internet and facilitate communication between Malusi and other more lucrative markets. Gladys now hires two workers to maintain her plot (approximately half of the total of the co-operative's space). These workers do most of the manual labor, and much of the harvesting. Gladys sorts and selects the produce, and together they package according to market specifications. Gladys then drives the produce to market, where it is sold at a premium, in bulk, and as organic. She earns considerably more than she did in the past when only selling to passersby. The fact that she now employs the two workers is indicative of this increase in earnings.

The other section of the co-operative space is still controlled by the co-operative group and while some of their produce manages to find its way to the middle-class market through the support from Gladys, this is not always the case. In this instance poorer farmers are only able to access premium market space through the support from the middle-classes, both through logistical and market support. From a social justice and empowerment perspective, this arrangement does not challenge existing inequalities.

Could civil society, such as a not-for-profit, non-state actor, or even perhaps the state, further support such access for example by providing information capacity, logistical economies of scale and non-exploitative business support, and thereby reduce the gap between these two divergent class structures? For Malusi and its membership, only time will tell whether market access will continue, and whether this access, through the PGS mechanism, which provides a viable and reliable market alternative, will in fact improve their abilities to increase their income from the garden and their overall well-being.

PGS at International CSA conference in California

By Joy Daniel (IIRD/URGENCI - jdaniel@iird.org.in)

The International Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) conference was held in California from 22-24 January 2013. URGENCI, the international network of Community Supported Agriculture, was among the organizers of the conference. Over 500 participants from around the globe joined the conference.

Among the many themes that were discussed, Andre Leu (IFOAM President) and Joy Daniel (IIRD, India), emphasized the potential of PGS for certification of organic produce by small farmers involved in CSA in the US and other countries.

There has been a significant growth in CSA networks around the world. In the US alone, there are over 6,000 CSA programs with the participation of more than 12,500 farmers. In China, there are over 400 CSA programs that have come up in a span of less than 5 years.

Most of these CSA programs do not have any organic guarantee systems, although many of the farmers involved practice organic farming. It was however noted



Andre Leu during his presentation at the conference in California.

that there are regulatory hurdles in the implementation of PGS in certain countries, particularly when there is a high volume of sales. It was suggested that organizations such as IFOAM and URGENCI should work with the farmers and regulatory authorities to integrate and promote PGS among CSA networks.

² Pseudonym used to protect identity of project members.

³ Gladys formerly managed the garden through Johannesburg's local government social welfare department. Her inclusion into the co-operative when she retired from her post is contentious and would require many more words to justly describe. While it is important, it will not be described here.

At a pre-conference event organized by URGENCI, Andre Leu presented the activities carried out by IFOAM and possibilities for collaboration between IFOAM and URGENCI was discussed. A sub-committee within URGENCI will look at these possibilities for partnering with IFOAM in lobbying for common concerns related to food security, small-scale family farmers, and local markets.

Call for papers open: 18th IFOAM Organic World Congress

By the IFOAM PGS Team

The IFOAM Organic World Congress (OWC) is organized every 3 years in a different country. The aim of the congress and its surrounding activities (preconference, IFOAM General Assembly, side-events and organic fair) is to share experiences, innovations and knowledge about the global organic sector with a special focus on the organizing country. Turkey will be hosting the 18th edition of the IFOAM OWC, to take place in Istanbul from 13-15 October 2014.

The organizers have recently issued a call for papers and announced the main theme of the event: "Building organic bridges". A total of three tracks and a series of workshops will allow participants to explore the organic sector from an array of perspectives.

For the PGS community, the OWC presents an important opportunity to showcase the significant contribu-

tion that PGS makes to the organic sector as a whole, and to discuss further development. Of the many sessions where PGS voices should be represented, a few examples include: the main track sessions "Re-thinking organic certification" and "Potentials and challenges for improving rural livelihoods" and the practitioners' track session "Building organic bridges between stakeholders". We take this opportunity to invite representatives of PGS initiatives, PGS supporters and practitioners to submit their applications as panelists, scientific speakers or to host workshops, so that PGS is well represented throughout the event. Please visit the website <http://www.owc2014.org/> for more information on topics and on the application process. The deadline for submissions is 30 September 2013.

Continental news: What's new in...



...Africa

- **Africa training manual:** A training video was launched this year as an output of the African Organic Agriculture Training Manual project implemented by FiBL, IFOAM, African National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs) and agricultural experts from across Africa. The video describes effective locally adapted marketing techniques and includes good examples of PGS initiatives. It illustrates with examples from Uganda, Ethiopia and South Africa, how to become an entrepreneur and how to learn about market opportunities, market requirements and marketing techniques for organic products in Africa. The video is available online in English (click [here](#) to access it directly) and other training materials are available for download free of cost on www.organic-africa.net.



...Latin America

- **Mexico:** The Red Mexicana of Tianguis y Mercados Organicos has launched a new [website](#) (in Spanish) with updated content, illustrations and many resources for PGS initiatives. The map showing the location of all the groups involved in the PGS is a really nice feature, especially useful for consumers searching for products close to where they are. There are also different publications available for download, such as [a brief summary of the guidelines](#) adopted by this PGS, which provides a good example of communication material including information on the process of certification for producers, consumers and the general public. Visit the website and send your feedback to the group, via email to coordinacion@tianguisorganicos.org.mx or using their social media channels such as [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)



...North America and Europe

- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) has been working to raise awareness about the value of having a PGS complement to the National Organic Program. Toward this end, CNG staffed exhibit tables at several annual sustainable agriculture conferences over the winter, including events organized by Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA), Georgia Organics, Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG), and Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI). These events were not only used to reach new audiences, they were a perfect occasion to host informal mealtime gatherings of CNG members to discuss group orders, farm visits, and other collaborative opportunities. CNG has also stepped into the world of social media, maintaining active accounts on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- **USA:** The May/June issue of *Grit Magazine* includes a nice profile of Certified Naturally Grown, written by a CNG farmer in Tennessee. Find it online [here](#).

Imprint

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