

## PGS activities alongside the East African Organic Conference

By Joelle Katto-Andrighetto, IFOAM Value Chain Manager



From July 2 to 4, 2013, Dar es Salaam hosted the third East African Organic Conference under the theme “Sharing achievements made and lessons learned”. The conference brought together organic stakeholders from the East African region to share experiences learned since the launch of the East African Organic Products Standards (EAOPS) six years ago.

One of the means of verification envisioned from the beginning for this standard is Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS).

With the EAOPS not yet recognized as equivalent by any importing country outside the region, its use is currently limited to products for the national and regional markets in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. As of today, third-party certification uptake of the regional standard has been low, and hence PGS is currently by far the main means of verification for the EAOPS, with thousands of farmers involved in various PGS initiatives in the three countries.

PGS were intensively discussed alongside the conference. A two-day workshop was organized in Morogoro just prior to the conference (July 1 and 2) for the regional PGS practitioners. During this workshop, the 18 participants shared their experiences on how PGS initiatives can operate concretely in the region and the various ways they can meet the specific criteria for approval of PGS developed by the National Organic Agriculture Movements (NOAMs) in East Africa.

Indeed, East Africa has a particularly conducive framework for PGS, whereby compliance with the regional standard is voluntary, and PGS can access the regional organic mark if they undergo an approval process by their respective NOAM. The approval is based on the criteria for PGS approval, which have been developed commonly at the regional level. The implementation of the PGS approval procedure is just starting. The workshop was a way for the NOAM staff and the people working in the PGS initiatives to get more familiar with the approval criteria and how PGS initiatives could meet them.

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PGS Farmers during the Morogoro PGS field trip

The criteria are unique to the region but still broad enough to enable a wide range of approaches under the overall PGS concept. PGS groups in the region have very different profiles, and hence are developing different systems to meet their specific situations. Groups range from a well-organized vegetable cooperative supplying tourism-oriented hotels and restaurants, to an NGO-supported rural community group supplying a local organic shop, to a group of farmers marketing organic mangoes to regional traders and processors, and anything in between.

In addition to the workshop, a three-hour PGS session was organized as a parallel session of the conference, on July 4. It gathered about 60 participants. Presentations were given by various people including the staff of NOAMs working as “national PGS coordinators” in the region, and myself. Presentations were alternated with lively rounds of questions and debates with the

participants. Obviously, PGS attracted a lot of interest and questions from the audience, which was a broader pool of people working on organic agriculture in the East African region.



PGS workshop in Morogoro, Tanzania

PGS is still in its infancy in East Africa and it is very interesting to observe and contribute to its process of development, particularly because the constraints and challenges are not (for once!) of a regulatory nature. The organic political framework is conducive of PGS. The NOAMs are organized and politically supportive of PGS. NGOs and donors are supporting the process. Whether or not PGS will be a success story in the region therefore will depend primarily on the ability of the stakeholders to harness the concept and exploit the full potential of the PGS approach, and link it to effective organic market access to make it sustainable in the long run.

## Organic farmers in the Philippines welcome extension of PGS recognition for another three years

By Rowena Buena and Alfie Pulumbarit, MASIPAG



After more than two years of information campaigns, networking and lobbying, the recognition of PGS and other types of organic certification has been extended for another three years in the Philippines. The Secretary of the Department of Agriculture issued earlier this year the DA Administrative Order No. 08, Series of 2013, entitled: *Amendment to Rules 15.1 and 17.1 of the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Republic Act (RA) 10068 otherwise known as “The Organic Agriculture Act of 2010”*.

The issuance of the order is timely as PGS and other forms of certification would only be recognized up until April of this year according to the original text of the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010.

The amendment states that the period of voluntary compliance to Third Party Certification is extended until April 1, 2016. During this three year period, the community based and Participatory Guarantee Systems (referred to in the Philippines as 1st and 2nd party certification, respectively), will continue to be recognized side

by side with 3rd party certification, while the Bureau of Agriculture, Fisheries Products Standards (BAFPS) shall ensure that all regulations and institutional modifications necessary for the implementation of the said provision are put in place.

The Administrative Order followed the National PGS Conference organized by MASIPAG in January 2013 with support from IFOAM and funded by the SSNC, where farmers, producers, non-government organizations, representatives of the academia, consumers, representatives from local government units and agencies all over the country called for moratorium on the implementation of Section 17 of the RA 10068. The conference resolution was presented to the National Organic Agriculture Board during their meeting on January 15 by representatives of farmers' organizations, PGS Pilipinas and IFOAM President Andre Leu. On February 19, 2013 the draft of the Administrative Order was ready and it was approved on March 8, 2013. For more details on the January conference see [Andre Leu's article](#) in the Jan/Feb. issue of this newsletter.

The Administrative Order gives more time and opportunity to lobby for the amendment of the RA 10068 towards the full legitimization of PGS as a



Andre Leu with the PGS Pilipinas convener group

form of organic certification. Likewise, this is also an opportunity for PGS practitioners to grow in number, create new markets and networks and to entice more smallholder farmers to shift to organic agriculture. Therefore this is a welcome development for MASIPAG and PGS Pilipinas, a network formally launched during the National PGS Conference last January 2013. This network gathers PGS practitioners and advocates, and aims at facilitating the development of organic agriculture among smallholder farmers, help building the domestic market for organic products and working for PGS recognition.

## Potentials and challenges of PGS discussed at Agroecology Encounter in Brazil

*By Eva Torremocha, Member of the IFOAM PGS Committee*



The Third International Encounter on Agroecology, organized by the [Brazilian Institute Giramundo](#), took place from July 31 to August 4 in Botucatu, Brazil. More than 2000 people participated in the event, among them international speakers like Vandana Shiva, Miguel Altieri

and Victor Toledo and representatives from the agriculture-related ministries in Brazil. PGS was present at all stages: in the plenary sessions, in a 4-hour PGS workshop and during the carousel of experiences.

The PGS workshop was conducted by Laércio Meirelles from the Centro Ecovida and by Romeu Leite from the Campinas natural agriculture association [ANC](#), both members of the Latin American Forum on PGS. Faviana Scorza from FERIA Verde, Costa Rica and Alberto

Gómez Perazzoli from the Agroecology Network of Uruguay both shared their PGS experiences and pointed out the qualities of PGS for the establishment of short supply chains and the creation of awareness and a sense for cooperation in the communities. Two other presentations focused on the PGS regulation issue. Rogério Dias, from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, introduced the current Brazilian regulation where PGS and OCS (Social Control Organizations) are officially recognised as valid certification schemes. Pedro Guzmán, from Agrosolidaria, in Colombia emphasized the need to establish appropriate processes to ensure qualitative participation of the organised civil society in PGS regulation.

“Challenges are necessarily linked to potentials; i.e. any challenge ‘derives’ from a potential under development,” this was a main thought visible throughout

all the PGS discussions during the event.

PGS gather diversities (farming methods, cultures organizations, aims, etc.). This is a great richness. It also presents a main challenge. How to ensure mutual respect, understanding and cooperation within such a diversity of natures, goals, strategies and contexts? Which strategies to adopt for a unified movement?

PGS are in permanent evolution. They are flexible and adaptable to change because they are a “living” system and decision processes can be quickly undertaken. At the same time the organization of such an evolving diversity and the choice of the appropriate coordination scheme can be truly challenging.

PGS are increasingly spreading beyond the organic world. Fair trade, local market initiatives etc., various sectors are starting to adopt PGS elements. How to deal with them? While this is a great chance for creating synergies with other sectors, it is a challenge how to handle opening up to new contexts.

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PGS - this was another conclusion drawn from the discussion - has particularly high potential for three specific social groups: Farmers, women and the youth. For farmers PGS can be a path towards higher levels of freedom. PGS relieves them from intermediaries' pressures to access the markets and allows them to farm in a traditional or indigenous way. Some PGS go even beyond that and are debating the access to land, water, seeds and other farming resources. For women, PGS have demonstrated to be an inclusive tool. They have a more domestic scale, thus, women are much more likely to participate in production and commercialisation duties in PGS. For the youth, PGS have showed to be a bridge for shifting from consumption to production. Social processes such as PGS (and food sovereignty experiences) are leading them from the cities and consumption models, to farming systems in the rural area.

Thanks to their systemic nature, their flexibility, their root-based structure, PGS are always in evolution. They are “living” systems. This entails that they have diverse potentials and many associated challenges. Paraphrasing Laércio Meirelles's words, I would suggest to go ahead leaving room for creativity, as the better way to face and solve those ever emerging challenges.

## IFOAM officially recognized PGS initiatives: the list keeps growing!

*By the IFOAM PGS Team*



During the last IFOAM PGS Committee meeting that took place in May this year, the members of the committee were busy discussing various issues, focusing especially on the further development of PGS worldwide. Among these issues, one topic that required more time and reflection was the assessment of PGS initiatives that have applied for official IFOAM recognition.

This evaluation process is always very dynamic, starting with information exchanges via e-mail and ending with heated debates during the in-person meetings of the PGS Committee. Interesting discussions are always raised about how each applicant PGS addresses the different areas covered by the Self Evaluation Form, the document that provides the basis for the assessment.

As a result of this meeting, two PGS initiatives have received official IFOAM recognition and are now granted access to the IFOAM PGS Logo, which can be used on their communication materials but not on the products. These are: Bio Caledonia, from New Caledonia (Oceania); and Nature et Progrès, from France (Europe).

Bio Caledonia and Nature et Progrès have very different

history and profiles. Nature et Progrès has been operating since 1972 and it is considered the first PGS initiative ever documented. With over 800 producers involved as members throughout France, and with its consolidated practices and documents, Nature et Progrès serves as a reference for PGS worldwide. Bio Caledonia, on the other hand, is a quite recent initiative operating for just about 4 years. Nevertheless, operating in the small territory of New Caledonia it already counts over 60 producers involved, of which 40 have already received certification.

A very interesting characteristic that both initiatives have in common is the high level of consumer involvement. This is also related to the fact that Nature

et Progrès and Bio Caledonia are associations formed by producers and consumers. Both pay a fee in order to become members, which supports the financial sustainability of the organizations running the system. Also, consumers have the opportunity to participate in the local committees that deliberate about decisions on certification and join the farm visits or inspections, with a very active role in the certification process.

The PGS initiatives that have been officially recognized by IFOAM are listed on a special part of the IFOAM Global Online PGS Database, which keeps growing each year. To learn more about the process of evaluation and to see the full list, please visit the [IFOAM PGS Portal](#).

## New video released: PGS at the Organic Symposium in Bangkok, 2013

As reported in the [last issue of this newsletter](#), PGS was a prominent topic in the Organic Symposium held in Bangkok on 10-11 May this year.

The IFOAM PGS team has compiled a video on the symposium, containing the key passages taken from the presentations of the PGS committee members and IFOAM president Andre Leu during the event.

Make sure to watch the video! It is available for free in the [IFOAM PGS Video Library](#).



PGS Video snapshot

## Continental news: What's new in...



### ...Latin America and the Caribbean

- **Latin America:** The Latin American Forum of PGS has launched a website. Even though it is still under construction, the website already includes links to documents produced during the meetings held by the forum since 2004, articles on various relevant topics and a virtual forum for discussion. Information is available in different languages, mostly Spanish and Portuguese, but also English. To visit the site, follow [this link](#).
- **Colombia:** On July 4, 2013 the Participatory Guarantee System in Risaralda was launched at the regional autonomous corporation (Corporación Autónoma Regional de Risaralda - CARDER), a local government body responsible for managing the environment and the natural renewable resources in this department of the country. The PGS emerged from a collective management process promoted by several institutions aimed certifying the experiences of alternative agriculture in Risaralda. 48 producers took part in the event and a label called "Sistema Participativo de Garantía en Risaralda" was launched. Peasants' organizations were present, as well as researchers from the Environmental Research Institute of the Technological University of Pereira, representatives of CARDER, representatives of the *Corporación Regional Agroecología*, Agrosolidaria and UNISARC. For more information, please contact via phone: Sebastián Barrera (+573137245) or Mónica Salazar (+573151019).



## ...North America and Europe

- **USA:** A recent issue of the magazine Edible Buffalo (NY) included an article about different certification programs and their meaning, especially how they differentiate themselves from the national organic program. [Certified Naturally Grown](#) was one of the first three programs profiled, between USDA Organic and Demeter Biodynamic. The article is targeted at clarifying to consumers the meaning of different quality labels found on agricultural products and concluded with a nice advice: “When in doubt, ask.” You can access the article [here](#).
- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown farmer participated in a Keynote “debate” at the NOFA Summer Conference: “[Is Organic Certification Right for You?](#)” The debaters were four farmers, two certified organic (the “pro” side), and two not certified organic (supposedly the “con” side), including CNG’s Justine Denison, of Denison Farm which operates a 500 member CSA and sells at two farmers markets. Alice Varon, CNG’s Executive Director, wrote a blog post about it. You can read it [here](#). Following the conference the story about CNG appeared in major US newspapers and received nationwide attention. Click [here](#) to access the article in the Washington post.



## ...Asia and Oceania

- **Thailand:** The Organic Agriculture Innovation Network (OAIN) convened a meeting about PGS in Thailand in the beginning of July. It was a very dynamic two-day meeting with key actors including the Holistic Health Foundation (a pioneer from the first hour with Senator Rosana Tositrakul), GreenNet, ISAC, Lemon Farm, Green Market Network and Towards Organic Asia, with a total of around 30 participants. There is a common intention to form a PGS platform. For more information: GreenNet: [info@greennet.or.th](mailto:info@greennet.or.th), Green Market Network: [greenmarketthai@gmail.com](mailto:greenmarketthai@gmail.com): Visit Towards Organic Asia [on facebook](#).

## Imprint

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