

Updates on Participatory Guarantee Systems worldwide.

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IFOAM Family of Standards: Two more PGS Standards approved

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM Value Chain and Programs Assistant



In August 2013, IFOAM officially approved and welcomed the **Vietnam PGS Standards** and the **MASIPAG Organic Standard** (Philippines) in to the IFOAM Family of Standards. Together with the **Nature et Progrès Standards** (France) and the **Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos Standard** (Mexico) that were already approved in 2011, there are now four PGS Standards listed in the Family.

The **IFOAM Family of Standards** is a program launched by IFOAM in 2011 to assess and approve standards based on the Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards (**COROS**). The Family aims to recognize the diversity of organic standards while unifying them around the concept of COROS-equivalence, and drawing the line between organic and non-organic standards.

Participatory standard setting

The Vietnam PGS Standards and the MASIPAG Organic Standard, were both developed in a participatory process. The Vietnam PGS Organic Standards were drafted by the PGS Coordination Committee in Vietnam, in line with IFOAM Basic Standards (now replaced by the IFOAM Standard) and the National Basic Standards for Organic Products issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). All members of the Vietnam PGS network, including farmer groups, traders, consumers, NGOs and the Vietnam Farmer's Union were included in discussions and their input fed into the drafting process. For the team it was important to develop good standards that support local market development and certification. As Koen den Braber mentioned in the application form for Vietnam PGS:

"Our advantage is the fact that there are no standards for the domestic market in Vietnam yet. The MARD Standards from 2006 are not being used since there was no certification system set up together with developing these standards. Our PGS is therefore the only organic certification available for domestic consumers and

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producers.” (From the Family of Standards application form, 2011)

MASIPAG also used the IFOAM Basic Standard as a main reference for their standard development. Another important source was the organic standard developed by the Asian Research Network of Organic Agriculture (ARNOA). The National MASIPAG Farmers Guarantee Systems (MFGS) Committee composed of 6 farmers, the 3 regional coordinators and the national coordinator, did the drafting. In order to facilitate the participation of more practitioners in the drafting process, MASIPAG organized farmers’ workshops. Dr. Charito P. Medina elaborates in the application form for MASIPAG that:

“The MASIPAG Organic Standard was developed with farmers, therefore it is easier for them to follow and understand, so the expansion to other farmers organizations will also be easier and faster.” (From the Family of Standards application form, 2011)

Proof of credibility

Achieving recognition in the Family is not an easy process. The approval is based on an equivalence assessment against the COROS. Only well drafted standards that sufficiently address the various objectives can pass the assessment. Consequently, approval of standards in the IFOAM Family of Standards is usually preceded by a review process, during which IFOAM gives feedback and identifies areas of improvement. This kind

of technical review provided by IFOAM in the ongoing process of standard development is an important benefit that comes with the application for the IFOAM Family of Standards.

The fact that four PGS standards are now approved in the Family is an excellent indicator of the potential of PGS and a significant contribution to increase credibility.

Vietnam PGS and MASIPAG both applied for approval of their standards in 2011. Since then, their standards have been revised and feedback from IFOAM experts has been integrated into the draft revisions. The results are two excellent organic standards that meet all COROS objectives.

Parallel to the IFOAM Family of Standards recognition, the two PGS initiatives have also applied for IFOAM PGS recognition. PGS Vietnam has finalized the process and is now officially recognized, becoming part of the PGS initiatives that have a special place in the Global Online PGS Database and have been granted access to the [IFOAM PGS Logo](#). For MASIPAG the recognition process will be finalized soon. You will find more about this in the next issue of this newsletter.

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Is Southern Africa a new growth point for PGS?

By Konrad Hauptfleisch, IFOAM Academy and Programs Manager



Konrad recently conducted a PGS training in Zambia. In this article, he shares with us his experience and his view on PGS development in Southern Africa.

Southern African organic stakeholders have been talking since 2008 about collaborating and networking on organic agriculture development issues in general, and PGS in particular. After 4 years, indications are that PGS is gaining market recognition and even government support and acceptance across the region. The latest initiative we know of in this region was initiated from outside the traditional organic sector, by a happy coincidence. Sometimes such coincidences can change destinies.

It is early October and Mbewe Khama, from Lumuno Organic Farm, drives me to our workshop venue a few kilometers past the Zambian international airport. “Normally [COLEACP-PIP](#) only works with big established businesses ready to export to Europe and the like,” he says. “Lumuno Organics is an SME¹, and we are currently focusing on local markets with our chillies and chili sauces.” Luckily for Mbewe and for PGS, COLEACP-PIP, a large facilitating organization based in Brussels, saw something in the small agricultural business, and decided to assist them in the implementation of PGS for their local marketing initiative so I was asked to come and assess this business, and establish whether PGS would be the way for them to go.

¹ Ed. N.: Small Medium Enterprise.

Lumuno Organic Farm is a recently created company, established in 2007, and based in Lusaka. It operates its own farm and also purchases produce from large and small-scale producers with which it has developed an association. The main crops produced are chili peppers, some vegetables and herbs and spices. At the moment, all production is for the local market with chili, particularly, being sold dried or processed as a sauce. Lumuno has planned to implement a PGS incorporating its farmers (more or less 50), **OPPAZ² staff**, local retailers and the local Kasisi Agricultural training centre.



Participants during the workshop

The specific objectives of my assignment were to establish the feasibility of PGS being successfully implemented. On the first day, an opening session was held with all the participants – they were given the opportunity to share their background, expectations and understanding of organics and guarantee systems. This was followed by a session where they were introduced to the principles of PGS and the key elements and features. This was followed by the obligatory farm visit where Mbeve extolled the virtues of companion planting, manure teas, marigolds as pest repellent and the shelf life of organic tomatoes.

The participants enjoyed the farm visit, where knowledge and experiences were shared, focusing more on technical crop production issues, irrigation, soil fertility and crop protection. It gave me a good opportunity to assess the level of knowledge and understanding amongst the group and especially the lead farmers. I was impressed with the general understanding of production principles, the level of understanding of quality and conformity assessment and the commitment to organic practices in typically harsh dry tropical environments – the main operational theatre for the Southern African farmer.

We concluded the day looking at structures, management systems and some marketing perspectives

of PGS. Tasks were set for the following day: participants were asked to do some homework in order to prepare the feasibility mapping for the following day.

The second day dawned warm and wonderful (the rule of thumb for Zambia!) while we reflected on the previous day's activity as well as sharing some experience on a previous PGS training at Kasisi Agricultural Training College, attended by some of the participants. It was a wonderful training leaving all participants positive and motivated, but has been languishing, as business has not followed the excitement of the training sessions. This was an important lesson, as it gave everyone renewed insight into one of the key preconditions for successful PGS implementation: the existence of a market with clear potential. Most of the day was dedicated to a mapping exercise: the participants were divided into 2 groups, and given the task of assessing the feasibility of Lumuno for training in and implementation of PGS. The groups gave feedback on their exercise, and suggested ways and means to develop an effective PGS system.

It is clear that the Lumuno Organics stakeholders want a PGS in place. It was generally agreed that the existing Zambian standards would be used as baseline production guidelines for the PGS. A logo needs to be agreed upon – a National logo under the control of OPPAZ was suggested. While national co-ordination by OPPAZ is preferred, the group also wants the PGS to be bottom-up, farmer-driven and owned.



Farm visit during the workshop

Lumuno Organics is reasonably well established, and the group dynamic is positive and well organized. There is a good understanding of organic and PGS, and the fact that Kasisi Training Centre has had previous PGS training, means that a good knowledge base exists to make the implementation of PGS possible, and give it a good chance of success. A few topics were brought up as possible weaknesses or threats for the successful implementation of PGS, and these are also the areas

² Ed. N.: Organic Producers and Processors Association of Zambia

that will need special focus during the implementation and subsequent training: there needs to be a clear link to market, or at least a demonstrable potential for such a link to be established; there is a strong need to develop the necessary entrepreneurial skills and marketing acumen to ensure that the market is developed and serviced effectively.

Closely linked to this, is the need for financial sustainability. But looking at the initiative and commitment of Mbewe and his lead farmers, as well as the other stakeholders, including the local media who attended the workshop, it is clear why COLEACP-PIP thought Lumuno Organics is a gamble worth taking. I believe it is, too. And PGS, wherever it wants to bud and blossom, is worth the risk and the investment.

Trends in PGS development: the role of private-public spaces for PGS sustainability

By Jannet Villanueva, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee, Latin America



In recent years PGS has spread quickly through the world and in Latin America, as a response to the need small farmers have to access market opportunities mainly through short value chains. In fact, PGS has emerged as a tool to address a market with differentiated

and properly identified products. But in order to use this tool, it is necessary to strengthen production capacities, in post harvest and in the generation of added value.

While creating market linkages, small farmers participate in different marketing strategies that provide access to fresh information about demand. This forces them to review and re-think their own production process, it implies changes in the producer's own market approach: moving away from the point of view of supply to a perspective based on information from demand, farmers begin to produce according to what consumers want to buy. The benefit that the organic or agroecological approach provides to this process is that the various marketing strategies are not only focusing on marketing per se, but they also sensitize, inform and share with consumers the importance of a healthy diet and of protecting the environment. This is a major difference if compared to the conventional markets, as consumers learn from and understand producers, who contribute to promoting consumer health issues, protecting the environment and to raising awareness about the relations between supply and seasonality, climate change, seed availability, etc. Through this approach, agricultural biodiversity, traditional knowledge, environmental and cultural aspects are valued.

As producers face the market and realize that the gains are greater when negotiations take place in a collective way, they reconsider, participate and contribute to strengthening their organizations. The perspective from the demand side, the redesign of their own production processes, the generation of added value and organizational strengthening, facilitate processes of supply organization and production planning. These are very important because they allow organized producers to serve the market with regularity, higher quality and quantity. Also, these learning processes focus not only on production, but also on management and organization; and all of them are strategic for the development of local, regional and national markets.

PGS has emerged as a tool to address a market with differentiated and properly identified products. But in order to use this tool, it is necessary to strengthen production capacities, in post harvest and in the generation of added value.

The market perspective is an important element to be taken into account by the various PGS experiences. Not all producers share the same vision even when belonging to the same organization or initiative. We must take into account the different "market visions" of small farmers, organized or not: while for some farmers the market vision does not go beyond the opportunity to enter a local market, for others it might include participating in a marketing strategy outside their local

area, and for others even outside their region. The PGS must be able to adapt to different contexts and realities of small producers; this flexibility does not mean failing to comply with the basic principles of organic production, or with the concept of PGS itself.

In Latin America, PGS legal frameworks are being developed in private-public spaces, in which government and civil society representatives interact. It is important to note the trend in various countries to produce legal frameworks which are making PGS processes more complex, so that instead of being accessible to small organized producers, they become too complicated for those whose market vision is simpler; and therefore, less inclusive. The diversity of PGS initiatives loses wealth and strength when only one model, built with a single view from the government or even from civil society actors, is promoted. PGS legal frameworks should be useful to the illiterate peasant farmers who live far up in the mountains, speak only their native language and produce in very small scale, as much as they can be useful to producers that are part of PGS

initiatives implemented by local governments and adopt various marketing strategies, such as selling via farmers' markets, "tianguis", organic shops, deliveries, among others.

The sustainability of PGS relies on two important elements: 1) the involvement and empowerment of stakeholders, which exist when producers endorse the PGS proposal and perceive this proposal as consistent with their reality, easy to understand and within their reach; and 2) the strengthening of private-public spaces, for dialogue and discussion to promote PGS not only from the perspective of oversight and control, but also to achieve the development of domestic markets. Building private-public spaces does not mean that once the state is involved in the process of implementing the PGS, it will have all the responsibility for the PGS, leaving out the civil society. Building private-public spaces means building a strategic alliance where public and private visions unite efforts to strengthen market development in the medium and long term for the benefit of small producers.

IFOAM Annual Global PGS Survey 2013

By Anne Thieme (IFOAM Value Chain Intern)



On 23 September, we launched our Annual Global PGS Survey 2013. Since 2011, this survey has been carried out on a yearly basis by the IFOAM PGS Team and aims to collect data on the current stages of development of PGS worldwide, gathering up-to-date figures and new information. After compilation and structuring, the new data enables us to strengthen and provide support to PGS initiatives and to update the [IFOAM Global PGS Map](#), an interactive map showing PGS details in different countries. Furthermore, the survey results are made available through our annual publication [The World of Organic Agriculture – Statistics and Trends](#), edited by IFOAM in cooperation with FiBL. Of

course we will also inform you about this year's survey outcome via the Global PGS Newsletter.

The survey is divided in three parts: the first addresses PGS initiatives already well developed; the second addresses PGS initiatives that are still in the early stages; and the third is targeted at all PGS stakeholders and it is done via an online questionnaire.

In this year's survey, PGS initiatives were also invited to describe and state their opinions on how knowledge exchange happens within their initiative. This information will contribute to a study investigating how PGS facilitates knowledge exchange between farmers.

You can still participate in our Global PGS Survey 2013 via the [online questionnaire](#), which will be available until 15 November 2013. We would like to thank everybody who has taken time to share the latest information about PGS with us!

Continental news: What's new in...



...Asia and Oceania

- **Vietnam:** The International Conference on Advancing Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) took place in Hanoi in Vietnam from the September 25 to 26, 2013. The event was organized with support of VECO Vietnam and Both-ENDS, in association with Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association (VOAA). The conference resulted in the formulation of recommendations on the relevance and application of PGS on family farmers in general, and with Vietnamese smallholder farmers in particular. Andre Leu, IFOAM President, joined as a key speaker and Chris May, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee, also participated in the event. A conference report and the joint recommendation will soon be available, but photos of the event can already be seen online following this [link](#). The cooperation between VECO Vietnam and Both-Ends has also resulted in the production of the video “PGS – A new way forward”, which has been recently launched in English and Vietnamese. To watch the video, please follow this [link](#).



...Latin America and the Caribbean

- **Peru:** From 10-12 September, the fourth [congress](#) of the Latin American Scientific Society for Agroecology (SOCLA) was held at La Molina National Agrarian University in Lima. Hervé Bouagnimbeck, IFOAM Organic for Africa! Coordinator attended this event and presented the preliminary results of the “Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and PGS” currently being conducted by IFOAM. The event was also a good opportunity to learn from Latin American experiences in developing organic sectors, thus contributing to South-South collaborations with African counterparts.
- **Brazil:** This year, the Brazilian Law on Organic Agriculture (n.10831) celebrates its 10th anniversary. The law is quite unique as it recognizes PGS and Third-Party certification on the same level, while also including the possibility for small, family farmers to sell directly to consumers and institutional markets even without certification. Of course, implementation of the law did not take place immediately after publication, but was possible through various technical regulations launched during the last decade, addressing different areas from production, to accreditation, labeling and use of the national seal. According to figures from the Brazilian government, organic production increases in the country by 20 to 30% each year and is the fastest growing sector in the food industry. The Brazilian Regulation is a pioneer in the movement towards a more inclusive organic sector, a good model for other countries. A documentary called “Brasil Organico” was launched this year and it shows different realities in organic production in Brazil. The full version in English is being prepared and but a teaser is already available online: <http://vimeo.com/55122176>.



...North America and Europe

- **Spain:** On 29 October the “Centro de investigación IFAPA de Chipiona”, Andalucía, organizes a workshop on promoting consumption of organic products. The workshop will present benefits of consuming organic products, different systems for commercialization and experiences of associations of producers and consumers in the region. Eva Torremocha, member of the IFOAM World Board and the IFOAM PGS Committee will join the event to discuss the PGS approach. For information, please visit this [link](#).
- **USA:** A radio interview on Eat Drink Explore, broadcast in the central coast of California, examines the difference between certified organic and Certified Naturally Grown. Available via YouTube here: [“Organic Alternative: Certified Naturally Grown”](#).



...Africa

- **Tanzania:** Initiated by the US American non-profit organization Plant With Purpose, two local markets selling organic produce exclusively recently opened in Moshi and Marangu. Carrying out a short-term project, the organization realized that going through a usual organic certification process was neither cost effective nor practical for their farmers. Being introduced to PGS enabled them to strengthen market opportunities for organic produce and to identify and label organic products without having to face the high cost of certification. The PGS is still in a pilot phase including 60 farmers to test the program but many others waiting to join. For more information, visit this [link](#).

Imprint

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