

Now available on our website: Revised self-evaluation form and Spanish subtitles of the PGS video

By the PGS Team of IFOAM – Organics International



The Self-Evaluation Form (SEF) is an important tool provided to PGS initiatives by IFOAM – Organics International. The self-evaluation process is a significant phase for every PGS initiative, in order to identify weaknesses and verify the integrity and functionality of its own system. This tool is also the starting point of the PGS recognition program of IFOAM – Organics International, helping us to collect detailed information that will subsequently be used as basis during the assessment steps.

The first version of the SEF was developed by the PGS Committee and published in 2008. Eight years later, it underwent a revision process that was completed in January 2016. The new SEF is now available online in English, Spanish, French, and soon also in Italian.

The revision was carried out in order to improve the previous version, to add potentially missing points and to address the changing realities that come with the expansion of PGS around the world. It was also an opportunity for the PGS Committee to discuss and exchange on new developments and controversial topics.

Long discussions took place, for example on the responsibilities of PGS groups to protect the integrity of PGS certified products throughout the value chain. While this aspect may be highly relevant and achievable for some PGS groups (especially bigger, e.g. nationally organized groups), it may be very difficult in the case of a small local PGS group. How can they control the honest usage of the logo once the product leaves their village?

Ultimately the decision was made to add question 18 to the SEF: “Is traceability ensured from the farm gate to the point of sale?” Its implementation will have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

The SEF revision was also used as an opportunity to discuss differences to and gaps in the ISEAL Assurance Code¹. Some points in the ISEAL Code were only partly or not addressed in the previous SEF, such as procedures for managing risks or handling complaints. ISEAL considers as good practice to publish the clients whose certificates have been withdrawn, a measure that was not mentioned in our SEF. After discussing which gaps needed to be filled in in the new SEF, the PGS committee decided to add for example question 17 about risk mitigation. Some ISEAL elements, like the above-mentioned public list of clients

¹ The International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling (ISEAL) Alliance developed a Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with Social and Environmental Standards which aims to provide guidance for high quality assurance that supports sustainability and improves the effectiveness of different verification and certification models.

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Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) Self-Evaluation Form (SEF)

Version officially approved in January 2016

This questionnaire is a free tool developed by IFOAM - Organics International to assist and support PGS initiatives. IFOAM - Organics International offers a free and voluntary assessment to PGS initiatives that apply for IFOAM PGS Recognition based on this Self-Evaluation Form (SEF). Successful applicants are granted the use of the IFOAM PGS Logo. More information on the IFOAM Recognition Program, as well as the SEF for download is available on our website at: <http://www.ifoam.bio/en/ifoam-pgs-recognition>

INTRODUCTION

There are now many Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) serving thousands of small farmers around the world. While there is enormous diversity in how these initiatives have implemented the various functions of a PGS, the key elements and features have proven to be consistent around the world.

This is not an attempt (or even a proposal) to harmonize the way PGS are run internationally. The great strength of PGS is that the mechanisms are regionally appropriate and under the full control of the local stakeholders.

The purpose of this voluntary questionnaire is to provide PGS initiatives around the world with a "Self-Evaluation" tool, to see how they are meeting the key PGS elements and features. It is also hoped that, very much in the spirit of PGS transparency, we share our answers with each other. In this way, we will achieve both a comprehensive global database of PGS as well as detailed information on operational procedures adopted around the world that we can use to strengthen the global PGS movement.

The order of the questions in this form generally tries to follow the logic of the PGS

Question 21: Do experienced participants accompany new participants during peer-reviews in order to support them and promote experience exchange?

Yes No

Please elaborate:

Question 22: Is there an internal mechanism in place to evaluate that the farm reviews were completed and that the decisions are consistent?

Yes No (Important Characteristic)

Please elaborate:

Part D: HORIZONTALITY

PGSs are intended to be non-hierarchical. This is reflected in the overall democratic structure and through the collective responsibility of the PGS. Responsibility should be shared and participants take turns in filling roles according to a rotation scheme, producers are directly engaged in the peer review of each other's farms and the decision making process is transparent.

Question 23: Is decision and policy making about PGS procedures made by either producers, consumers or regularly elected producer and consumer representatives?

Yes No (Important Characteristic)

Please elaborate on the procedure adopted for electing producer and consumer representatives:

PGS Self-Evaluation Form

with withdrawn certificates, were not taken up. Producers drop out of PGS because of various reasons and not always are irregularities involved. The PGS Committee was reluctant to require all PGS initiatives to publish such lists since it could be too delicate in some contexts (e.g. very small villages) and potentially stigmatize producers who may not have done anything wrong.

Ultimately, the revision was also used to update some terminology. For example, nowadays we prefer to use

the term "farm review" instead of farm inspection, and where we previously used the expression "farmer", we now use "producer".

We believe the new SEF has significant improvements compared to the previous versions, and we invite all initiatives to download it and test it out.

Also online are now the Spanish subtitles of our recently published PGS Video. Enjoy watching it!

PGS on the cloud: Italian companies develop PGS app

By Vincenzo Verdoliva, consultant L'Officina GBS



In the context of **FRACTALS** (Future Internet Enabled Agricultural Applications), a project funded by the European Commission, two companies in Italy have started to collaborate to develop services for innovative governance in agriculture.

Software Design, in collaboration with *L'Officina GBS* (expert in food traceability), has created the PGSC software (Participatory Guarantee Systems on the Cloud). This tool is designed to help people involved in setting up and maintaining PGS by making it easy to store information and share it among members.

"The software provides a user-friendly interface that allows data to be inserted in real-time."

Through the software, it is possible to store and manage different types of information according to the needs of the PGS:

1. **Farmer information**, such as the data concerning the pledge and certificates
2. Farmers can update, store and share the **records of all farming activities** carried out in the fields.
3. **Scheduling of field visits** can be managed and shared by the PGS committee through the software.

4. Any **irregularities and respective corrective actions can be recorded and shared** on the cloud between members of the PGS.
5. **Product traceability** via a QRCode generated automatically by the software. The QRcode approval and release is granted by the PGS Committee who will notify the farmer the procedure to use the QRcode and how to display it on the product label.
6. Consumers can provide **suggestions and feedback** to the farmers.

At the moment, *Software Design and L'Officina GBS* are cooperating with several producers and consumers organized in Ethical Purchasing Groups (e.g. Community Supported Agriculture, called GAS in Italy) to create two PGS in the territories of the Murgia and Gargano **National Parks**, in Apulia (Italy). The project involves many stakeholders who play a key role in local rural development: farmers, consumers, agritourism operators, environmental educational centers, national parks and artisans. Approximately forty farmers are involved; they produce cheese, vegetables, fruit, extra virgin olive oil, wine, meat, almonds and legumes. About 30% of these farmers are third party certified as organic; the others are not certified, but follow organic principles.



PGS Cloud Meeting

Today, we are in the startup phase: Partners are defining and sharing rules and procedures for the governance of the local system. The software is still a prototype. At this stage it will be provided for free in order to improve it with the feedback of the users. At a later stage, the software will be provided upon payment of an annual fee. Software Design, in collaboration with L'Officina GBS, provides consultancy services and support to access and manage this tool. The software aims at improving the management and organizational development of PGS initiatives, is based on an integrated approach that puts the person at the center of the transformation process.

PGS in Laos: From natural bamboo forest to PGS certification of dried bamboo shoots

By Sara Melki, Project Coordinator GRET & Phong Huynh, Value Chain and Organization Advisor at Huaphan Bamboo Sector Development Project



Development of dried bamboo shoots: learning by collectively doing

Houaphan Province in Northeastern Lao, is covered by natural bamboo forest. Recognizing its potential, the Bamboo Sector Development Project (BbPj), implemented by GRET since 2009, decided to support the Houaphan Bamboo Sector Strategy 2011-2015 (Phase I) & 2016 -2020 (Phase II), planned by the Bamboo Taskforce.

In 2012, supported by BbPj, producers of Nor Hok dried bamboo shoots collected from natural forest started to organize themselves into Village Bamboo Committees (VBCs). Realizing that it is essential to ensure a sustainable use of the bamboo forest, the VBCs started working

together with the district government and the village population to develop and implement a sustainable forest resource management plan, allowing communal use rights and trade of bamboo products, together with the implementation of forest monitoring. In 2011, Lao government had enacted a ban on the harvesting of fresh bamboo shoots for trade purposes to protect the forest against destruction by overharvesting and wood felling. However, after the communities showed that they could manage the forest sustainably, the ban has been lifted.

At the beginning, the shoot strips were let dry under the sun and then sold to local middlemen, who exported them to cross-border Vietnamese traders. Although some added value was gained, the price remained low due to relatively low quality of the products. Over time, stakeholders started to develop structures that enabled them to increase the quality of shoots. They formed Processing Units (PUs) and constructed improved ovens.



First phase in dried bamboo shoot production

PU members have been settled in four villages and motivated producer leaders took on the management. The PU members were then trained by the BbPj to buy fresh shoots from village harvesters, then processed into high quality dried shoots and contracted and sold to the Vietnamese social-enterprise Ecomart, which supports the commercialization of PGS-certified vegetables and organically-produced dried shoots in Vietnam. Through a participatory learning process, the PUs achieved significant improvements in terms of organization, business skills and quality production. They also started to understand about the direct linkage between improved product quality, organic certification, premium price and increased market access (domestic and trans-border).

Birth of “PGS-Stakeholder Group Houaphanh”

In 2014, producers were willing to engage into a PGS process to ensure sustainable forest management and improve commercialization. PGS as promoted by IFOAM – Organics International, is well suited to the local situation. Being an internationally recognized quality assurance system PGS provides credibility, while at the same time the systems empowers the participatory nature of the PUs’ organization. By implementing PGS, the PUs are able to get a product quality certification and to meet the standards of their main international traders.

In April 2015, to explore the complexity behind the setting up of a PGS system, PU representatives travelled to Vietnam to learn personally about PGS implementation by organic vegetable producers in Hanoi Province. BbPj supported the visit and organized a training with Mr. Phouvong Chittanavanh. This experience convinced the PU members that PGS was indeed the system that best fits their purposes. They decided also to incorporate the

existing forest monitoring system inside the PGS Charter, to ensure sustainable resource use and comply with organic requirements of PGS.

At the same time, the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry engaged in the ADB-PGS project to promote organic and PGS certification through the Department of Agriculture (DoA). MAF/DoA recognize the organic certification could improve access to international markets for local producers.

Through the PGS Lao Project, a national project also funded by ADB, PGS pilot initiatives in three provinces will be implemented. Among them, the PUs of Houaphanh that produce Nor Hok dried bamboo shoots have been selected for their experience with improved quality production, knowledge about the PGS system and the support by the experienced GRET team. Consequently, since early 2016, together with governmental partners, BbPj provided trainings and supported PU members to develop their own PGS.

Through a continuous learning process, the PU members, who initially had limited understanding of the PGS concept, have evolved into fully engaged actors creating the PGS-Stakeholder Group Hauphanh, with a fully self-developed pledge, standard, organization structure, rules and compliance.



Nor Hok bamboo

China - How to gain trust in organic

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM – Organics International



Gaining the trust of Chinese consumers is a challenging task for many Chinese farmers. It is difficult even for farmers who are 3rd party certified as organic and for ones who sell directly to their consumers (e.g. via farmers markets, vegetable

box schemes or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)). During my visits in China I heard stories about surveillance cameras being installed on farms by worried consumers to allow for 24-hour observation and maximum control. The lack of consumer trust results in stakeholders searching for alternative ways to ensure transparency and traceability, and it is not surprising that the concept of PGS is appealing.

In November 2015 I attended two PGS-related events in China: The International and National CSA Symposium in Beijing and a PGS Summit hosted by Sunshine Earth Farm in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. During these events I found that various types of stakeholders are increasingly becoming involved and interested in PGS in China.

Grassroots organic and local food initiatives in China are aiming to ensure safe food and local consumption. They want to support peasants and smallholder farmers and facilitate rural development. For these initiatives that include, among others, farmers markets, vegetable box schemes, consumer cooperatives or online selling and distribution platforms, PGS is an interesting tool to establish consumer trust in an affordable and transparent way and also to build capacity and knowledge for local producers. Many grassroots initiatives are interconnected across provinces and provide support and capacity building to each other (e.g. Beijing Farmer Market).

Not only small farmers initiatives, but also large and medium sized farms and farming companies are discovering PGS. Haiyan Zhou, from the China PGS Association, observes that enterprises so far have shown more enthusiasm for PGS than smallholder farmers. For these larger farms PGS can make a significant difference in adding an additional level of transparency to their farm operations in order to build consumer trust. Their involvement and interest in PGS can be quite diverse and it can also be controversial. On one hand, the desire for more transparency through PGS can be

considered positive, as Haiyan Zhou from the China PGS Association assesses:

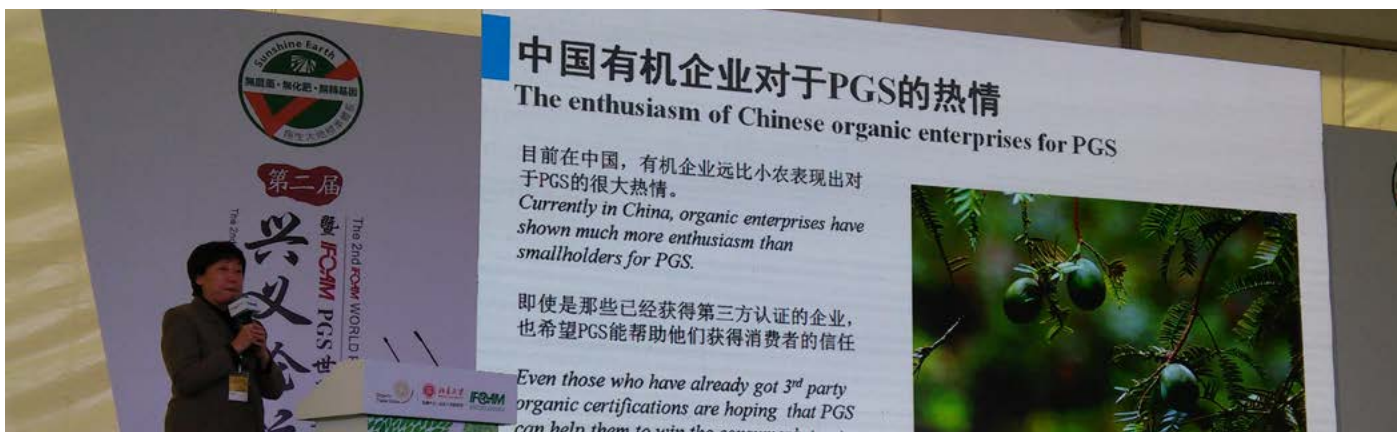
“According to my experience, the farms and companies that are interested in PGS are usually the honest ones. They are the ones that really want to do organic agriculture.”

On the other hand, not all companies that are interested in PGS have a vision that is compatible with the PGS principles and values, like horizontality or participation. Some companies look into organizing their contracted farmers into farmers groups, with a top-down approach. Since the self-organization ability of farmers and consumers in China is low due to historical and cultural reasons, there is a risk that farmer groups are set-up and held together by external forces rather than from within.

In recent years some development actors across China also started supporting PGS. This includes, for example, Oxfam Hong Kong or the Partnership for Community Development (PCD), that are doing important work for rural development in China. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) is funding a project implemented by IFOAM – Organics International to PGS build capacity in the Greater Mekong subregion. The main aim of these actors is rural reconstruction and development. Many of them focus their work especially on the poorer provinces like Sichuan or Guangxi in the South.

In 2013 the PGS China Association was founded. The NGO is involved in various activities to promote PGS in the country and provides support to some PGS pilot initiatives. While working with diverse actors, the organization is also involved in PGS awareness raising and research activities, such as how to adapt PGS to the local conditions.

The relationship between the various actors promoting PGS in China is not without tension. In fact, there are important arguments happening, especially between grassroots initiatives and the more business oriented ones. Moreover, some stakeholders fear that the term PGS could be misused by some actors (e.g. the bigger businesses) and subsequently lose its appeal.



Haiyan Zhou from China PGS Association

Another important aspect to keep in mind when observing PGS developments in China is its relationship with an organic agricultural approach. Not all initiatives aim for a production that is purely organic. With agricultural pollution being high on the agenda, many consumers are already satisfied if products are free of industrial pollutants and if they can trace back and verify the origin of the products. Consequently, standards used are diverse and can range from strict organic+ requirements to more simple pollution-free approaches.

We can see that there is much interest and potential for PGS in China with many different initiatives and actors appearing and getting involved. Stakeholders from different backgrounds involve themselves in PGS for various motives like the desire for safe food, the need for rural development and reconstruction, as well as the expectation of business opportunities. It will be interesting to observe how those developments continue and what type of relationship will be established with the authorities.

Continental News: What's new in...

AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA: The successful experience of Kumnandi PGS in tackling rural poverty through gardening has recently been published online. Two operational Kumnandi PGS initiatives are located on the South Coast of the Kwa-Zulu, Natal Province. They are rooted in the idea to complement the health benefits for peasant families that produce and eat organic food for their subsistence, with the economic value of selling the surplus products at a premium price to local cooperatives. Since 2012, hundreds of home gardens have been raised in the framework of the PGS, providing families with food security, market profits and social development. The initiatives are supported by the Siyavuna Abalimi Development Centre, which is providing trainings for families in the rural communities to grow organic fruit and vegetables. Read the original article [here](#).

ASIA

India: The LEISA INDIA Magazine, published in March 2016, focuses on the process of co-creation of knowledge, which is an essential characteristic of the agroecological

approach. Knowledge co-creation in agriculture has been realized through various participatory processes such as participatory breeding, farmer field schools, participatory technology development and Participatory Guarantee Systems. PGS can be considered as a powerful platform for encouraging knowledge sharing among farmers. It also represents an important tool to preserve and re-establish traditional knowledge. Knowledge dissemination is essential for farmers, particularly in the organic sector, in order to implement innovations, increase resilience and respond to new challenges. The magazine can be read online [here](#).

INDONESIA: The Non-Timber Forest Product Exchange Program recently presented a positive example of a PGS that supports smallholder farmers. Rattan¹ has long been a mainstay of Central Sulawesi. However, sustainable management of this resource has been critical in the last decades, to the level that the government enforced a ban on exporting rattan, to prevent forest destruction.

¹ Rattan (from the Malay rotan) is the name for roughly 600 species of old world climbing palms belonging to subfamily Calamoideae.

In order to change the situation, the Sustainable Rattan Programme (ROLES) has trained 374 families in the Namo village, on how to implement sustainable management of the rattan resource. The project has promoted the concept of PGS in order to organize the producers, plan the sustainable resource management and promote transparent market mechanisms. Read the full article, translated in English [here](#).

EUROPE

AUSTRIA: The International Sociological Association has planned its third forum of sociology from July 10-14, 2016, in Vienna, with the theme "The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World." According to the organizers the event will give opportunity to "share thoughts on empirical, theoretical, and normative research across geographic, linguistic, and disciplinary boundaries". On Monday July 11, two presentations will focus on PGS:

- Labeling Social Innovations: A Solidarity Label in France and a Participatory Guarantee Scheme in Namibia by Yuna CHIFFOLEAU and Allison LOCONTO (INRA, France)
- Local Practice of Solidarity Economy: A Case Study on PGS Project for the "Tribal E-Shop" in Taiwan by Huei-Wen CHIN, (Institute of Sociology, Taiwan) and Jie-Ting CHEN, (Agricultural Policy Research Center, Taiwan)

For more information visit the website of the [Third ISA Forum of Sociology](#).

BELGIUM: COSY-food is a new project, started in January 2016, where the Brussels's GASAP network (Groupe d'Achat Solidaire de l'Agriculture Paysanne) are working together with other stakeholders engaged in alternative food systems and in coordination with the Université Libre de Bruxelles. All these actors will co-create a tool to assess the sustainability of alternative food supply systems. The COSY-food project also includes the development and implementation of a PGS within the GASAP network. The PGS will be based on principles and values already rooted

in the GASAP network and will use the results of the sustainability definition and assessment. The objective will be not only to ensure a high quality of the products, but also to use PGS as a tool to improve reciprocal communication between producers and consumers, to strengthen the cooperation and trust among the actors involved and to create a platform for open and creative sharing. For more information about this project, contact Christophe Nothomb, spg@gasap.be.

FRANCE: PGS initiatives from around the world are encouraged to apply as speakers at the International Conference on Agri-Chains and Sustainable Development in Montpellier, December 12-14, 2016. **Deadline for submissions as speakers is July 25, 2016.** PGS is fitting well into the conference themes, in particular theme 3: Concrete innovations and partnerships for building and transforming agri-chains towards sustainable development. There is a chance for participants from developing countries to have their participation sponsored by the organizers. For more information please see the conference [website](#).

LATIN AMERICA

BOLIVIA: At the beginning of June, the Ministry of Rural Development and Land and the Coordination Unit of the National Council of Organic Production (UC-CNAPE) have approved the National Green Seal, through the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS-Totora), for 118 producers of the Huacanapi, Sora Sora and Calacalani communities, in the municipality of Totora in the department of Oruro. Therefore. PGS-Totora producers can now market their products with the guarantee of organic production, according to Law 3525.

In the Oruro department there are 11 operational PGS. Organic certification involves 1,163 families with 6,768 tons production of vegetables, tubers, and Andean grains, for a total area of 5.702 hectares of Oruro. Read the original article in Spanish [here](#).

Imprint

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