

PGS around the world: results from the Global PGS Survey 2015

By Simona D'Amico, Value Chain department, IFOAM – Organics International



A decade has passed since the first “International Workshop on Alternative Certification” in Torres/Brazil in 2004 was organized and the terminology and conceptual framework for describing what is now known as PGS was developed.

Since then, there has been a growing awareness of the potential for the application of PGS methodology as a tool for improving livelihoods in rural areas and contributing to sustainable development. PGS is an important platform for the development of social processes such as: collective marketing, sharing information, techniques and traditional knowledge, collective seed management and conservation, small scale saving systems, collective work, developing a committed, informed and supportive consumer base, and socialized pricing. Entry into PGS offers farmers and their families a range of economic, environmental and social benefits, thus improving their livelihoods.

A good cooperation between civil society organisations, Governments, and private sector must be in place for a sustainable development and maintenance of PGS initiatives. This is in synthesis what emerged from the Global PGS Survey 2015 issued by IFOAM - Organics international. Moreover from the results of the survey it is estimated that 123 PGS initiatives are now established on all continents, and another 110 are currently under development. PGS are spread over 72 countries; of these: 20 countries have both well-established and under development PGS, 33 countries show just cases of PGS under development and 19 countries count just operational PGS. Some of the PGS are organized into networks. 38 new PGS initiatives emerged from the Global PGS Survey 2015, of which 16 are established and

22 under development. 8 countries newly appeared in the Global PGS map of IFOAM – Organics International. Please consult our [online map](#) for more detailed figures.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who took part in the survey; you provided us with very interesting information on PGS all around the world. Respondents were asked to reflect on the enabling conditions for creating and maintaining PGS. They pointed out the following opportunities for supporting PGS on the part of various actors.

Civil society organisations are generally necessary for the initiation of PGS initiatives. They play the role of promoting actions to raise awareness and trust among consumers and policy makers toward PGS. Moreover, they facilitate cooperation and communication among the operators involved in PGS.

Governments are asked to support or, at least, not obstruct the diffusion and maintenance of PGS. They may support PGS by recognising them as an effective certification tool, by allowing - or even preferring - the use of PGS certified products in public food procurement, and by subsidising trainings to instruct operators on how

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to fulfil PGS standards. On the other hand, Governments should avoid overly rigid organic regulations that can obstruct the diffusion of PGS.

Middlemen and agronomists are among the private actors to be involved in the promotion of PGS initiatives. Their role consists of creating logistically effective supply chains as a means to ease, stabilise and expand access to markets for operators involved in PGS. Furthermore, private actors contribute by defining easy to implement standards, training operators on how to fulfil the standards and professionalising and streamlining the certification process.

Not all of the actions necessary for the establishment and maintenance of PGS are in place yet. Different regions and

PGS initiatives show different ability to undertake those strategies that may be instrumental for the sustainable development and maintenance of PGS. This explains why there are places - such as Europe and North America - where PGS show a certain degree of stagnation. This is also the explanation to variations over the years in countries' performance in terms of number of PGS, involved operators, and covered land.

The sustainability of PGS initiatives would benefit from studies that investigate a) the interventions by governments having an impact on PGS and b) strategies used to start up and continue PGS worldwide. From these studies the most effective approaches to establishing and maintaining PGS could be derived and used as examples of best practices to further develop these initiatives.

Growing Places: a visit to PGS farmer members in Giyani

By Audrey Wainwright, administrator of the Bryanston Organic & Natural Market (BONM) PGS



A gentle rain falls as the women from Nkomo Village in Giyani, sharing their umbrellas, show us their gardens and explain their use of fermented aloe sap to dissuade insects from eating the crops they grow primarily to feed Nkomo

School's pupils. Language interactions are dynamic – Tsonga, a little Zulu, the occasional Afrikaans word and some translation into English – but, most of all, gesture and facial expression communicate the understanding of organic agriculture and the commitment to each other as a community.

And so begins the annual assessment and knowledge exchange visit of the Bryanston Organic & Natural Market (BONM) PGS team to the group's five farmer members in Giyani, Limpopo – the province commonly referred to as South Africa's garden, thanks to the bounty of fruit and vegetables grown there. The farmers of Nkomo Village are able to sell their excess produce to Lucy Mabundza, herself a farmer from Giyani and a stallholder at the BONM, in Johannesburg. Fruits, roots and leafy vegetables are transported on taxis and buses to Johannesburg and then onto the shelves of Lucy's stall. The assessment team – comprising Lucy, Alan Rosenberg (an organic agricultural



BONM PGS team members, Lucy Mabundza, Agnes Mabunda and Shadreck Mhlanga Mbiba examine compost rich with manure from the cattle

specialist) Shadreck Mhlanga Mbiba (a BONM PGS farmer) and myself – suggests greater focus on mulching, since one of the biggest challenges facing the farmers in Giyani is access to water.

A truck arrives to take us to fields that we did not have an opportunity to see on the 2014 visit. They are some distance from the village – the farmers ride a donkey cart to their fields for planting and harvesting. We slowly make our way, listening to farmer Mphephu Mabundza gently singing and pointing out the Mondzo tree (*Combretum imberbe*) the ash of which is used to repel the red spider mites on tomatoes. We arrive at Mphephu's field that stretches out over 6 ha and walk over the cow pats settling into the moist, rich soil.



Nkomo Village community members with the BONM PGS team from Johannesburg

Photographic record has proven essential when introducing customers to the BONM PGS process. Photographs are taken of the beds, the natural inputs, the participants at the visits as well as of the fresh produce in the stalls at the market – linking visually the entire process from farm to market, for customers who live too far from the farms to join the visit.

Early the next day we are joined by Agnes Mabunda, a consultant for an agricultural cooperative who farms organically in the neighboring village. We visit Maria and Majaji Mabunda and Martha Makubela's vegetable plots next to their homes. Referring to the sketches of the plots from the 2014 visit, we update the information. "This section has tomatoes – what was planted before? Onions – what do you plan to plant next? Beans..." And so we map out the story of the soil, all the while sharing knowledge.

We walk down to a bigger plot that Maria and Majaji share to see the rows of cabbages that the farmers are planting in abundance due to the arrival at the market of a stallholder who does a brisk trade in sauerkraut. The link between the crops planted and demand in the city is yet another indication of growing PGS success, directly linking farmers to consumers.

We are asked to stop by a farmer in the neighborhood who has two small plots of tomatoes and who is interested in joining the PGS. When asked if he has a problem with red spider mite, he shows us two chemical products he bought from the agricultural co-op in town. We discuss organic agriculture, how chemical pesticides poison the soil. We speak about the ash from the Mondzo tree, companion planting and crop rotation and the importance of soil health. We leave the farmer with the offer of participating in PGS visits where he will be given support should he wish to convert to organic agriculture.

We drive a short distance to Mphephu's home where she has prepared a feast of for the visitors and the farmers. Mphephu offers a prayer, giving thanks for the food and community. After lunch, we sit together and Alan talks about organic agriculture, about our teachers – the forest and the body. The greater the diversity food you consume

the healthier your body. The same applies to the soil: the greater diversity of crops planted, the healthier the soil. He speaks about clothing the human body to protect it from the sun and the storms in the same way as mulching protects the soil from evaporation by the sun and erosion from the storms, how it holds water in the soil, like a sponge. Agnes informs the team that the Department of Environmental Affairs is concerned about the sustainability of the Mondzo tree. Its hard wood is very popular for making furniture and building fences, and Majaji asks if there are any alternatives to the ash. Shadreck suggests that if there is companion planting and crop rotation and if the soil is healthy, farmers will not need the ash to protect their tomatoes and reiterates the analogy of the body: if we eat healthy food we have resistance to disease.

The Giyani farmers who are part of the BONM PGS are unable to participate sufficiently in the work of the PGS. The 5-hour journey from the other members prevents them from attending the bi-annual meetings where the committee is elected, where the documentation that describes the organic standards and processes is adopted, where the seed exchanges take place. The Giyani farmers are also unable to visit other farmer members based in Johannesburg. It has become clear the solution is to facilitate the development of a PGS among the Giyani farming community.

Before setting out from Johannesburg, the BONM PGS committee agreed this trip would be used to initiate workshops to support the creation of the Giyani PGS. Agnes Mabunda volunteered to act as PGS facilitator and set up monthly meetings and regular farm visits. She will spend time in Johannesburg, mentored by BONM PGS members. In this first workshop we reviewed the basic elements of PGS. Significantly, when we got to horizontality, which means that a PGS is defined by its members, all responsible, all accountable and all beneficiaries of the system, the farmers began clapping and ululating (singing). This was clearly an indication of how smallholder farmers, particularly women farmers in rural areas, have been side-lined in our society. It is immensely inspiring that farmers see PGS as a mechanism for their empowerment.

New Certification Programs for Aquaponics and Mushroom Production in North America

By Alice Varon, Executive Director, Certified Naturally Grown



A couple years ago Certified Naturally Grown started to receive phone calls from aquaponic and hydroponic producers wondering if we'd offer CNG certification for their operations. They assured us they didn't use any synthetic inputs, so therefore we should let them participate. But we felt in all honesty we

couldn't offer them any meaningful certification since our standards were developed for soil-based operations. Besides, CNG certification is about more than just the absence of prohibited inputs. If we were going to offer CNG aquaponics certification, we needed to take a more holistic approach and consider the sustainability of the operation, including the materials, water, and energy used, so we put out a call for experts and producers to be part of an Aquaponics and Hydroponics Exploratory Council. With their assistance we determined in spring of 2014 that we would proceed with development of a new program that would offer certification for produce grown aquaponically, but not hydroponic operations, and not the fish grown in aquaponic operations.

We opted to exclude hydroponics due to the finding that there weren't many, if any, viable commercial operations that relied solely on biologically-based nutrients. It's standard practice for commercial hydroponic producers to use synthetic fertilizers.

Our decision to exclude aquaponic fish was due to the paucity of organic fish feed. While it's regrettable that aquaponic producers must rely on conventional feed, we didn't feel it was sufficient reason to exclude practitioners of this emerging form of low-impact ecological agriculture from our certification programs. Our solution was to proceed with development of an aquaponics certification program, but not certify the fish, in hopes that a market for organically-grown fish feed may develop. The CNG standards for fish feed will be re-visited in 2018.

In June 2014 we convened a second group, CNG's Aquaponics Advisory Council, to work with CNG staff to develop robust standards for a new certification

program. In the thirteen months that followed, a set of draft standards was developed, covering topics such as system design, materials, water sources, monitoring, inputs, waste use and disposal, and crop production. The draft was posted for a four-week public comment period in early September of 2015. The majority of comments affirmed the core elements of the draft standards, and we received a good deal of constructive feedback that has been incorporated in the final version. In December 2015 we'll publish the revised standards that will form the basis for our new certification program. We plan to begin accepting applications for certification in January 2016.

Our new mushroom certification program has similar origins to those of the aquaponics program. When we started to see an increase in the number of applicants for whom mushrooms were an important crop—if not the main crop—of their farming operation, it became clear that our standards for produce certification—which are tailored for soil-based food production—didn't provide adequate guidance to evaluate their applications. Mushrooms are typically grown in non-soil substrate, whether wood chips, logs, sawdust, compost, or by-products of other agricultural crops, such as cottonseed hulls, soybean meal or cornmeal. In order for CNG certification to be a meaningful designation for mushroom producers, we needed to develop standards that took into account their distinct qualities and mode of production.



New CNG bookmarks

In March 2015 we convened our Mushroom Advisory Council. This five-member Council is composed of mycology experts and mushroom producers, including authors Tradd Cotter and Steve Gabriel. Over the past year we've worked with the Mushroom Council to draft standards for indoor and outdoor mushroom production, covering topics such as substrate materials, substrate disposal, pest control and disease management, water, containers, racks and beds, and record keeping. The draft standards are [open for public comments until 22 December 2015](#). Based on our experience developing our

aquaponic standards, we expect the public comments we receive will enable us to strengthen the draft mushroom standards. We plan to post the final standards and accept our first applications for CNG mushroom certification in January 2016.

To celebrate and promote these new certification programs we produced a little bookmark that features our new website address and the circular icons we've developed to represent each of the five certification programs we will run in 2016.

Continental News: What's new in...

ASIA

CHINA: CSA and PGS in China made the news on Al Jazeera. A recently [article published online](#) by Al Jazeera describes the organic revolution taking place in China as a result of the work of new young farmers such as Shi Yan (Shared Harvest) and Chang Tianle (Beijing's Farmers Market). The comprehensive piece is very inspiring and worth reading.

PHILIPPINES 1: November has been a very intense month for MASIPAG. The regional conference on MASIPAG Farmers Guarantee System (MFGS) took place from 12 to 14 November. A few days later, from 16 to 21 November, visitors from Uganda-PELUM participated in field visits and met with MASIPAG farmers for knowledge exchange. From 24 to 25 November, the National MFGS Conference took place and the PGS Negros, in the region of Negros, was launched; finally, from 28 to 29 November the first General Assembly of the network PGS Pilipinas took place. Pictures, regular updates and more details are available on the [Facebook Profile of PGS Pilipinas](#).

PHILIPPINES 2: A PGS orientation was successfully held at Imulayan Organic Resource Center in Davao City from 11-13 November 2015. The orientation was conducted to familiarize the Agriculture Technicians of Davao City and representatives from the University of the Philippines-Mindanao (UPM) about PGS principles, process and requirements. The course included practicing organic inspections as well as discussions on how technicians and universities can help small-scale farmers implement organic agriculture and acquire organic certification from Davao City. Davao City PGS is jointly organized

and implemented by the City Agriculture Office, City Veterinary Office, Environment and Natural Resources Office, METSA Foundation and GO ORGANIC Davao City.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

CHILE: The national coordinator of the competent authority for organic agriculture in Brazil, Rogério Dias, visited Chile in order to learn about the control system implemented by the Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG) for organic production. Chile and Brazil have been negotiating an agreement on mutual recognition for raw materials and organic products, to facilitate the growing bilateral trade in this sector. Meetings with government officials of national and regional agencies, as well as with private sector organizations and organic networks, were organized to discuss issues of public policy on organic agriculture promoted by the government of Brazil and regulations in Chile. The head of SAG Sub department for Organic Agriculture, Claudio Cardenas, said that "the idea is that the agreement will not only incorporate third party certification systems for organic, but will also recognize alternative certification systems". While Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) are recognized in Brazil, the regulation in Chile foresees a similar function to be fulfilled by Organic Farmers Organizations (OAE). Therefore Brazil is seeking to incorporate PGS and OAE into this Memorandum of Understanding and establish a mechanism for effective exchange of information and experiences. It is expected that the protocol can be implemented from mid-2016.



PERU: The seminar “Participatory Certification: ensuring healthy products for the domestic market” took place on November 12 in Lima. The delegation of the European Union in Peru, the Cultural Center of Spain in Lima, the Belgian Embassy in Peru, Calandra, IDMA, CESVI, Agronomists and Veterinarians Without Borders and VECO Andino were the conveners of this event. Patricia Flores, Latin American Representative for IFOAM - Organics International joined as key speaker to present on the importance and current developments of PGS in Latin America. Gabriel Mejia presented an educational video about PGS in Peru, developed by Instituto de Desarrollo y Medio Ambiente (IDMA). The video is available online, in Spanish only, please [click here to watch it](#).

EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA:

IFOAM EU GROUP: IFOAM EU has recently published the report “Feeding the People: Agroecology for Nourishing the World and Transforming the Agri-Food System.” In this report, editors Angelika Hilbeck and Bernadette Oehen, senior scientists at Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), bring together a number of well-known experts to share their visions of how agriculture can be transformed from its current, destructive form, to one that will help reverse environmental damage, and one which can feed the global population. One of the 8 featured contributions focuses on the role of PGS for Food Security. The report is available for download [here](#).

USA: Certified Naturally Grown has been gradually updating their marketing materials to have a more consistent look and feel. CNG recently completed a major component of this project with a website redesign. The new website reflects CNG’s new look, is oriented toward food eaters as well as farmers, and integrates easily with social media platforms. [Click here to check it out](#).





THE ORGANIC STANDARD

www.organicstandard.com

The Organic Standard (TOS) is an international monthly journal that enables individuals and organizations to keep up-to-date on development concerning worldwide standards and certification issues in the organic sector.

The journal has a growing number of subscribers representing certification bodies, standard setters, sector bodies, governments, consultancies, and industry. It has become widely recognized as the credible source of international news and analysis for organic standards setting, certification, regulation, and accreditation.

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Imprint

The Global PGS Newsletter is published bimonthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to pgs@iffoam.bio.

The Global PGS Newsletter is a free electronic publication. To receive the newsletter, please write to pgs@iffoam.bio. The newsletter is published by IFOAM - Organics International. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM website.

Editing: Flavia Castro, IFOAM - Organics International
Layout: Stevie Blaue, IFOAM - Organics International
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