

Updates on Participatory Guarantee Systems worldwide.

Nov/Dec 2012
Volume 3 Number 2

PGS and CSA: reflections from the first European meeting

by Eva Torremocha, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee



Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) and Consumer Supported Agriculture (CSA) have a lot in common, starting with the fact that they both involve producers and consumers by creating direct links between them. Recently, these two systems have started to move closer to each other, with PGS adopting mechanisms from CSA schemes and vice versa. [URGENCI¹](#) noticed this trend and invited the IFOAM PGS Committee, through its European representation, to participate in the 'European meeting on CSA and other distribution systems for Food Sovereignty', which was held in Milan (Italy) October 10 to 12 this year.

The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for face-to-face meetings of representatives of CSA experiences implemented all over Europe, but also to discuss the creation of a European platform, defining its goals and targeting possible partners to work with on technical, practical, as well as political issues (for alliances and advocacy). More than 100 participants from over 12 European countries joined the meeting, which was organized in two tracks: internal coordination and experience exchanges; and, building alliances. Representatives from movements promoting access to land, alternative consumption and production patterns (such as 'Transition Towns'), and from the PGS community were among the partners invited as potential stakeholders for further development of the CSA movement. This first exchange between CSA and PGS at a continental level shed light on areas that these two approaches have in common, as well as on their specificities. It is interesting to look at these, and draw a line between PGS and CSA, in order to reflect on how these two approaches can complement each other.

As a first point in common, both PGS and CSA bring together farmers and consumers in order to address issues related to food production, distribution and commercialization - both from a practical and philosophical point of view. Another similarity is that a PGS or a CSA initiative can be triggered by a group of consumers or by a group of farmers, or even by a mix of both groups. Both approaches are put into practice by extremely diversified initiatives, which develop according to the territories where they are based, and both have a focus on food sovereignty.

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¹ The International network of community supported agriculture .

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With reference to specificities, CSA is more often implemented through consumers' organizations, whereas PGS tend to be more farmer-oriented.

At an international level, CSA is promoted by URGENCI, while PGS is promoted by IFOAM within the organic sector. CSA also tend to be more focused on access to products, while PGS are a form of quality guarantee system, more specifically organic quality. Because of their horizontality and participation principles, PGS are perhaps more likely to be related to active political engagement, although this may not apply to all PGS initiatives and also be visible in some CSA. PGS tend to have a wider scope than CSA that usually work for a close and defined consumers' group. In fact, PGS are usually market-driven and they can involve con-

In fact, PGS and CSA are currently having the same debate regarding regulation: To what extent is it necessary? What price would be acceptable?

sumers who are not members of the initiative that is implementing the system. In any case, as is normal in the systemic approach, nothing is black or white: some PGS are run by consumers' groups (for instance in Spain), to have a better and broader involvement of their associate farmers. Some CSA have a strong influence over their social environment, having therefore an important political tendency to promote change in consumption patterns.

Of course, none of these observations are absolute. The purpose is only to provide an outline of these movements and approaches, which are actually complementary, and reinforce their links. In fact, PGS and CSA are currently having the same debate regarding regulation: To what extent is it necessary? What price would be acceptable? It seems that PGS, being more farmer-oriented, would tend to advocate for official recognition, as a way to access the organic market in Europe and funds from public policies (such as the European Union Common Agricultural Policy or CAP, which is due to be reformed by 2013).

Apart from these reflections, the event in Milan launched the need to create a platform (such as an umbrella organization, still to be totally defined based

on the participants ideas and proposals) at the European level. The European PGS community continues with its efforts to establish the PGS European network. Some steps have recently been taken: Italy and Spain have held their first national seminars on PGS, during which the different PGS initiatives met to exchange their knowledge, lessons-learned and tools, as well as to consolidate the experiences and shape the whole national movement. It emerged from these meetings that a national coordination could be the right tool for further developments.

Step by step, little by little, PGS are expanding throughout the European continent (including Turkey) and creating alliances. In Europe, where the consumer's presence within the system is very strong, the CSA movement is likely to become the first partner with whom we will establish strong links for our ongoing process. The so-called 'October Milano meeting' can be considered to be the first step, and the story is to be continued.

PGS in South Africa and the 'free-ranging' debate

By Marc Lewis, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee



The PGS movement in South Africa is at an interesting and exciting stage of its development. There are self-identified PGS movements springing up all over the country, largely as a result of the advocacy work done by Konrad Hauptfleisch during his time at the Bryanston

Natural and Organic Market (BONM) in his capacity as the African representative on the IFOAM PGS committee. The BONM PGS, the most documented of the South African experience, was formed primarily through a persistent demand for organic produce from a largely middle-class consumer base in South Africa's biggest city – Johannesburg. It is controlled and coordinated through the marketing capacity of the BONM. The newly established Green Road PGS (based in Stellenbosch in the Western Cape) similarly was developed at the market level and intends to coordinate assessments and administrative capacity and spread the knowledge to the farming community through the process.

Questions could be raised as to the viability of a PGS

developed through a response to demand pressures (a reverse evolutionary process perhaps) and furthermore, whether it would have the desired impact on South Africa's small and medium scale farmers. In my research² I have found that some emerging – mostly Black – South African farmers practice 'organic' principles without necessarily knowing that their methods could be labeled as such. On the other hand, some emerging, small-scale farmers are lured into using chemicals to enhance and maximize their crops to compete with other large-scale agricultural projects, little knowing that a PGS system could link them to other, niche markets. The farmers committed to organic ideals are mostly those who were privileged through the apartheid system pre 1994 or those who now are able to access the privileges of South African democracy. The reality is that the small, less privileged South African farmer is largely unable to access the opportunities present within the organic PGS paradigm.

Currently, PGS is included in the draft South African National Standard³ for Organic agriculture products and processing. With this inclusion comes the prospect for more inclusivity for small producers within the South African food system. The question is how to manage this so as to benefit smaller, less well-resourced farmers in South Africa.

'Free range egg' production could well be such an entry point. Traditionally, thoughts of the South African countryside conjure up images of huts and roaming chickens, perhaps free-ranging chickens that produce happy eggs. Yet, the vast majority of eggs in South Africa come from nothing of the sort. They are produced in factory farms where battery hens live in tiny cages, never see the sun, and are discarded after they have produced their maximum number of eggs. Indeed, Compassion in World Farming (South Africa) estimates that 22.8 million chickens are annually 'debeaked' in South Africa to prevent them from inflicting harm to themselves or other hens when confined to a battery cage the size of an A4 sheet of paper⁴.

In response to this cruelty, eggs labeled 'free-range' have become available in some supermarkets in South Africa. But what 'free-range' actually means, and whether the chickens that produced 'free-range' eggs were housed in ethical conditions, is up for debate, and no legislation currently exists to regulate this⁵. Some note that 'free range' is where poultry is housed in such a way that it has access to the outside environment. For how long or what this outside environment refers to is not very clear. In this lacuna, PGS assessment procedures could well cover such classification and could take ethical advantage of a marketable product that needs managing in what has become a highly contentious space.

While free range egg production is not referred to within the IFOAM Standard for Organic Production and Processing (Version 1.0) there is a reference to animal welfare in its animal husbandry session, such as the prohibition of landless animal husbandry, and specifically requirement 5.1.8 where "all animals shall have unrestricted and daily access to pasture or a soil based open-air exercise area or run..."⁶. I would argue that there is ample space for such classifications to be included in local PGS standard development/adaptation. The BONM PGS aims to do just that. What has been discussed thus far is possible collaboration with the South African branch of Compassion in World Farming⁷ (a non-profit organization that advocates for humane and ethical food production) and to work in partnership with them in drafting ethical, free-range poultry farming guidelines. Due to the unavailability of organic feed in South Africa such eggs would only be labeled 'Non-organic free-range PGS-verified'. Nevertheless, in due course, this action would contribute to increasing awareness of organics, the stimulation of organic feed production, and will bring producers closer to full organic classification. Ultimately, consumers buying PGS 'free range' eggs in South Africa, would be assured of ethical, and humanely produced goods.

2 Marc is completing the third and final year of his MPhil through the Institute for Land, Poverty and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) in Johannesburg South Africa. The focus of his research is on urban and peri-urban agriculture in Johannesburg, with an emphasis on organic and agro ecological farming practices.

3 The South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) are currently finalizing the draft standard SANS 1369:201x Edition 1: SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL STANDARD, Organic agriculture products and processing.

4 Compassion in World Farming (South Africa) "Farmers and supermarkets wash their hands of 'spent' hens" Special Report: January 2009. Available: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/27815483/Spent-Hens>

5 Birgit Ottermann „Free-range, organic, grass-fed: do you know what you're eating?“ Health24 8 February 2012 Print http://www.health24.com/natural/Go_organic/17-673,61404.asp

6 The IFOAM Norms for Organic production and processing Version 2012, available online at http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/norms/IFOAMNormsVersionAugust2012withcover.pdf

7 <http://www.animal-voice.org/>

PGS networks: the experience of Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos

With contributions from Jannet Villanueva (Member of the IFOAM PGS Committee) and Rita Schwentesius (Coordinator of Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Organicos)

The word 'tianguis' derives from the náhuatl⁸ term 'tianquitzli', which means 'public market'. In Mexico, tianguis are places where people meet to exchange products, purchase and sell different items, above all locally produced food. These public markets represent an important part of the Mexican social and cultural sphere, serving as areas for community building and strengthening, with a close relation to food.

In 2004 a network was formed by a group of consumers, researchers and students who felt the need to create spaces for the commercialization of organic products. The idea was to promote the development of the domestic market, through responsible local consumption of organic products and direct exchange between producers and consumers, as well as to disseminate the principles and philosophy of organic agriculture, facilitate the exchange of experiences and offer multicultural spaces. In a nutshell, the idea was to promote the development of organic tianguis.

In the first years, the members of the network did not have much practical experience in organizing markets. Only four markets were part of it and meetings for exchanging ideas and observations were fundamental. Eventually, the need for organic certification emerged and, more specifically, the idea of a participatory certification started to develop. The group invited experts from certification bodies, such as Laura Gómes from the Mexican certification body CERTIMEX, for support and organized workshops to build technical capacity on organic inspection. Soon, the network could count on a group of trained people who conducted inspection visits among the organic producers that participated in the markets joining the network.

During these first years, the network received financial support through a grant from Falls Brook Centre. This allowed for conducting annual meetings, initially twice

and then three times a year. These meetings were very important for the organization of the network. Finally, in 2008, the Red Mexicana de Tianguis y Mercados Orgánicos/CIDRII (Mexican Network of Organic Markets) became a registered organization, and this opened other possibilities for obtaining public funds. Today the network counts about 35 local and regional organic tianguis, which host small and medium producers and serve consumers all over the country.

The network is well known among organizations supporting and promoting farmers and food sovereignty in the country. It plays an important role in the definition of public policies referring to the organic sector, voicing the concerns and requests of the organic Mexican movement. Recently for example, during the national forum of organic production in Mexico, held in October in the House of Representatives, Rita Schwentesius (researcher and coordinator of the network), introduced the proposal of a national program for the promotion of organic production, which includes the request for a specific budget (800 million Mexican pesos, or 48 million Euros) to be assigned for organic production, since governmental support for the sector so far has been scattered or awarded on a discretionary basis.

The network has developed a participatory certification scheme in order to address the difficulties faced by small farmers in complying with third-party certification procedures, while adding to the guarantee system the democratic elements of participation and the necessary flexibility to adapt to local conditions. The participatory certification is fully developed in 6 markets. In each market, a certification committee (formed by farmers, consumers and students) is responsible for receiving and reviewing the applications from producers, providing advice as needed and guiding the visits for inspection. For the tianguis in which the participatory certification is not yet fully implemented, representatives of markets with more experience carry out guided visits. In addition, farmers give consumers free access to their farms, and especially to students.

In fact, a very special characteristic of this experience is the link with researchers and academics of different universities. Students can be involved in many steps of the process of establishing new markets, as well as in the analysis of best practices and lessons learned. Therefore, the network is supported by many young people, who recognize its importance from different points of view: as producers, as

⁸ „Nahuatl is a language of the Nahuan branch of the Uto-Aztecan language family. It is spoken by an estimated 1.5 million Nahua people, most of whom live in Central Mexico and some who live in El Salvador known as the Pipil people. All Nahuan languages are indigenous to Mesoamerica“ (Wikipedia).

consumers, as researchers, as entrepreneurs and as educators. The first link of this kind was established through the University of Chapingo and the Tianguis Organic de Chapingo. The role of researchers and academics usually starts with setting up of the market and promoting workshops. Eventually, the producers become responsible for running the market themselves. Research is conducted at different levels, including the analysis of the economic and social profiles of consumers and producers, comparison of prices between the tianguis and other market channels, but also food safety of fresh and processed products.

The tianguis that are part of the network have different characteristics, with specificities that fit the context in which they are established. In the framework of the Global Comparative Study on PGS and Social processes, currently being implemented by IFOAM, some of these markets have been visited and their practices documented. A common concern among them was the selection of the area where the market is to be set, as the space should not become a burden on the farmers, increasing costs or conditioning the access of producers and consumers. The markets have autonomy in terms of obtaining access to funds through grants provided by the government or by intentional donors. But it is through the activities implemented by the network, such as the seed bank and campaigns for awareness raising and advocacy, that the tianguis have been included in a wider national framework, which facilitates the dissemination of the experiences and of the benefits obtained by farmers and consumers participating in them.

Gaining governmental support for PGS with support from SSNC

By Flávia Castro



IFOAM is currently implementing a project financed by the [Swedish Society for Nature Conservation \(SSNC\)](#)⁹, aimed at providing PGS stakeholders with targeted financial assistance in their efforts to gain governmental support. The project builds on

⁹ The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation is Sweden's largest environmental organization. It was founded in 1909 and has 190,000 members and 270 local associations. The Society's international work is aimed at contributing to environmentally, socially and economically sustainable development based on respect for human rights and democratic governance.

two main components, as follows:

- Encouraging and facilitating direct engagement with decision makers - in coordination with national organic stakeholders - to help them address PGS in their regulation; and
- Providing updated and accessible advocacy and lobbying tools to be distributed to government representatives (in particular the IFOAM Policy Brief 'How Governments Can Recognize and Support Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)').

PGS initiatives from countries in Africa (South Africa and Benin), Asia (Vietnam and Philippines) and Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru) are involved as local partners for implementation. The results of the activities will be communicated through this Newsletter, and some updates are already available on the section "Continental News: what's new in..." in this issue.

This is a short-term project, running until the first half of January 2013. The impact of the activities, nevertheless, will be observed in the long-term, as PGS stakeholders' capacities to influence public decision-making are strengthened, while government authorities become aware of the importance of PGS for the development of the organic sector.

IFOAM PGS Committee reappointed for another term

By The PGS Team

The IFOAM World Board met in Bonn, in November, during a busy week just before the celebration of the 40 years of IFOAM. The appointment of the PGS Committee for a new term of three years was part of the agenda of the meeting.

Applications were accepted until October 14, 2012, after an open call was published through a special announcement. Based on the profiles of the candidates and the ToR for the PGS Committee, the PGS Team prepared a recommendation, which was discussed during the meeting.

The IFOAM World Board voted for the reappointment of the current PGS Committee: Alice Varon, Chris May, Eva Torremocha, Jannet Villanueva, Marc Lewis and Matthew John have therefore a new term of three years as members of the PGS Committee. Congratulations!

Continental news: what's new in...



...Africa

Benin The West African Network for Organic Agriculture Research and Training (WANOART) is a network of academics and professionals involved in the promotion of organic agriculture in West Africa. The network was established thanks to the support of a European Development Fund 3-year project, which is soon coming to an end. As part of the project, the network organized a workshop on Organic certification in West Africa, with a very strong focus on PGS. The workshop took place end of November in Cotonou, Benin, and included the participation of Joelle Katto-Andrighetto as IFOAM representative. The workshop was an excellent opportunity for organic stakeholders in the region to learn more about PGS and how it compares with other guarantee alternatives. Members of the WANOART network agreed to initiative national as well as regional joint efforts to test the implementation of PGS in the region and start raising awareness of the PGS concept amongst various stakeholders including the governments.

South Africa (1): The Biodynamic Association of Southern Africa (BDAASA) would like to develop a biodynamic PGS. A component of sustainable energy use is to not redo what has been done, therefore BDAASA is sending out this request to the organic and biodynamic communities of the world: „Have you developed a biodynamic PGS assessment form? And if so, would you be willing to live up to the ‘P’ in ‘PGS’ and share it?“ Liesl Haasbroek, from BDAASA, would like to thank in advance for your reply to info@bdaasa.org.za.

South Africa (2): The South African Draft Standard for Organic Production was recently finalized, and will be published for public comment within weeks. One very positive outcome of the process was that PGS supporters, under the leadership of PGS South Africa, had the opportunity to advocate for the recognition of PGS as alternative guarantee system in the standards. The result was extremely positive: PGS is defined in the standards, and the clauses on labeling and certification allow for PGS to carry the „Organic South Africa“ - logo with the subscript „PGS endorsed“. Thanks to the support of IFOAM through a SSNC-funded project (see above, page 5), Konrad Hauptfleisch could attend the final Standards meeting, and support PGS in the final draft. It is hoped that the wide consultation in preparation of the Standard, will result in it being generally accepted and published early in 2013.



...Asia

China: The Fourth National CSA Conference took place in Beijing. The development of PGS in China has been hindered, as the government authority does not allow private certification. CSA on the other hand are quite popular now. Between 400-500 participants (farmers and consumers) joined the conference. According to Dr. Shi Yan, the executive director of Shared Harvest (Beijing) Ecological Agriculture Service Ltd. and founder of Little Donkey Farm, the first CSA in China, there are about 100 similar experiences in the country. Many farmers are considering alternative guarantee systems for organic products, so PGS could be adopted within the CSA movement.



...Europe and North America

Spain: The Spanish Society for Organic Agriculture (Sociedad Española de Agricultura Ecológica - SEAE) is advocating for the recognition of alternative guarantee systems for small organic production in the framework of the European regulation. In a recent press release, the SEAE requested that the possibility for collective or group control, which currently exists in EU but for developing countries only, be extended to small-farmers in EU Mediterranean countries. According to SEAE, this would allow more than 30000 small-farmers in Spain to access the regulated organic market. SEAE is also calling for a revision of the Regulation 834/200, that would take PGS into consideration. For more information: seae@agroecologia.net

USA (1): Certified Naturally Grown has printed a second edition of the Handbook for Natural Beekeeping, based on the updated version of their apiary standards. Nearly all of the 1,000 copies of the first edition were sold within a year, indicating a strong interest in natural beekeeping and desire for clear certification guidelines. Look inside at www.naturallygrown.org/handbook-info.

USA (2): PGS makes it into the New York Times! An [article](#) by Kim Severson published on the New York Times features a Certified Naturally Grown farmer who explains why this PGS program was a good fit for his small operation. The article addresses the difficulties faced by US-consumers concerned about the quality and safety of the food they purchase. It discusses the results of the controversial study on organic food published in October this year by the Stanford University, the high costs of organic certification in the USA and the move from small-scale farmers toward alternative guarantee systems.

Imprint

The Global PGS Newsletter is published monthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to pgs@ifoam.org. Deadline for submission of articles is the 30th of each month for the following month's issue.

The Global PGS Newsletter is a free electronic publication. To receive the newsletter, please write to pgs@ifoam.org.

The Global PGS Newsletter is published by IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM website.

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The Global PGS Newsletter is supported by