

## The last issue of the Global PGS Newsletter



By **Flávia Moura e Castro**, IFOAM – Organics International

The Global PGS Newsletter was launched in October 2009, initially supported by Hivos, as part of our strategy to dedicate substantial resources to better support PGS initiatives, collect comprehensive information on them, help build linkages and contribute to the establishment of a global PGS network. Gradually, the list of subscribers grew from about one hundred contacts to more than 7 thousand subscribers as of 2018. A community of PGS practitioners and researchers, experts and supporters, regularly contributed to the publication, submitting articles and news about latest developments in the field, opportunities for capacity building, inspiring stories, lessons learned and useful tools.

The PGS concept has spread widely in the past 9 years. This is clearly visible from a quick comparison between recent data and figures from the very first issue of our Newsletter: from 20 PGS initiatives in about 20 countries documented back in 2009, to more than 240 PGS initiatives in over 60 countries in 2017; from 10.000 to more than 310.000 producers and processors involved in PGS; from little government support, to more than 10 national regulations for organic agriculture that have included and recognised PGS. We believe that this dedicated publication has contributed to this development, supporting the dissemination of PGS and raising awareness among practitioners, researchers and policy makers of the benefits PGS provide to farmers and consumers.

The organic movement has benefitted as a whole, as PGS is a tool to promote organic agriculture and sustainable food systems. As the only organization collecting and data about PGS on a global level, IFOAM – Organics International has also gradually integrated PGS into its broader communication strategy. Thus, now that this is the final issues of the Global PGS Newsletter, dissemination of information about PGS will continue to happen through different platforms and formats: from updates on our website or the global PGS initiatives map, to the yearly publication “The World of Organic Agriculture”; through articles on the “Organic without Boundaries” blog or on monthly issues of “The Organic Standard”

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IFOAM – Organics international is counting on the PGS community to keep sending us contributions. They will have a place, for example on our blog, and will support IFOAM – Organics International in

our mission to work toward true sustainability in agriculture and food systems.

## Eat, farm and participate: experimenting with PGS in Belgium

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By **Christophe Nothomb**, Project Lead, COSYFood research and PGS implementation

The network Groupes d'Achat Solidaires de l'Agriculture Paysanne (**GASAP**) is a federation of around 90 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives in Belgium, mostly located within the Brussels area. A GASAP is a form of CSA, where self-groups, composed of around 20 citizens commit to taking part in the production of a small-scale farmer for a full production season by paying for their share of the harvest in advance. The farmer, in exchange, commits to deliver on a weekly or biweekly basis, his or her products to the group in a predefined location. The role of the GASAP network is to facilitate the interactions between groups of eaters and farmers, to assist in creating new groups and to provide support for advocacy in different political arenas. The network's long-term objective is also to improve the solidarity aspect of the partnerships between consumers and farmers.

In the city of Brussels, demand for healthy and local products is strongly increasing. Organic products are now highly available through organic box schemes, specialised retailers and large-scale supermarkets. However, to distinguish between these alternatives is very difficult. As GASAP, we believe that the relationship and knowledge of the others, their evolution and ambitions, are the key ingredients that characterises the quality of a local solidarity partnership, such as CSA or PGS. Consistency of

production practices while respecting the diversity of producers, their identity and desires is essential within our network. The reflection on production also extends to consumer groups, where improvement in consumption practices and engagement are also possible and even essential.

PGS have been the subject of discussions for several years within the GASAP network and more broadly with partners and other initiatives that share our values. As most of our farmers are certified organic, the certification aspect of PGS has never been central in our discussion. We have looked at PGS more as an approach to structure and deepen the relationship between eaters and farmers, to allow more exchanges between farmers, and to strengthen our common vision and the continuous improvement of production and consumption practices.

In 2016, we started a 3-year project on the sustainability of alternative food systems (COSYFood) which made it possible to set up and pilot the GASAP PGS. To start, we did a review of the various existing PGS initiatives and we conducted a survey among our members (eaters and farmers) on their expectations and the challenges that the implementation of a PGS within the GASAP Network could create. As a result, a draft PGS model was defined by a small team, and discussed more



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Farm visit to  
a vegetable producer  
of the GASAP network

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broadly with active members, producers and at the network's General Assembly. A small group of producers and eaters then took charge of the development of the PGS, to define more precisely the standards and procedures. The preparation phase took about one year. In 2017, we started piloting the PGS visits and we tested the tools developed. The focus so far has been only on vegetable growers. Ten out of fifteen vegetable producers are currently involved and have received or joined visits. Each visit has brought new reflections and improvements.

Meanwhile, GASAP has started sharing its experience with other European PGS and CSA initiatives through the **EATingCRAFT** project, which researches synergies in local solidarity partnership actions in order to build sustainable food systems. Many GASAP producers are also producing for other alternative food networks, which are interested in developing their own "PGS-like" processes. A common platform has been set up to ensure that these parallel processes are compatible and to avoid duplication. Work is ongoing to reach a single PGS for all Belgian agroecological initiatives.

## Our Cooperative: a recognized PGS initiative in Mexico

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By **Vanessa Ramirez Ríos**, Sociedad Cooperativa de Productores del Tianguis Orgánico Chapingo

The producer's cooperative *Sociedad Cooperativa de Productores del Tianguis Orgánico Chapingo*, in Mexico, is an initiative organized to create a direct link between producers and consumers and offer high quality healthy foods to those concerned about their health and the environment. We promote

local organic and agro-ecological production, for conscious and responsible consumption. This means, for producers, increasingly rigorous quality standards; and for consumers, to ask "Who?", "How?" "When?" and "Where?" the food that we bring to our mouths and nourishes our body is produced.

In order to provide guidance for production and answer these questions, we have been working on the consolidation of a participatory certification for organic agriculture. This provides us with tools to ensure that our producers comply with our internal regulations for production, processing, marketing and the general ethics of the *Sociedad Cooperativa*, as well as with the organic standards and principles of production defined by IFOAM – Organics International, which we chose as our reference. We believe the philosophical foundations of organic agriculture and PGS are the same: to produce a diversity of food and other products, suitable to soil and climate, without altering their harvest times, rationally using the available natural resources and generating sustainability in each agroecosystem, thinking first about the family’s food security and then offering surplus to the local and regional community.

Fostering the loyalty of our consumers through the trust generated during these years has been a priority for our Cooperative. In the process, we have gathered experience and fulfilled the requirements to operate a “Sistema de Certificación Orgánica Participativa” (SCOP), essentially a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) initiative for family production and small organized producers, as established in the *Lineamientos para la Operación Orgánica de las Actividades Agropecuarias (LOOAA)*. These are the guidelines for organic agriculture in Mexico, where PGS is recognized as an option for organic certification. The Mexican organic regulation

establishes a process and requirements<sup>1</sup> PGS initiatives must comply with in order to be approved by the competent authority for organic agriculture, the Servicio Nacional de Sanidad e Inocuidad Agroalimentaria (SENASICA).

Thus, after over 15 years of work to encourage and enhance the production and consumption of organic, natural, traditional and agroecological food, facing changes and challenges, we were able to adapt and adjust our processes, sticking to our priorities, and we have proudly obtained our recognition from **SENASICA**. Only three PGS initiatives in Mexico have obtained this recognition so far.

We are now 19 partners working in 13 different production units. We are guided by a common vision based on the exchange of knowledge and experiences among all participants, and the honesty and responsibility among our producers, who comply with a set of requirements we have created ourselves for continuously improved production and processing. This is strengthened by a dynamic process of transparent support provided by the Participatory Organic Certification Committee to all the members of our Cooperative, who attest to the solidarity, equality and social coexistence with a just and democratic relationship, agreed upon for ourselves and our consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> Provisions indicated on articles 24 of the “Ley de productos Organicos” and 14 of the Regulation of the mentioned law.

## Public policies for organic agriculture and PGS in Brazil



By **Karina Gonçalves David**, Associação para o Desenvolvimento da Agroecologia (AOPA)

From 5 to 9 November 2018 the event Paraná Agroecológico III took place in Brazil. The event, that gathered farmers, government and civil society

representatives takes place every two years since 2014. Six different meetings were organized, among which a seminar about the government program to

promote organic agriculture in the state of Paraná, called “Paraná Mais Organico”. This program is aimed at contributing to the consolidation of Paraná as the state with the highest number of organic producers in Brazil. It offers technical assistance and rural extension services that stimulate the adoption of technological innovations based on organic agriculture, and supports the organization of family farmers for organic production and marketing, particularly with support for certification.

I had the opportunity to join this seminar and talk about the importance of PGS for this state program, and give examples of support being provided to PGS producers. I reported on the experience of a group of the PGS initiative Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia and the activities implemented in partnership with the Center of Reference in Agroecology (CPRA) in Paraná. Rede Ecovida is a network that promotes Agroecology in its different levels and is one of the first and largest PGS, with more than 3000 certified farmers and over 4000 farmers involved. In 2017, in the framework of “Paraná Mais Organico”, Rede Ecovida and CPRA started a cycle of workshops with farmers aimed at strengthening PGS processes, addressing bureaucratic issues and improving the relations between farmers. Through group dynamics and simulations of the routine of farmers during peer visits, the producers were coached for empowerment and to improve their own record

keeping capacities. Above all, the objective was to demonstrate through practice that the documents required by Rede Ecovida for PGS certification are above all working tools for Agroecology, and can be used for improved production planning and financial control.

The workshops also targeted the importance of the participation of all stakeholders in the PGS certification processes, as a tool for social control and to build collective responsibility. Producers themselves hosted their peers from various regions of Paraná, which contributed to highlighting potentials, challenges and opportunities, while also justifying the need for flexibility in a system that must adapt to different realities. This workshop cycle strengthened the PGS initiative and all involved, producers, technicians and some local civil society entities supporting agroecology.

The “Paraná Mais Organico” Program was fundamental in providing the funds to support this learning process through peers: a key element of PGS. As a result of the support provided by this public policy in cooperation with the work of the local civil society, producers are better prepared to farm organically and to support their peers, which has a positive impact on the increased quality and availability of organic produce for the people in Paraná and the whole country.



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Participants of  
the event Paraná  
Agroecológico III, 2018

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# CONTINENTAL NEWS: WHAT'S NEW IN...

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## Global

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**IFOAM – Organics international:** The World Board has recently approved a new edition of the IFOAM Policy Brief on “How Governments Can Recognize and Support Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)”. Published for the first time in 2011, this Policy Brief on PGS is a landmark in our advocacy work. The document targets policy makers and advocates that wish to support PGS not only through recognition in their national organic regulatory systems, but also through different forms of support aimed at promoting rather than regulating the organic sector. The revision of the policy brief has been co-funded by the European Union under Erasmus +, in the framework of the EATingCRAFT project.

**Calls for proposals:** Two international calls that could be interesting for PGS initiatives to apply for:

1. Under the flagship of the **International Innovation Award for Sustainable Food and Agriculture**, FAO and the Government of Switzerland are calling on individuals, private companies or institutions to submit a nomination for one of the following categories before 28th February 2019:
  - Award for Digitalisations and Innovations for Sustainable Food Systems (USD 40,000) that impact more than one level of supply chain and strengthen the link between farmers and consumers.
  - Award for Innovations that empower Youth in Agriculture and Food Systems (USD 20,000).

## Africa

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**Sao Tome and Principe & Ghana:** PGS development is ongoing in several countries in West Africa. In the framework of the project Organic Markets for Development (OM4D) implemented by IFOAM – Organics International in partnership with the Louis Bolk Institute, new PGS initiatives are taking shape. Following the introductory PGS trainings that took place in May and June, 2018, local stakeholders met in December in both countries to discuss which documents to adopt and develop (organic standards, farmer’s pledge, guidelines for farm visits, etc.). For more information, please contact Alexandro Cardoso, the local PGS Facilitator in STP: [stp\\_cardoso@hotmail.com](mailto:stp_cardoso@hotmail.com) and Olawumi Benedict in Ghana: [ghana.pgs@gmail.com](mailto:ghana.pgs@gmail.com).

## Americas

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**Brazil:** On 16 October 2018, the first ecological farmers’ market in Brazil celebrated its 29th anniversary. The market “Feira de Agricultores Ecológicos” was founded in 1989, when family producers, organic pioneers, linked to the “Coolmeia” Cooperative decided to hold a market offering local organic products to celebrate the World Food Day (16/10) and the World Week Against Agrochemicals. After only three years, the market went from monthly to weekly. This successful experience has become a model for direct interactions between farmers and consumers: they pioneered the first experiences with participatory certification for organic agriculture in the country. The market remains operational providing not only fresh, PGS-certified organic produce, but also a place for community building and promotion of agroecological principles. For contacts and more info [click here](#).

# Asia

**India:** The poverty eradication and women empowerment programme “Kudumbashree”, implemented by the Government of Kerala, recently announced that the over 2000 ha of land, are in the process of being certified organic through the National PGS Program. The area is managed by over 20,000 women, for the production of vegetables and fruits. This action is supported by *the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Rural Development* in the framework of the PKVY programme, a set of public policies promoting organic agriculture with value chain activities such as PGS certification.

**Vietnam:** In August 2018, the Decree No. 109/2018/ND-DP to regulate and promote organic agriculture in the country was published. The regulation includes a section to encourage farmers to participate in PGS, but at the same time considers third party certification as the only valid method for organic certification. The decree came into force in October, 2018. For more information about the PGS movement in Vietnam, please contact: **Tu Thi Tuyet Nhung** from Organic PGS Vietnam.

# Europe

**Japan:** Organic Shizukuishi PGS has been approved by the PGS Committee of IFOAM – Organics International and is now one of the **IFOAM Recognized PGS Initiatives**. This young and small PGS initiative has a well-structured internal organization and a robust set of protocols in place. They have been investing a lot in communication with consumers, who participate in the PGS activities, and have a close collaboration with the local authorities of Iwate to promote organic agriculture. For more information, please contact **Ryoichi Komiya**.

**France:** Sylvaine Lemeilleur (CIRAD Researcher and member of the PGS Committee of IFOAM – Organics International) and Gilles Allaire (INRA) have recently published a paper titled Participatory guarantee system, towards a re-appropriation of intellectual commons. In the article, they look at organic farming and food labels as an intellectual common-pool resource, which can be analyzed drawing from the **8 principles of Management of Commons** that were developed in the 1990s by nobel-prize winner Elinor Ostrom. The article is available in French [here](#).

# Imprint

The **Global PGS Newsletter** is published bimonthly by IFOAM - Organics International. It is a free electronic publication. For a subscription to the newsletter, please write to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio). You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on our website.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome at any time. Please send your PGS-related articles in English, French or Spanish to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio).

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