Dear members of the PGS Network,

September 2012 was a significant time for Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). The organic agriculture project implemented by ADDA was closed after 7 years, and our PGS Network has not received any support from ADDA since then. This change has been a big challenge for our young PGS System. However, Vietnam PGS remains healthy and continues moving forward with strong support from its members as well as from NGOs such as ACCD, ADDA, VECO, and IFOAM.

Funded by Veco Vietnam, the PGS Newsletter is expected to provide up-to-date information to all members, interested organizations and individuals, particularly members of organic producer groups who have limited access to internet and the PGS website.

The PGS Coordination Committee, term 2013 - 2015.

The Vietnam PGS Annual Meeting was held in 14th December 2012 in Hanoi at La Thanh hotel. The meeting was funded by IFOAM, and had various support from the College of Agriculture and Rural Development (VCARD), Action for the City (ACCD), and Inter Groups and Companies. Being an IFOAM member, Vietnam PGS discussed and reached agreements on revised PGS standards to equivalent of IFOAM organic standards. As procedure, a new PGS Coordination Committee (PGS.CC) was elected for the term 2013-2015 after the resignation of the former committee.

There are 10 members in the new committee, including consumers, traders and producers from Inter-Groups Luong Son and Thanh Xuan. The list of all members is available on the PGS website www.vietnamorganic.vn. The first meeting of the new committee was conducted on 12 January 2013 to discuss the directions and activities of PGS in 2013, and assign responsibilities among the committee. Ms Tu Thi Tuyet Nhung, former head of the committee in 2012, was re-elected as head of the new committee in the term 2013-2015. With a large number of elected members and volunteers than ever, it will promise an effective operation term to ensure the transparency of whole system and create a strong motivation to develop PGS Vietnam.

Inspection and PGS certification

Officially, our PGS network has 3 Inter-Groups in Soc Son (Ha Noi) and Luong Son (Hoa Binh), in which there are 29 producer groups with 225 members and 23.7ha, whose cultivations include longan, pomelo, and vegetables.
Two Inter-Groups in Thanh Xuan and Luong Son have been improved after they were restructured and trained in inspection in July 2012. The annual inspection plan was closely monitored by the two Inter-Groups and the decisions made on time after inspection not delayed as they previously had been. However, the violation was not processed in time by the two Inter-Groups, and this resulted in losses not only for producers, but also for traders and consumers, as production groups have to wait for the decision. Four groups in the Inter-Group Xuan Giang (Soc Son) including Huong Nhai (Dong Xuan commune), Lai Cach 1, Lai Cach 2 and Ngoc Ha (Xuan Giang commune) were not monitored and inspected due to their not maintaining PGS activities. Therefore, all products from these four groups have not been certified as organic. So far 24 groups with 172 producers and 18.7 ha have been certified as PGS organic, among which 7.7 ha are vegetables and the rest are pumelo and longan. Most of the areas which do not certify are in Xuan Giang Soc Son (2.9 ha) and in conversion period of new areas in Luong Son and Thanh Xuan.

In June and July 2012, 3 inspection trainings were conducted in Luong Son and Thanh Xuan. 66 farmer inspectors of 22 producer groups, 4 staff members from the companies, and local farmer union staffs participated in the training. Both theory and practice on inspection skills were carried out on crop farming, animal husbandry and packaging unit. The new standards were presented and discussed in detail during training to make sure the critical points of standards would be well received for the inspection work after training. Training on inspection will be addressed annually to improve the capacity of inspectors and update the standards for theirs work as well.

Registration and compliance PGS of retailers
Nine companies registered PGS so far, in which eight have been approved as PGS members. Generally, the companies have been acting in compliance with the rule. That is only products certified by PGS organic or International Certification Body can be sold as organic, and all PGS certified products must be packaged and labeled with PGS organic. However, a couple of violations have been found in labeling and packaging at Ecomart, Trang An, and Bac Tom shops; also, the label “organic products” has been overused to make display of non-organic products shelves in Mr Sach stores; or the arrangement was not clearly between organic certified and uncertified products in Mr Sach and others such as Trang An, Tam Dat could make the buyers misunderstand when looking for the organic ones. The PGS committee has addressed the violations and many of them were improved. This year, PGS.CC will collaborate with Smart Club of Vietnam Consumers (SCVC) to intensify check at the PGS retailer's stores.

The list of PGS retailers is available on the website www.vietnamorganic.vn.
New standards and IFOAM's recognition

After the ADDA project, PGS.CC completed the registration to IFOAM and now being officially member of IFOAM under name PGS Vietnam. The Vietnam PGS standards was first submitted to IFOAM for recognition in 2011, and was then revised based on IFOAM comments. The second version was submitted to IFOAM right after approving through annual meeting 2012 for their appraisal. We got very positive feedback from IFOAM which it is very high possibility of recognition our PGS standard in this evaluation. If they agree, our standards will be officially recognized at the international level!

PGS Promotion

Besides the strengthening of productivity, monitoring and inspection, the promotion for PGS have been carried out. Funded by ADDA Organic project, the promotional campaign has implemented to disseminate the images, messages of PGS system through mass media such as VTV, VTC16, and Newspaper. Additionally, posters and leaflets were provided to PGS retailers to promote PGS directly to their consumers. Especially, the website www.vietnamorganic.vn has established become a useful channel to provide the information about PGS activities and the documentation guide on technique and PGS as well. Promotion activities have attracted the attention of community to organic agriculture in general and organic PGS system in particular not only in Ha Noi, but in other provinces from the North to the Southern of Vietnam. However, most of consumers have a poor understanding of PGS. The education to consumer on organic and PGS should therefore need to be remaining as an important mission.

It has been more than 25,000 visits to website vietnamorganic.vn during PGS promotion. Nearly 8,000 downloads of documentation on organic technique and PGS

Cooperation with other organizations

Thanks to great efforts from all members, PGS organic has gained attention from not only consumers, but also government agencies and NGOs which are implementing the sustainable agriculture in Vietnam. Professional agencies from the Agriculture ministry, Ha Noi DARD and other development projects of international
Organizations such as JICA, VECO, and SEED TO TABLE participated in the PGS AGM 2012 to listen to, encourage and learn that indicated PGS is right direction in the current context.

Several NGOs in Vietnam have started applying PGS System in their projects. VECO Vietnam applied PGS in monitoring and managing safe vegetable production in Phu Tho and Lang Son, and up scaling its model for organic vegetables in Hai Phong and safe vegetables in Vinh Phuc in 2013. VECO with its counterparts are advocating for PGS to be officially recognized in Vietnam. A new Inter-Group in Tan Lac Hoa Binh was formed with support from SEED TO TABLE. The sustainable agriculture development projects of JICA have shown strong interest in applying PGS system into rural development activities. Action for the City (ACCD) has committed to continue providing financial management, stationeries, office equipments to enable the PGS.CC working effectively. Particularly, Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association has provided positive policies to help PGS growing thus contributed to the development of Vietnam organic agriculture.

In 2013, PGS will be run within Vietnam Organic Agriculture Association to get more supports in order to help Organic movement develop strongly.

Signing agreement between Veco and its partners

The workshop on PGS advocacy of Veco

**PGS fees**

We clearly need some money to run PGS. We need to pay for administration work, printing and inspection work. Since the close of the ADDA-VNHF organic agriculture project, Vietnam PGS has not been funded; therefore, fees from PGS members are necessary to run the system. The annual fee of 250,000d/producer and 1,000,000d/store was discussed in the last annual meeting and agreed upon again in the meetings of Inter-Groups.

**Acknowledgement**

Internal Newsletter was issued by Vietnam PGS Coordination Committee to provide up-to-date information about inspection, certification and important events about PGS. The edition team of Vietnam PGS Internal Newsletter is thankful to Veco Vietnam for its funding for editing, printing and disseminating. More information and comments from individuals and related organizations are much appreciated to improve future newsletters.

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