

The Global PGS Newsletter

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Impressions from the Terra Madre PGS workshop

By *Mathew John*



Terra Madre – a gathering of food communities from around the world. A simplicity of expression contrasts with a display of the earth’s complexity and diversity. It takes one’s breath away. The sheer enormity of the exercise of bringing together close to 6000 people from

around the world, giving them a platform to express themselves and meet people from other diverse backgrounds – that is what makes Terra Madre unique. It does not try to create boundaries but allows people to find and channel energy from one another for the earth’s common good.

I attended, of course, the PGS session, where it was quite a surprise to be hauled out of the crowd and told that, within a few minutes, I would have to speak about the experience in India. It gave me an opportunity to go back in time and provide a background to the PGS movement in different parts of the world. I explained about the manner in which PGS evolved in India – farmers reaching out to consumers in ways that they had not connected before. I ended with the effort being made by the government to launch a PGS Program in

India. I think it was quite well received, as this session went on for close to 3 hours with no signs of ending. So many people from around the world talked of their efforts and the tremendous strength that they have gotten from this concept of PGS. Many others were hearing about it for the first time and were so excited.

Representatives of other PGS groups like Certified Naturally Grown from the US and the newly formed PGS network in Sri Lanka were also present at the event to add strength and contribute to the debate.



A Terra Madre 2010 session in Turin, Italy

The accreditation process of PGS in Brazil: a consumer (and producer) perspective

An interview with Maria Elisa von Zuben Tassi
By Flavia Castro



Maria Elisa von Zuben Tassi

Starting from December 31, 2010, organic products sold in supermarkets and restaurants in Brazil must bear a national certification seal on the package. Producers, certification bodies and PGS groups have been taking steps to comply with the national regulation and to obtain accreditation by the Government. Maria Elisa

von Zuben Tassi is a Master's student at the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (Ufscar), developing a research project on direct sales of organic products in Campinas, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Lucimar Santiago de Abreu (Embrapa). She has started an organic strawberry production this year and participates in the consumer group (CSA) Trocas Verdes, associated with the Associação de Agricultura Natural de Campinas – ANC, an organization involving around 60 producers in PGS. The ANC has applied for accreditation, making it the first PGS that will undergo audit by the government! In the following interview, Maria Elisa provides us with her perspective on the accreditation process.

1. *Before submitting the application for accreditation, were the different steps of the process clear? What were the main challenges with the accreditation process?*

I have not been a part of the process for very long and, officially, my role is to represent the consumer group while investigating the process as part of the research for my Master's dissertation. The documents required for the accreditation, as well as the deadlines to be respected, actually contribute to make the process faster, but they demand from the producers a routine that wasn't requested before, such as field agendas with daily entries. In addition, many doubts have emerged throughout the process, because of the particular characteristics of some producers and the need to form stakeholder groups (producers, consumers, etc) that did not exist before.

2. *Was it necessary to request technical assistance in order to apply for accreditation?*

In the group I am involved with, there was a more intensive voluntary work from some of the representatives in order to implement the participatory system throughout this year. An agronomist was hired to assist one of the groups in the OPAC (Participatory Body of Organic Conformity Assessment), and the costs were sustained by the group. In other groups some participants are both producers and technicians (agronomists), so they can contribute to solve the problems they come across.

3. *Currently, what is the status of the accreditation process? Has any audit or inspection visit been already carried out by the competent authorities?*

Right now only the peer visits are happening, in the cases in which we have new producers becoming part of the participatory system. Still no audit by the MAPA or other competent authority has happened, but one visit is scheduled for November 22, together with the first meeting of the Participatory Body of Organic Conformity Assessment (OPAC), during which all the representatives of each group will be present.

4. *How would you describe the relationship with the public institutions throughout the process?*

In the specific case of the OPAC- ANC the relationship is good with the local body for technical assistance and rural extension, the CATI – *Coordenadoria de Assistência Técnica Integral* (São Paulo), as well as the collaboration with the State's Commission of Organic Production, bound to the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA). Technicians from the MAPA have been making efforts to promote and implement the law, through the distribution of informative booklets. Marcelo Laurino, MAPA's representative in this commission, has been conducting many lectures in order to clarify the changes introduced with the new certification system to the general public. Universities and research institutes (such as EMBRAPA – *Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa agropecuária*) still remain outside the process, even though the theme is becoming stronger and is being promoted by local facilitators, in order to have it included in the research agenda of these institutions.

5. *Did the number of producers and/or consumers involved in the group grow since the accreditation process started?*

I have noticed that the stakeholders' interest in PGS has become more relevant, since information has been disseminated and the local network is becoming stronger. I could mention for example two producers that moved from third party certification to PGS, as well as producers that were not certified but are now interested in the process, and the integration of the consumer group into the OPAC.

6. *How would you evaluate the Brazilian regulation concerning guarantee systems that are alternative to third party certification? What are the benefits in becoming a member of a PGS for producers? And for consumers?*

The Brazilian regulation has been determining new relationships among producers, consumers and technicians; among NGOs, competent authorities and the private sector. The law is still not very well known by

those involved in the process, since it is very recent. It requires some control instruments and information registration that in many cases are new to the producers, increasing the "bureaucratization" of the process. It is still being implemented and developed, for example with public consultation of some technical rules (e.g. on edible mushrooms, organic seeds, traders and catering etc.) that are now open for society's input. Therefore there is still a lot to understand from this regulation. As for the benefits of being part of a PGS on the side of the producer, I consider them to be the possibility to exchange information with producers and others involved, to strengthen bounds of trust, friendship and commercial relations. For consumers, the main benefit is the possibility to approach organic producers and the Guarantee System as a whole, contributing to build a certification model that is coherent with reality. During the field visits, the contact with the origin of food products makes it possible to experience the local reality, to understand difficulties and losses in the production chain, as well as to understand more about natural cycles and seasonality of production.

South Africa recognizes PGS in draft policy on organic agriculture

By Konrad Hauptfleisch



Last month, the South African Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) published a draft Policy on Organic Farming. This, in itself, is a positive development in that the SA government is now showing recognition and support for the organic agriculture sector. The other piece of good news

is that PGS has received recognition in this policy, thanks to the advocacy and lobbying of IFOAM members and other stakeholders from the sector. In the policy, the DAFF recognizes PGS as an effective tool for emerging smallholder farmers, and includes it in the section dealing with regulations and certification. The draft policy also included PGS in the list of critical priority actions needing support and development. The document is now open for public comment, and it is hoped that the sector will react positively to ensure that organic agriculture, including PGS, becomes an integral part of the South African agriculture sector.

Reflecting upon the process of how we managed to have PGS included in this policy, I think an important step was the FRIDGE study entitled "Study to Develop a Value Chain Strategy for Sustainable Development and Growth of Organic Agriculture", which was commissioned by our Department of Trade and Industry. The draft policy is based on this study to a great extent, and the study was very much pro-PGS, thanks to the inputs of Gunnar Rundgren, who was a co-author of the study. The Bryanston Organic & Natural Market also gave input during the research phases and were well featured in the final report. For the first time during the development of the organic sector in South Africa, emerging farmers, smallholders and the small retailers were consulted and are seen as partners, along with government and the commercial organic agriculture sector. This, in conjunction with the registration of our new organic sector body, SAOSO (South African Organic Sector Organisation), bodes well for the future of organic agriculture in South Africa.

The concept of “social control” and its use in describing PGS

By Joëlle Katto-Andrighetto



Many of us use the concept of “social control” to describe the social mechanisms contributing to the enforcement of conformity to the organic rules in Participatory Guarantee Systems. This term is also used to describe similar processes taking place in Group Certification. “Social control” is a widely applied concept in sociology, deeply rooted in E. Durkheim’s theories concerning order and social integration, but formally introduced in 1901 by E. Ross and primarily used in American sociology, referring to a society’s capacity to regulate itself without resource to force (Deflem 2007). For instance, G. Mead (1934) defined it as those mechanisms of cooperation and voluntary cohesion in society.

A current understanding of the concept is that it “generally refers to societal and political mechanisms or processes that regulate individual and group behavior, leading to **conformity** and compliance to the rules of a given **society, state** or **social group**.”¹ Accordingly, the two basic means to enforce social control are:

- **Informal social control:** resulting from continuous contacts between individuals and groups of individuals, it is exerted on a daily basis in the form of social norms and the internalization of these norms and values by the individuals; and
- **Formal social control:** exerted by specific agents and institutions (justice, police, army, companies, etc), it corresponds to the application of external sanctions which can be either positive (rewards) or negative (punishment).

In the context of organic compliance, “social control” is rarely used as a concept to describe third party certification, yet governments (through their organic regulation) and certifiers (through their certification procedures) typically exert a formal kind of social

control. Similarly, formal social control is also present in group certification and PGS, with written rules of compliance and pre-determined sanctions for those who do not comply.

What is particular to PGS and group certification is the additional importance of informal social control, resulting from the collective responsibility towards certification. Since individual operators in such groups understand that if one violates the commonly agreed rules the credibility of the entire group will be at stake, they feel an increased responsibility to comply and an increased interest to “watch” each other. In groups that have a strong social cohesion, breaking the rules will mean more than losing market shares; it will mean losing friends, respect and status in the community. PGS also works very much on building a common vision among the stakeholders, thereby leading farmers to internalize the organic values, which is ultimately the best way to ensure organic integrity.

In a conference workshop, I was once talking about collective responsibility towards organic certification and the advantages it can bring in terms of adding a social control component to promote organic integrity. A certification body representative reacted very strongly on the concept of “social control” and pointed at the danger of using a term which is also used to refer to the way dictatorial governments control their populations.



¹ See Wikipedia, *Social control*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_control (describing the concept of social control) (as of Nov. 16, 2010, 15:10 GMT)

That person reminded us that PGS have existed before in Europe and that precisely the pressure of “social control” on the farmers – meaning that sometimes assessments were not really objective but influenced by personal relationships (whether positive or negative) – is what led most farmers to prefer independent third party certification. Although it could be questioned if that was the real reason behind such preference, it is more interesting to note here that indeed the concept of social control has been put to a wide range of applications. But originally social control is opposed to coercive control and, as Spierenburg (2004) notes, it was meant to cover both the formal institutions of the state and all kinds of nongovernmental arenas, some of them at the “bottom” of society.

What can be said about the turn towards independent third party certification is that, as a result, social relationships between the certified and the certifier have very much weakened and been replaced by client-vendor relationships. Not to mention the fact that the role of consumers becomes virtually irrelevant.

Therefore, it seems to me that the concept of social control (which we should more accurately call “informal social control”) is still of great value, as the organic sector develops into a mainstream market but wishes to retain a strong internalization of organic values by operators along the supply chain. If our vision is to make the whole world organic, we will need the full diversity of integrity-building and trust-building mechanisms, from the most traditional to the most innovative, and from the most informal to the most formal.

Some organic regulations have already integrated this strategy and enabled a range of mechanisms to support organic claims. For the Brazilian and the Chilean governments, being part of a farmer’s organization that exerts “social control” on its members is one condition for farmers to make organic claims in direct sales, without the need of third-party certification. The Brazilian regulation implementing rules even define “social control” in this context: as “an organized process to generate credibility from the interaction of people or organizations, based on participation, compromise, transparency and trust” (Brazil, 2007).

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PGS BASICS

What are organic products? A government says it well

The “Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria” (National Service for Food Safety and Quality) of the Federal Government of Mexico, offers a one-page answer to the question “What are organic products” on its website. On the verification aspect, the government explains that “*For a product to be called organic, it must be certified (by a certification body, through a Participatory Guarantee System, or by the Authority)*”. Simple and efficient!

To read more, visit: www.senasica.gob.mx/?id=1758

Work plan of the Latin American PGS Forum for 2010-2011

This year's annual meeting of the **Latin American Forum of Participatory Guarantee Systems** took place on September 7 in Lima, Peru. The objectives of the meeting were to discuss the Forum's history, its objectives and tasks; to provide update on current PGS initiatives that are relevant for the Forum's activities; and to define the work plan for 2010-2011. After the sharing of ideas within the Forum, the following work plan, including initiatives and responsible volunteers, has been agreed upon:

Task Areas	Activities	Objectives	Persons Responsible
Creating synergies	Assessment of the contribution of PGS to the expansion of local markets	To assess the impact of PGS in strengthening local organic markets through the development of impact indicators	Benjamín Macas Georgina Catacora
	Identification of mechanisms for implementing PGS in cross-border markets	To identify and systematize PGS implementation mechanisms in cross-border organic markets between Guatemala and Mexico To analyze the possibilities of replication of these experiences in the Andean region	Mauren Lizano Miguel Escalona Patricia Flores
Impact on CNA (competent national authorities)	Draft of an IFOAM support letter	To influence competent national authorities of Central America for the recognition of PGS in the text of the regional organic standard	Janneth Villanueva Laercio Meirelles
	Development of a newsletter on the Latin-American PGS Forum aimed at the international commission of competent authorities in organic agriculture	To present and disseminate the Forum as a platform for information and reference on PGS in Latin America	Laercio Meirelles
Impact on CNA / Mechanisms of reciprocity	Diagnosis of national and regional public bodies with the potential to support the promotion and control of organic agriculture	To identify public bodies capable of: 1) promoting organic agriculture and PGS, and 2) supporting regional harmonization of regulatory frameworks in organic agriculture including PGS	Daniel Vildoza Patricia Flores Janneth Villanueva Alicia Alem
Communication and information exchange	Creation of the Forum's electronic platform	To improve the dissemination of information on PGS and to make the Forum's work more transparent through a web page.	Georgina Catacora Miguel Escalona Daisy Peña (Ecuador)

PGS national consultation goes on in India

In the September issue of The Global PGS Newsletter, we announced that the Indian Ministry of Agriculture, through its National Center for Organic Farming (NCOF), was launching a national PGS program. NCOF had prepared a draft operational manual for this new PGS system and was initiating an intensive several month consultation period with all stakeholders within and outside India.

Several consultation workshops have now taken place. Two rounds of discussion and feedback have been completed with incorporation of changes in the draft operational manual, based on the feedback of the stakeholders. The last PGS Feedback workshop took place on November 10-11 at the NCOF office in Ghaziabad. IFOAM was represented there by World Board member Vanaja Ramprasad and member of the PGS committee Mathew John. Other

participants included senior farmers, institutions engaged with farmers such as universities, third party certifiers and distributors of organic products around the country, along with the regional representatives of NCOF. According to Vanaja Ramprasad, "The program has been well thought out and draws a lot of inspiration from IFOAM. The draft very clearly spelt out all the steps in the process and the enthusiasm of the government officials from NCOF was very contagious and gave clear indications of the intent to implement the PGS program at the national level."

The final version of the manual was released on November 11. A copy can be requested at akya-dav52@yahoo.com.

Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown is launching a two-year initiative to help foster robust local farmers networks, initially focused on farms in Tennessee and Georgia. CNG will provide organizing support and technical assistance and compile a resource guide (made publicly available online) that includes case studies outlining the activities of existing networks and concrete examples of how they benefit farmers (and therefore justify the time commitment they might require). This work will be funded through a grant from the Farmers Market Promotion Program of the Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **India:** The Keystone Foundation is planning a workshop in December to discuss their new protocol for the participatory certification of wild honey collection. Various stakeholders such as 3rd party certifiers, FairWild, academics and NGOs will be involved. For more information, contact Mathew John at mathew@keystone-foundation.org.
- **Fiji:** Last month, the Fiji Organic Association (FOA) held its annual general meeting. According to Sokoveti Namoumou, Vice President of FOA, the organization is mobilizing small farmer groups to organize themselves into PGS for developing the local market, using the Pacific Organic Standards and under the auspices of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom). The FOA meeting concluded that association needs to establish a full time secretariat and to conduct training on PGS and internal control systems for group certification. (Source: www.solomontimes.com)



...LATIN AMERICA

- **Bolivia:** The technical commission of BTC (the Belgian Development Agency) has approved the financing of a project submitted by AOPEB to implement organic agriculture through PGS in Bolivia.
- **Bolivia:** Within the project “Strengthening the exchange of knowledge in the agricultural ICT network and AOPEB’s farmer to farmer process” AOPEB is adding an ICT component to its PGS program: computers are used for gathering and storing information and geo-referencing products through the use of GPS. The information generated is then made available through an online platform, and is mainly used for the certification of organic products for the local market. For more information, contact AOPEB (gerencia@aopeb.org) or Red Tic Bolivia (info@ticbolivia.net), and watch this video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ddl8meVjJ8Q of an interview with Arturo Miranda, responsible for AOPEB’s ICT unit.
- **Mexico:** The first International Forum on Organic Agriculture and Fair Trade took place on November 12th and 13th in Chiapas, Mexico, during the EXPOCHIAPAS. It was organized by CERTIMEX in collaboration with SECAM, Fundación Produce, Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano, Banchiapas, and UNACH. Several hundreds participants, including producers, technicians, researchers, traders, officials, as well as importers from Europe, Japan and the United States were present. The aim was to promote the exchange of experiences between producers and traders and the advantages of organic and fair trade certification. On the second day of the Forum, during the session dedicated to the Market of Organic Products, PGS was presented through the experience of the IFOAM member *Red Mexicana de Mercados y Tianguis de Productos Orgánicos* by Dr. Rita Schwentesius.

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.

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