

The Global PGS Newsletter

March 2011
Volume 2 Number 5

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Who approves / accredits / certifies PGS schemes?

By Joëlle Katto-Andrighetto

There are growing demands on governments to recognize PGS schemes and to include them in the frame of their organic regulations, so as to enable PGS-certified operators to make organic claims and possibly to use the national/regional organic logo or a PGS-variant of it. Usually, such government recognition of PGS schemes will come together with specific regulatory requirements, which PGS schemes will have to demonstrate compliance with. To be officially recognized, PGS schemes will then have to give up some of their independence and accept to be supervised by a "third party". There are several possible scenarios for who this "third party" can be. Some countries and regions have had fruitful public-private consultation processes that have led to various arrangements in this regard.

Brazil is the most advanced country in terms of legal recognition of PGS, as these are, in the national regulation, considered certification organizations on the same level as third party certifiers. PGS, like third party certifiers, have to be accredited by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (of course, the accreditation requirements are different). Decision on accreditation is centralized at the national level: COA-

GRE, the competent authority, makes the accreditation decision for both PGS and 3rd party certifiers. As a result PGS-certified products can be sold and even traded anywhere within the country with the national logo.

The Pacific Community is a regional community encompassing 26 island countries and territories. The community has worked on its organic certification system in the context of FAO-supported projects a few years ago, and has developed a regional organic standard, legal framework and logo. To use the regional logo, PGS schemes must be approved by the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom), a body that is housed in The Secretariat of the Pacific Community, an inter-governmental body.

The East African Community is another example of an inter-governmental regional body that has adopted a regional organic standard and agreed on a common approach to manage the use of a regional organic logo. To use the regional logo, PGS schemes must have been approved by their respective national organic movement association. Approval of PGS schemes is therefore "de-centralized" to the national level, whereas PGS-certified products can be traded freely within the region. It is also a rare case where the approval of

PGS is in the hands of the private sector and not of the government authorities.

India is just in the process of setting-up a national PGS program, under the supervision of the National Center for Organic Farming (NCOF), an office of the national Ministry of Agriculture. The system of approval and oversight of PGS groups under the new program is quite hierarchical, with a chain of regional and supra-regional councils under the ultimate supervision of a National Advisory Committee composed of representatives of both the public sector (Ministry of Agriculture) and the private sector (NGO, farmer & consumer representatives). Approval of each PGS group is de-centralized to the regional (sub-national) level, but decisions regarding the overall scheme are centralized at the national level and somewhat under influence of the Ministry of Agriculture. PGS-certified products will be traded nationally.

In Chile, the law does not recognize PGS, but does allow “alternative certification systems” to be used for direct sales by small farmers, provided that these schemes (which can in practice be PGS schemes) be supervised and approved by the national Agriculture and Livestock Service. The requirements and process of such supervision are very similar to the certification of groups with internal control systems, except that the certification is in this case delivered directly by the government agency.

These examples show the diversity of approaches that can be used to endorse PGS schemes. Endorsement can take a “group certification” form, an accreditation form, or a more simplified approval form. The challenge is to find procedures that will not place a too bureaucratic administrative burden on PGS schemes; otherwise it would contradict the very approach and principles of PGS. Governments should consider decentralizing the supervision of PGS schemes as much as possible, and also, why not, delegating it to the private sector organization, if there is one that is well organized, and is a democratic and legitimate representative of the whole sector.

As, the need for paper work and complicated procedures, and the cost of external supervision can be tremendously reduced by involving the local stakeholders in the case of PGS, it is more likely that the approval process of PGS schemes would be leaner if de-centralized to the administrative level that best knows and interacts with the system. It would also make sense that there is a relationship between the scope of action of the PGS schemes and the adminis-

trative level that is responsible for their oversight. For example, the local, state or provincial administration within a country could handle the supervision of PGS schemes that operate only or mostly in the boundaries of their jurisdiction.

The aspect of competence is however another point to consider: supervision of PGS schemes is still a very new area, and there may be reasons to centralize this activity to the national or even inter-governmental regional level if there is a lack of adequate competence at lower levels to handle this. Ideally and in the long run, as organic agriculture will expand and PGS schemes will multiply, governments could accompany this process by decentralizing their oversight and developing supervisory competences in lower administrative levels.

Italian government supports discussion on alternative certification at Biofach 2011

By Eva Torremocha

The Italian government, in collaboration with AIAB, the Italian Association for Organic Agriculture, organized a workshop on alternative certification systems at the AIAB booth during BioFach 2011 at Nuremberg. The workshop took place on the February 14, attended by around 30 persons including Christopher Stopes, the IFOAM EU-Group President, and Eva Torremocha, a member of the IFOAM PGS Committee.

After briefly presenting the situation of the organic sector in Italy, Andre Ferrante, the president of AIAB, raised several points for discussion on the evolution of organic certification. He expressed the idea that group certification and Participatory Guarantee Systems could bring into the organic sector a high number of farms that, despite the fact that their practices comply with the EU organic regulation, do not have access to the official organic sector because their production does not have the necessary certification.

This was followed by the presentations by Christopher Stopes and Allesandro Triantafyllidis (scientific committee of AIAB) on the main characteristics of group certification and mentioned the studies conducted to date regarding its implementation in Europe. Eva Torremocha then presented Participatory Guarantee Systems and opened up the debate regarding criteria to be established in view of a possible recognition of these systems in Europe.

The debate concluded on the opportunities offered by Participatory Guarantee Systems for producer groups, not only as certification tools, but also as a tool for community development.



Andre Ferrante, Eva Torremocha, Christopher Stopes and Alessandro Triantafyllidis on the panel of the AIAB workshop on alternative certification

South-South exchange: discovering commonalities between community initiatives in Mexico and India

By Gabriela Ortiz Cosío

“It is peasant initiatives that, in contrary to the governmental production and supply policies, create and recreate long-term subsistence strategies...those actions take numerous forms...all of them have something in common: they are bottom-up community initiatives focusing on the realities in which they operate...” (Fco. López Bárcenas, La Jornada 10/2/11, Mexican newspaper).

One such initiative is in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, in the south east of Mexico, the Red de Productores y Consumidores Responsables Comida Sana y Cercana (Network of Responsible Producers and Consumers for Healthy and Local Food). This movement, created from the needs of consumers, involves producers, consumers and other social actors in a community that exchanges healthy and home-made products, know-how, experiences, services, traditions and values, thereby creating fair interlinkages. In December 2010, as consumers and as part of the coordination team of this network, we went to visit another such initiative in India: the one that is being facilitated for 16 years by Keystone Foundation in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in south India.

This initiative is one that emerged from the needs of the collectors of wild honey who were selling their products for a very low price. How to make this very special honey and other products collected in the forest recognized and sold as local, organic and sustainable products of high quality? The indigenous groups living in this area also collect medicinal leaves, flowers, fruits, barks, resins and seeds. They also grow species such as cloves, pepper, cinnamon, tea, coffee and silk. At the beginning they tried third party certification to demonstrate product quality to consumers. The costs of this process increased in the 2nd year and quickly became unsustainable. Later on, they tried to work on simple ways to convince consumers about their organic produce, which later became part of the participatory certification systems. They work on the basis of a traditional system to share labour, which enables them to recognize the work of others. As in Comida Sana y Cercana, they are interested in the fact that good quality products can stay in the country and benefit them and the local population.

As the majority of their products are from the forest, they have built a monitoring system to guarantee the sustainability of the product, looking at parameters such as diversity, availability, health, regeneration, distribution and population of the concerned species. Like us in Mexico, they came to wonder why we need to certify our organic products when in reality those who should make their production methods known to the public are those who use agrochemicals and GM seeds. Like us, they think that the term “organic” is often used for export-oriented monocultures. Among others, it is important to communicate to the consumers that the products comply with guidelines that reflect their interests and those of producers, that they are controlled by the stakeholders, not by exporters or third parties, and that the products are from small farmers and for local consumption. Keystone facilitates the marketing of the products of the indigenous communities and participates in the quality guarantee.

In India, several institutions and NGOs that work directly with producers have come together to work out the basis of the participatory certification process. Government representatives were invited to their meetings and workshops and are now very interested in backing-up this kind of certification. The PGS India Organic Council, composed of 10 organizations, has been formed but is not yet a legal entity (registered in March 2011). They do not have an office and they function as a network, which as such does not have financial resources. Like us in Comida Sana y Cercana,

they are discussing the pros and cons of establishing themselves as a formal group to be able to access financial resources. They have established their PGS guidelines after extensive discussions between the members of the Council, each of whom had extensive discussions with producers. They designed a simple field questionnaire that can be answered with “yes” and “no”. The questionnaire is not perfect, a work in progress, with adaptation to various locations and types of products. It is translated into 9 Indian languages. Producers in each organization meet once a month to exchange experiences and they receive once every 3 months a technical training such as on how to make insect-repellents or earthworm compost.

development. It is an initiative of eco-development that promotes organic and fair local trade, especially of products derived from bees and non-timber forest products.



Men of the Irula tribe

Photo: Shelbi Joseph

During a visit to the indigenous producers of one community in the natural reserve of Nilgiris, they told us that for them certification is important because it helps to improve the prices and the market of their products and therefore to improve their livelihoods. Like for us in Mexico, their meetings are also difficult and not everybody is always present. We attended the meeting of a community cooperative where they process the products collected. 60% of the income from the sales of the products are shared between all the members of the cooperative. The other 40% is used to cover the costs of transport, labeling, packaging, etc. This way of working together is not always easy, as not all members participate in an equal way and the sharing of income can be subject to intense discussions.

Their work and attracting consumers has been very slow. In the beginning, they set-up weekly markets, which did not work well. Now they sell only non-perishable products in 4 regional shops. The people in these shops are the ones responsible to give the information and little by little to educate the consumer. Keystone foundation works as well in research and conservation of these natural resources and in rural

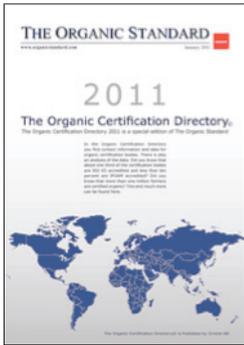


Gabriela Ortiz Cosío, her daughter and 2 girls from the Indian community cooperative.

Organic Standards owned by PGS initiatives can also apply for the IFOAM Family of Standards: applications are free if submitted before the 1st of May.

The IFOAM Family of Standards is a new service launched a couple of months ago under the new IFOAM Organic Guarantee System. The IFOAM Family of Standards contains all standards officially endorsed as organic by the global organic movement, based on their equivalence with the COROS (Common Objectives and Requirements of Organic Standards), a document jointly developed by IFOAM, FAO and UNCTAD. Any organic standard, whether private or public, can apply to be included in the IFOAM Family of Standards. This includes organic standards owned and maintained by PGS initiatives. Having your standard in the IFOAM Family of Standard can be a main asset to demonstrate to your stakeholders, your supporters or your government that your standard is truly organic and is equivalent to the international reference. Upon application, the assessment of your standard against the COROS will also reveal the strengths and weaknesses of your standard, as a tool for self-improvement. Applications for the IFOAM Family of Standards can be done any time, but applications submitted before the 1st of May will be free of charge, while applications submitted after that date will begin from 1,250 Euros. Do not miss your chance, apply now!

More than 20 PGS initiatives listed in the new “Organic Certification Directory”



The eighth edition of The Organic Certification Directory was published in February 2011. The Directory lists all the organic certification bodies in the world. Previously, it was issued as a special edition of The Organic Standard but will now be issued separately and distributed for free to the organic world. Two of the many new features in the Directory are that it will be published online on the TOS website and also list Participatory Guarantee Systems Organizers. You can download the directory for free at

<http://organicstandard.com/directory>.

Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **India:** A meeting of food producers from across the country, met in Dehradun in the state of Uttarakhand for 2 days to discuss ways of conforming to Fair Trade standards. Presentations from FLO and Fair Food International were among the many presentations made. PGS Committee member Mathew John made a presentation on PGS, dwelling briefly on the international efforts and largely on the work being carried out in India. That the entire process could be done in the local language and in a manner that sorted out issues, seemed to interest many groups. A brief discussion on how the process is carried out by local groups was heartening for many of the participants, as they saw how local women understood the system and its benefits.



...LATIN AMERICA

- **Colombia:** the VI Encuentro de Agricultura Ecológica (VI ELAO) will take place in Cali, Colombia in October. Similar to the one held in Peru in 2010, this event will include a meeting of the PGS Latin American Forum. As soon as we have the official announcement, we will communicate it. This is an important event where PGS practitioners meet and exchange their experiences. In the meantime, for more information, please contact Carlos Escobar, member of the organizing committee, at the address. Vielao@colombia.com
- **Brazil:** Laercio Meirelles (Red Ecovida-Brasil), based on his Brazilian experience, is working on a basic regulation for PGS, a document that he wants simple enough to be applied and adapted to different contexts in different countries. This document should be a useful guide to promote and strengthen PGS across the globe. For more info, contact [Laercio](mailto:Laercio@laerciomeirelles@gmail.com) at laerciomeirelles@gmail.com.
- **Peru:** on the March 11, the University of La Molina (Lima) invited representatives of the public and private sector for an event allowing the competent authority of Peru (SENASA) to present its proposal of the new technical organic regulation. Among the input from the private sector, it was mentioned again to the competent authority that PGS exists in the country, and must be included in this proposal as beneficial options for small producers. It was also pointed out that these systems are implemented in various countries in the region and in other parts of the world. For more information, please contact Jannet Villanueva at jvillanuevaescudero@speedy.com.pe.



.....EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **France:** Another example of PGS being increasingly mentioned as an alternative to “industrial organic big business” by the mainstream media can be found in the March issue of Le Monde Diplomatique (English Edition). In the article titled “France’s organic chickens come home to roost - Will organic farming lose its alternative identity and just become another form of intensive agribusiness?”, the journalist Philippe Baqué observes that “Resistance to organic big business is growing across the globe. More and more smallholders, rural communities and small farmers’ cooperatives are defending smallholder farming and other forms of agriculture that emphasize farming on a human scale, respect biodiversity and food sovereignty. Many choose not to apply for organic certification and have created Participatory Guarantee Systems founded on exchange and trust between producers and consumers”. The full article is available to subscribers only on: <http://mondediplo.com/2011/03/13organic>. A French version of the article is available to all on <http://alerte-environnement.fr/?p=3907>.
- **France:** a conference-debate on PGS has been organized on March 12, during the Fair “Primevère” in Lyon, France. “Alliance PEC Rhône-Alpes” and Nature et Progrès, two organizations implementing PGS in France, organized this event to inform consumers and other stakeholders about the complementary alternatives to third party certification or organic products.
- **Spain:** on February 26 and 27, the first state meeting of organic consumer groups (Encuentro Estatal de Grupos de Consumo de Productos Agroecológicos) was organized in Valencia. The event gathered 104 participants from 9 Spanish provinces. Among other themes, the official closing statement of the event mentions PGS in these terms: “The Participatory Guarantee System has proved sufficiently robust to become an efficient guarantee system for the consumer. In Europe, it should be authorized for concrete situations with small producers, considering that collective (group) certification is already allowed in the case of developing countries”.

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.

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The Global PGS Newsletter is supported by

