

PGS Workshop in Lao PDR

by Chris May



Between 2006 and 2010 Bioglobal Consultancy Ltd , with IFOAM PGS Committee member Chris May as team leader, designed and implemented a smallholder organic coffee project on the Bolovens Plateau in Southern Lao. As part of the project work Bioglobal had numerous informal discussions with Helvetas and Profil about the possibilities for helping smallholders produce organic vegetables and other products for local markets.

As part the Helvetas and Profil strategy to promote organic agriculture they invited Chris May to facilitate a PGS Workshop in Vientiane in March 2011. The purpose of the workshop was to examine how a PGS approach might be used to provide producers with recognition (i.e certificates) and access to organic markets.

Helvetas and Profil have been the leaders for the promotion and development of organic agriculture in Lao PDR. Thus for this PGS workshop the groundwork was already in place for an in-depth analysis of both PGS and ICS approaches for the certification of smallholders supplying local markets. Helvetas has been active in Laos since 2001, they support several projects including Profil and its sister project Prorice, which promotes the production and marketing of organically produced rice.

Profil has undertaken several organic initiatives which include: the creation and adoption of new Lao Organic Standards, and continuing work to set up an organic certification system that meets the unique needs of Lao producers and consumers; training and encouraging local producers to gain the knowledge and skills needed to produce



Vientiane farmers market operates Saturdays and Wednesdays

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organic fruits and vegetables; and taking a lead role in the development of regional and international market opportunities for Lao organic products.

One of the major successes of the project is the creation of an organic farmer's market in Vientiane, which makes a wide variety of fruits, vegetables and processed organic products available to consumers. Lao organic products are also beginning to appear in restaurants and stores around Vientiane, a development that will support the continued growth of the local organic market.

The workshop on March 31, 2011 achieved two

purposes. Firstly it broadened the understanding of how PGS can be structured and function sustainably with reference to India, Brazil and New Zealand and other more recent PGS. Secondly, drawing from these practical experiences and with reference to the IFOAM PGS Self Evaluation Document, it examined the ways in which the existing Profil ICS might adopt PGS approaches to enable a wider group of smallholders to produce and sell certified products. As a follow-up to the workshop, the participants planned to use the PGS Self Evaluation form to 'test' the extent to which their ICS has already adopted PGS methodologies.

IFOAM Comments on the Draft Peruvian regulation, in Favor of PGS Recognition

By Flávia Castro



On February 24, 2011, the Peruvian Ministry of Agriculture published on the webpage of the National Agrarian Health Service (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agraria - SENASA) a Draft Technical Regulation for Organic Production and invited interested stakeholders to send feedback, comments, contributions and suggestions.

IFOAM seized the opportunity to comment on the draft with the aim of contributing to the development of a legal framework for organic production in Peru, one that is in tune with the international organic sector. Markus Arbenz, IFOAM Executive Director, addressed the letter to Mr. Jorge Jave, Director of the Organic Production Branch at SENASA, with detailed comments resulting from a deep analysis of the draft.

Mr. Jave kindly and promptly replied, acknowledging the receipt of the letter and thanking IFOAM for the comments, which according to him will be assessed and considered for adoption by the institution. Suggestions to consider PGS and include alternatives to third-party certification in the draft were an important part of the comments, based also on the document "Best Practices for Organic Policy: What developing country Governments can do to promote the organic agriculture sector" published by the UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development, which recommends that:

"11. Governments should facilitate the access to certification services, either by stimulating foreign certification bodies to open local offices or by supporting the development of local service providers. In some countries, especially where the private sector is weak, the Government could consider establishing a governmental certification service.

12. Compulsory requirements for mandatory third-party certification should be avoided as they will not enable other alternatives to emerge. Other conformity assessment procedures, such as participatory guarantee systems, should be explored."

Below you see an extract from the original letter sent (translated from Spanish):

"IFOAM supports the development of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). We recommend that Governments that do not yet recognize PGS in their national organic regulations take them into consideration during the review of such regulations in order to include them. Within a few weeks, we will have completed a "Policy brief" offering options for Governments to provide a space for PGS in their organic laws and regulations. We would like to share this paper with SENASA as a contribution to the consideration of the official

recognition of PGS in the future. In the meantime, we suggest the inclusion of an article in which it is established that for the domestic or national market, with reference to:

- direct sales (producers to final consumers),
- sales for an amount (set a reference) not higher than...

For which it would be established an assessment that is alternative to third party certification or otherwise, the exemption from verification by third party certification bodies.”

We look forward to the coming developments, hoping that the Peruvian government shall be willing to promote and recognize alternatives to third party certification for the benefit of Peruvian organic farmers and consumers.

Turning possibilities into practices: Brazilian consumers and PGS-certified organic products

By *Giovanna Sacchi*



A PhD student from Bologna University, Italy, researching PGS, Ms. Sacchi has recently carried out field research among organic consumers in southern Brazil. She has finished the data collection, is now starting the analysis, and kindly shared with us some of

her impressions on this ongoing process and a few results.

Since I first started studying for my PhD in Agricultural Economics and Engineering, I have been interested in organic production processes that are guaranteed through alternative models rather than third-party certification. I have focused on the category of consumers, evaluating their interest in products certified through Participatory Guarantee Systems. I believe that consumer behavior is one of the pillars supporting the development and diffusion of organic production processes in general, as well as those specifically guaranteed through the participatory model, considering consumers' close connection to and involvement in the certification process itself.

I decided to develop my own model for evaluating the different consumer patterns in buying PGS organic food products in different social contexts, especially in rural areas (where consumers should play a more active role in understanding and participating in the process) and in nearby urban areas (where the levels of awareness, trust, and participation in the system are considerably lower). I then analyzed their behavior, by asking a random sample of consumers to fill out a questionnaire containing different sections based on

a series of individual factors, which I had previously identified:

- **Attitude** – an essential factor in determining whether consumers' attitude towards PGS products is positive or negative, also by analyzing their level of awareness and understanding of the certification process.
- **Motivation** – to evaluate the consumers' positive or negative attitude in agreeing or refusing to purchase PGS products, in comparison to the underlying motivations; and also to find out whether these motivations are random or based upon sensory appeal, or whether there are ethical and/or political reasons behind the selection of these products.
- **Behavior** – paying specific attention to the frequency of purchase, to find out if the consumption of PGS products is occasional or repeated over time.
- **Trust** – in the quality certification process.
- **Participation** – in the certification process.

I then combined these individual factors with environmental factors in order to classify the scenario in which the interviewed people live.

My choice of Brazil was based on the fact that it is a “mature” country, in terms of accepting, recognizing, and including PGS in national legislation. In fact, it was back in the '70s that groups of farmers in Southern Brazil started adopting alternative practices which veered away from conventional food production models. These alternative models resulted from shared needs, some of which were due to the negative impact of the Green Revolution, and some of which stemmed from

a new increase in awareness linked to environmental protection, animal welfare issues, and workers' rights – thus uniting ethical production methods with improved education on how to choose the right products.

These agroecological initiatives evolved into Rede Ecovida de Agroecologia (Ecovida Agroecology Network) which, due to the need to differentiate between product and production process, developed a similar alternative certification model, thanks to PGS. Since 1998, Ecovida Network contributes to the development and dissemination of sustainable production models in line with the principles of agroecology, and is one of the most widely studied cases due to its success and impact, also in institutional terms.

At this point, I would like to draw attention to three specific case studies: the first two are organizations set up within Ecovida Network's Litoral Solidário nucleus, in Rio Grande do Sul, and the third example is the city of Curitiba, Paraná. As for the first two cases, the conclusion I found to be most evident is that consumer participation takes place through the creation of associations and cooperatives, rather than through the monitoring of quality production processes.

In this community, I was able to visit two consumer cooperatives, operating as stores specializing in ecological products: Coopet, and Ecotorres.

Both organizations were created as a result of local consumers' need to have access to their region's organic products at affordable prices. In fact, food producers in that area had been marketing their own products since 1991, at the Ecological Producers' Market in Porto Alegre (about 300 km away from production sites) and this meant that local consumers were denied access to the goods being sold. This issue led to several encounters and debates among consumer and producer representatives and Centro Ecológico Ipê which is an NGO operating since 1985 that studies alternative production methods in reference to current legislation as well as environmental and social sustainability. This organization shares its findings with the community and has always seen active consumer participation as an indispensable element for successful ecological agriculture. The outcome of the sessions was the creation of Coopet and Ecotorres in 1999.

The latter cooperative is located in the center of the small coastal town of Torres and its main founding principle involves essential integration between the community producing organic food items and the inhabitants of the city, who demand clean products,

in order to achieve a higher quality of life in general. At Ecotorres, both members and non-members can purchase local organic and ecological products from a group of regional producers participating in the nucleus. The store is non-profit and all proceedings from sales are reallocated within the co-op to provide self-funding and cover expenses such as utilities and compensation for employees.

The example of Coopet differs slightly in terms of its approach to sales. In fact, anyone may join the association by paying a membership fee of R\$102 (approx. US\$63) and a monthly fee of R\$30 (approx. US\$18), thus ensuring their right to purchase organic food products at cost. All products have two sales prices – one for members and another one increased by 30% for non members. I personally believe this to be a successful business approach, considering that Coopet's volume of sales amounts to around R\$20,000 (approx. US\$12,000) a month, for a town with a population of about 8,000.



Passeio Publico Organic Market, Curitiba, PR. Participatory certification from Ecovida Network.

Moving on to the case study of Curitiba, we must keep in mind that this is the ecological capital of Brazil – and perhaps of the world – given that the city was awarded the Globe Sustainable City Award in 2010. From the '70s onwards, various government administrations have adopted bottom-up policies and have never haphazardly imposed solutions not previously agreed upon with the citizens. Partially based on these administrative decisions, the tendency to support alternative food production methods took hold in

the early '90s. Green Markets were set up in the city center and after showing steady growth over the years, became known as Organic Markets, in 2004.

Moreover, one section of the community marketplace is entirely dedicated to organic products. There are fruit and vegetable stands as well as stores specializing in organic cosmetics or handcrafted goods, restaurants and cafés, thus providing an opportunity to access daily organic products. On the upper floor of the organic section, there is an area dedicated to raising people's political awareness, with the goal of encouraging consumption of organic products and facilitating availability through various educational programs, offered by national public agencies such as SEBRAE and SENAC. These projects demonstrate the propensity of private and government-owned entities to invest in educating people in order to raise awareness about

organic practices, but also to encourage entrepreneurial activity in the area of sustainable, ethical, and ecological production.

In the Brazilian areas I have visited, I have found that consumers who choose organic products are extremely aware of the need to know what they are putting on their tables. These populations are educated when it comes to choosing healthy, high-quality food and are accustomed to eating seasonal produce. In these cases, it seems evident that choosing organic products is not only a form of individual preference, but also a socially responsible act that takes on a new dimension in terms of politics. This is especially true when things are done in an organized way, as seen in the case of cooperatives and consumer associations for organic products guaranteed through participatory means.

Certified Naturally Grown: a collaborative alternative to USDA's NOP

Adapted from the article "Some Southwest Michigan farmers choosing to forgo organic label, but not the process" by Olga Bonfiglio

Certified Naturally Grown, the PGS set up in the US by Ron Koshla, member of IFOAM's PGS Committee, was recently featured in an [article](#) discussing issues that concern small scale organic producers in Michigan, USA. According to the author Olga Bonfiglio, producers face many problems when it comes to certifying and selling their organically produced vegetables and fruits as certified organic products. This is causing small, local farmers to choose alternatives to third-party certification.

The author interviewed a few producers who have decided to completely abandon organic certification, even though they don't intend to abandon organic production practices: this allows them to save about \$1,000 per year for certification fees, paperwork, inspectors and certified organic seeds.

Other area farmers, as Bonfiglio reports, have turned to CNG. "This is a label especially designed for small-scale producers who sell locally and directly to their customers. CNG standards are just as strict as the USDA's NOP, but they differ from the government-run program in that CNG minimizes paperwork, and certification fees are between \$50 and \$175. CNG also uses an on-site peer-review inspection process and performs unannounced pesticide residue testing. Growers may use an easily-identified label for their products just as organic growers do."

The author spoke to Carrie Young of Young Herbs and Produce in Portage, who has run a three-acre farm since 2006 and has been producing CNG produce for the past 2 years. According to the author, Carrie says that PGS allows CNG farmers to develop a sense of community and support: "We're not in competition with each other; we are collaborating with each other. In today's business world, that's a unique and important model."



Call for successful cases of interactions between PGS and traditional social processes

IFOAM is currently carrying out a global comparative study on interactions between traditional social processes such as seed conservation systems and PGS, in the framework of the project “Ecological and socio economic intensification for food security in smallholder agriculture in Central Andes, Peru”. The overall goal is to assess the importance of PGS and Seed Management (SM) and to identify how PGS and SM can play a trigger role for adaptation and innovation to improve livelihoods of rural communities worldwide, particularly in the Peruvian Andes.

IFOAM will select five successful cases of communities using PGS and own seed management, which represent the best cases in terms of food security and sustainability for the initiative and the region where it operates.

We would be very grateful if you could send us information, contacts and documents you might have, related to such initiatives. We will then engage in a dialog with the recommended initiatives, according to a set of criteria for the selection.

For more information on this call, please visit http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs.html.

For questions and submissions, please contact Hervé Bouagnimbeck: h.bouagnimbeck@ifoam.org.



Continental news: What's new in...



...Europe and USA

- **Italy:** The event AGRI-CULTURE 2011, organized by the association L'Isola che c'è, happened from 6 to 21 May, in Como, Italy. The last day was dedicated to PGS: a workshop took place during the morning and a seminary about the importance of direct relations in agriculture and the role of PGS in supporting local communities in rural and urban areas was held during the afternoon. Cristina Grandi (AIAB), Saverio Nannini (ASCI Toscana), Roberto Schellino (ARI) and Eva Torremocha (Andalusian PGS movement and IFOAM PGS Committee member) were the invited speakers. For more information: evatorremocha@hotmail.com.



...Latin America

- **Peru:** The research project "Ecological and socio economic intensification for food security in smallholder agriculture in Central Andes, Peru", granted by IDRC/CIFSRF, has started and Roberto Ugas (IFOAM World Board member and Vice President) is one of the main investigators. This project is aimed at the ecological and social intensification of smallholder organic systems in two regions of the Peruvian Andes (Cusco and Cajamarca) known for its high biodiversity and where farmers' associations are active. It includes an important PGS component, for which IFOAM will perform a global comparative study on PGS initiatives (see "Call for successful cases" above)

Imprint

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