

The IFOAM Global PGS Newsletter steps into 2012!

Dear readers of the PGS Newsletter,

As a new year begins, we look back at what has been achieved in order to set our objectives for 2012. There were important accomplishments for the PGS community in the past year! For the IFOAM PGS Team some things were done for the first time, other things were improved and the main outcome is that now we know more about PGS and how these initiatives are developing all over the world.

As you know, this publication is intended as a participatory tool, aimed at strengthening the PGS community and inspiring each other. Please do not hesitate to take part in this process. There are many ways to participate: send us an article about a PGS related issue that you consider relevant, send us your feedback on what you have read in these pages, tell us about a PGS initiative you know and help us get in touch with it.

The more you get involved, the better this publication will be.

Happy 2012 and happy reading!

The IFOAM PGS Team

A quick overview of PGS in 2011

By *Flávia Castro*



The year started off with many good news with regard to the formal recognition of PGS by governments and within the organic sector: right in the beginning of the year we communicated that the Organic Certification Directory had opened up to include PGS schemes, that three PGS organizations received government accreditation in Brazil and that PGS are now recognized at the same level as third party certifiers in French Polynesia.

Throughout the year, we could report on many meetings and discussions concerning PGS, which took place all over the world. To mention a few: in Germany during BioFach, in Bolivia with stakeholders from all over Latin America at the III Forum on PGS and in the many sessions focusing on PGS at the 17th IFOAM Organic World Congress in South Korea, where stakeholders from all continents participated.

Last but not least, the first IFOAM Global PGS Survey was a great success! The aim of this survey was twofold: first of all our objective was to collect information among PGS initiatives already known to us, in order to update figures and follow up on the development of PGS around the world. PGS initiatives that participated provided us with new numbers on the amount of farmers and producers involved, as well as

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on the area of land under organic management that is guaranteed through their PGS. These figures will soon be published through “The World of Organic Agriculture” and will soon be available on the new PGS Database, which is currently being finalized.

Secondly, we wanted to identify PGS groups that are under development or that were previously unknown to us. For this part of the survey, we have set up an online form. Following suggestions from readers of this newsletter who kindly took some time to answer to the online form, we could get to know some interesting initiatives, such as ECOPAR, featured in an article in this month’s issue. Answers came from a variety of stakeholders: producers (20%), consumers (8%), technicians (20%) and staff of NGOs that collaborate with PGS initiatives (24%), but also from researchers, government officials and staff members from Certification Bodies. If you have not been able to answer to the online form, there is still time until February 15, 2012 to provide your input. Just click [here](#).

We would like to thank all those who took part on the first IFOAM Global PGS Survey. PGS numbers are definitely growing all over the world, and we are looking forward to conducting a similar survey again in 2012.

ECOPAR: a developing PGS in Chile

ECOPAR (“Ecoferia Certificación Orgánica PARTICIPATIVA”) is a PGS created and developed by Ecoferia, in order to support small farmers who are unable to have access to third-party certification. Ecoferia has been recently featured in this Newsletter (The Global PGS Newsletter, November 2011, v.2, n. 12, p. 4). Notwithstanding the challenges in applying for national recognition, the initiative has been developing and adapting so that organic farmers and consumers can benefit from it. We invited Golde Waisman, one of the organizers of Ecoferia together with Carmen Ruiz Tagle, to tell us more about the initiative.

By *Golde Waisman*

Shortly after opening Ecoferia, we received a visit from the national Agricultural and Livestock Service (Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero – SAG), which informed us that all those producers who were participating and selling organic products in the market had to be certified, otherwise neither the market, nor the farmers could use the word organic, ecological and/or biological. Given the high costs of third-party certification in Chile, offered usually by foreign-owned companies, we decided to adopt a participatory certification system, which is foreseen by the national Certification System of Organic Farming in Chile (Law 20.089)¹.

According to this law, it is possible for associations of small organic farmers to apply for recognition by the national authority. It is necessary to have an internal control system, to comply with special conditions for marketing and to be directly controlled by the SAG. The farmers who are members of the system have to belong to a legally constituted organization, and the products must be sold directly to consumers, only in the domestic market.

While Ecoferia is legally constituted as a Limited Liability Company, it has the power to generate association contracts to its participants, which can be considered as valid alternative to membership in an association. With this entity we approached the Department of Organic Agriculture of the SAG in order to apply for recognition. Although



Golde and Carmen from EcoFeria

1 Chile, Law 20.089 (2007), Art. 3: “In the case of direct sales to consumers, either at fairs, shops, local markets or others, by organic farmers (small producers, family farmers and indigenous people), embedded in own processes of organization and social control, pre-registered within the national authority, these may have their own and alternative certification systems, as long as product traceability and free access to the premises of production or processing is guaranteed to consumers and the national authority.” (Ed.)

ECOPAR technically complies with the national standard, the SAG argues that the farmers must be part of the legally constituted society in order to be eligible to apply, so the form “producers’ group plus company” is not accepted.

After over two years of experience, and unable to apply for recognition by the SAG, we realized that customers who come every week to the market are willing to pay a premium for the products, even though these are not certified. They trust that products sold in the market are truly organic because of the direct relationship they have with the farmers, producers and the organizers of Ecoferia, who are always present and available to answer any questions when the market is open. As Ecoferia, we want to reward the loyalty of our customers by offering them a trustworthy system of control, a form of ‘social control’.

The Chilean law also imposes other restrictions on small organic farmers by allowing them to sell only directly to consumers. This restriction is not always in the best interest of farmers. The country’s reality demands alternatives that are not foreseen in the current national standard (from 2007), which was written at a time when Chile only had a small group of pioneering organic farmers.

These requirements/restrictions have been a barrier and at the same time an opportunity to build the system that has brought about ECOPAR. It was created to meet all the technical aspects of organic food production and processing in accordance with the National Standard, while keeping its original structure as a group powered by a company with a strong social ethos and operating with total transparency. We believe that if a management system can comply with an organic standard, the products that derive from it must be able to obtain access to the same market as products certified by third party certification companies.

All documentation pertaining to ECOPAR’s producers is available online, and the results of the farm inspection visits are also available for anyone to access. We propose a new way of relating and creating partnerships on a human scale, where trust is fundamental as a way of raising awareness on an issue, as fundamental as it is to know where our food comes from. This is why we felt it was important to create [ECOPAR](#).

PGS conference in the Philippines: discussing how to empower small producers and strengthen the Philippine organic market

By *Rowena Buena* and *Alfie Pulumbarit* (MASIPAG)

On October 25-26, 2011 [MASIPAG](#) organized a conference in order to bring together organic agriculture practitioners in the Philippines and to come up with a strategy to mainstream Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) in the country. Seventy participants gathered at Balay Kalinaw, UP Diliman, to discuss on the role of PGS in providing credible certification, improving and promoting organic agriculture in the country and, more importantly, increasing income and improving the lives of organic farmers.

The current Philippine Organic Agriculture Act (RA 10068, 2010), while welcomed by organic agriculture practitioners and consumers, puts long-time small organic farmers at a disadvantage as it limits the use of the term “organic” to third party certified producers, with a brief two-year grace period to non-third party certified producers. In a presentation by the Office of the Bureau of Agriculture and Fisheries Products Standards (BAFPS)², it was stated that the Organic Agriculture Roadmap prioritizes the expansion of agricultural area devoted to organic agriculture but, unfortunately, for the development of the export market. The PGS conference aimed at emphasizing that, in this early stage of the organic industry in the Philippines, it is crucial that all types of certification system are recognized, and that incentives are provided to all organic producers (small, big and corporate) in order to strengthen not only the export market but, even more importantly, the domestic market.

Representatives from local governments were invited to present their initiatives for the promotion and development of organic agriculture in their respective municipalities and provinces. The presenters from local government units (LGUs) and agencies shared their experiences, strategies, challenges and accomplishments, such as:

- Prioritizing organic agriculture and assisting small farmers to shift to organic agriculture in Goa, Camarines Sur.

² The agency responsible for the national government’s organic agriculture program

- Upholding and enforcement of resolutions and ordinances that favor organic agriculture, such as the prevention of field-testing of genetically modified organisms in their area. An example is the resolution that declares Davao City as an Organic City, which prevented field-testing of Bt Eggplant in that area. Another concerns the entire island of Negros, declared as an “organic food bowl”.
- Educating the youth about the importance of agriculture through the Gulayan sa Paaralan (Vegetable gardens in Schools), in different regions.
- Organic agriculture development vis-à-vis environment protection through banning of large-scale mining and GMOs in the municipality of Dumingag, Zamboanga del Sur.

Several non-government organizations advocating for organic agriculture and organic producers association also shared their experiences in ensuring the organic integrity of the products. Representatives from *Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya* (SIBAT), Organic Producers and Traders Association (OPTA), Palawan Center for Appropriate Rural Technology (PCART) and the Agro-Technical Assistance and Livelihood Opportunities in the North (Agtalon Inc.) provided information on how producers and farmers conform to the quality standards set by each organization and the Philippine National Standards.

With these achievements, however, both LGUs and NGOs are still looking for more practical, affordable alternatives for the certification of organic products, which empower the small farmers while maintaining integrity and transparency. The Province of Quezon, for its part has already initiated the development of its own PGS to address such problem.



Mr. Ed Pnes, Chair man of MASIPAG's Farmers Guarantee System Committee, explains how PGS is implemented

MASIPAG, as a network of small-scale and resource-poor farmers in the Philippines, aspired for an affordable system without risking the organic integrity of the farmers' products. In 2004, IFOAM invited MASIPAG to the first International Workshop on Alternative Certification, jointly organized by IFOAM and MAELA. The MASIPAG Farmers Guarantee System (MFGS) was launched later that year, as an alternative certification for small farmers and a tool to empower farmers for marketing.

During the PGS conference Mr. Pagusara (MASIPAG's Mindanao regional coordinator) held a presentation on the expansion of the MFGS, from the development of the standards, through the process of inspection and certification to

marketing of the products. He also shared the principles and elements of MFGS and the reasons why PGS is appropriate in the Philippine context, where the majority of farmers are small-scale and resource-poor. Mr. Pagusara said that *“PGS is the next logical step if we want to move forward in organic agriculture as the main strategy for rural development and poverty alleviation”*.

Copies of the Global PGS Newsletter and of the IFOAM Policy Brief [How governments can support Participatory Guarantee Systems \(PGS\)](#) were also distributed to the participants.

The conference concluded with an agreement among the participants that PGS is the best way for small-scale farmers to provide assurance of the quality of their organic products and to sustain the growth of organic agriculture in the Philippines. The concept of organizing a national PGS network, focused on the development of the domestic market for organic products and on supporting the lobbying activities for PGS recognition, was also reiterated. A conveners group was formed in order to initiate the necessary activities to form such a network. The members of the conveners group are NGOs working directly with farmers, with MASIPAG holding the secretariat.

A bill that recognizes PGS as a form of certification for organic products and sponsors the amendment of RA 10068 was discussed during the conference and participants had the opportunity to provide comments and

suggestions. As the explanatory note in the Bill says: “(...) criticism towards the seemingly exclusive rights given to private certifying bodies inhibits the growth of organic agriculture, as it deters small farmers from going organic. The high cost to get certified, in order to carry the “organic” label discriminates against our small farmers and indigenous peoples who have long traditions of raising and producing organic goods. Denying them to label what is essentially an organic product as such is also detrimental to their livelihoods thus the need to amend RA 10068.” The bill was officially filed on December 14, 2011 and will go through a series of readings and improvement at the House of Representatives and endorsement at the Senate before approval.



Participants of the conference

Continental news: What's new in...



...Asia and Oceania

- **Philippines (1):** The province of Quezon is the first province in the country to adopt PGS. Three municipalities will be part of the pilot and the plan is to expand it to more municipalities in the coming months. The municipality of Dumingag in Zamboanga del Sur is also investing in PGS: capacity-building activities, including training on inspection and approval process have been conducted, and the local government is now preparing for the launching of Dumingag PGS to coincide with the municipality's hosting of the Mindanao Agro-Tourism Fair in February. For more information, please contact [Rowena Buena](#).
- **Philippines (2):** On December 14, 2011, congressman Teodoro Casino has filed the House Bill 5635 entitled “An act recognizing the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) as a form for certification for labeling products amending for the purpose republic act 10068, also known as the Organic Agriculture Act of 2010, and of other purposes” (for details, see in this issue: “PGS conference in the Philippines: discussing on how to empower small producers and strengthen the Philippine organic market” on page 3.



...Europe and North America

- **Italy:** The news of a major organic fraud uncovered in Italy in mid-December 2011, has led to various reactions in the international press. Among these, an article by Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food International, published in the Italian newspaper „La Repubblica“ (available in English [here](#)) offers an interesting reflection on the challenges faced by the organic sector as a whole, but also on the integrity of the concept of organic, threatened if considered as „nothing but a label“. Petrini emphasizes the need for really sustainable farming systems, mentioning that short production and distribution chains not only reduce environmental impact but also allow for a reduction in risks of fraud. More specifically, Petrini supports the development of PGS as a way to achieve this while also protecting small-scale producers.
- **Spain:** On 21 January, the second workshop on Participatory Certification of the network “Red Agroecologica de Lavapiés” (RAL), took place in Madrid. Consumers’ groups, producers and other stakeholders discussed creating a PGS and about the different possibilities of development for PGS within their city, starting from the neighborhood of Lavapiés. Information on this workshop, as well as on the first one organized by the network and on the groups involved, is available (in Spanish) on their [blog](#).

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. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM website.

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The Global PGS Newsletter is supported by

