

IV Latin-American PGS Forum: multi-stakeholder engagement and envisioning



By **Patricia Flores**, IFOAM – Organics International Latin-America Office Coordinator

Based on the interview for LEISA Magazine – Teresa Gianella. This is the first article of a series looking at the current status of PGS development in Latin America through the work of the Latin-American PGS Forum.

On 21-23 March, the IV Latin-American PGS Forum gathered in the city of Piura, Peru, with the aim of sharing and discussing the stage of development and implementation of organic regulations, governmental support and performance of PGS experiences in the region. Competent authorities from seven countries, together with civil society organization (CSO) representatives from ten countries, worked together for two full days. The third day was dedicated to internal issues of the Forum. The meeting was organized by ANPE PERU, a grassroots organization of organic farmers, the members of the Latin-American PGS Forum and Terra Nuova, an Italian development agency, in collaboration with IFOAM - Organics International and the National Agrarian University La Molina, with funds from the Fondo Italo-Peruano (FIP).

The Forum is a regional platform for knowledge exchange, dialogue and advocacy among the different stakeholders implementing PGS in Latin America. It helps to update the understanding of PGS challenges, opportunities and development. It is comprised by PGS practitioners and two networks: MAELA and IFOAM - Organics International (Latin America Regional Office), and is facilitated by Laércio Meirelles from Brazil, a member of Red Ecológica de Agroecología and Centro Ecológico. Organized since 2007 as regional meetings, the Forum itself met for the first time in 2009. Since then, every Forum

produces a public letter to announce the issues the members agree to highlight on that occasion, which was also the case this year with the Carta de Piura.

The main points of discussion and agreements during the VI Latin-American PGS Forum were as follows:

Objectives of the IV Forum

The Forum had several objectives, equally relevant in order to move towards legal recognition and development of PGS while being very careful in keeping the essence of the principles and values. Therefore, the first thing that makes this Forum different from the previous ones is the participation of competent authorities for the promotion, support and control of organic production from seven

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Participants of the IV LA PGS Forum, Piura, Peru

countries: Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. Representatives of CSOs were present from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. The objective of building bridges for dialogue between authorities and CSOs that implement PGS, showcasing national experiences to be discussed at the regional level, has been very beneficial.

The second thing to highlight is the objective to get out of the schemes normally used to operate PGS. Although they are diverse and adapted to the context in which they are created and developed, PGS are in a kind of comfort zone. This is very understandable insofar as it has meant a huge effort of CSOs to build, legitimize and, in some cases, legalize existing systems. Therefore, this Forum promoted the idea of “thinking outside the box” in order to be attentive on how the world is moving to incorporate innovations and a wise use of available technologies, with the aim to make systems simpler, inclusive and sustainable, without jeopardizing the organic quality guarantee.

Lessons learnt

One lesson learnt is a reaffirmation of what the Forum has been advocating from the beginning: the diversity of systems due to cultural, economic, and political reasons, must be valued and understood by governmental authorities of control and supervision, and those that foster and develop PGS.

A second lesson is that the pathway for legal recognition by the competent authority is not a single

and simple one. In some countries this recognition is sought, but in others PGS practitioners are clearly against it, demanding in first place, policies and action plans for the promotion of family farming, with the inclusion of PGS as a strategy to improve livelihoods of smallholders, producers, peasants and indigenous people.

A third lesson, almost a consequence of the second one, is the need to reflect on and evaluate the level at which PGS should be officially recognized: whether in the scope of the governmental entities in charge of promotion and support, or in the scope of the governmental entities in charge of organic control. This decision on where to place PGS recognition as a first step is strategic, so that the potential of these systems can be expressed. Depending on the results, authorities can in a second stage follow the step of supervision and control.

Regional trade: beyond country borders

The promotion of regional trade of organic products in Latin America has been raised from the outset. The Forum states that there should be no geographical barriers or limitations for PGS organic products to flow. The only country allowing imports of organic products with PGS is Brazil. There is interest from government representatives in Chile and Brazil to have mutual recognition and include PGS in equivalence negotiations. This would be the first case of international trade with PGS recognized by the parties in the organic sector, between countries where the organic sector is regulated.

Currently in Latin America, international organic trade of PGS certified products is possible provided that the national organic regulation of the countries involved has not made it explicit that PGS are restricted to supplying local markets or limited to the national scope. The Forum argues that products should flow without restrictions as long as they comply with their national organic regulations and their own system's requirements, which are often broader and more appropriate to small family farmers than those in a national standard. This applies whenever we want to commercialize under the organic label. But if the prestige and recognition of PGS transcends borders, and if due to legal restrictions the organic label is not granted, PGS organic products could be marketed even without such label and without geographical limitations, because the principle of trust in the system prevails on the consumer side regardless

of nationality or residence. In order for this to happen, we need to reconnect farmers, producers and consumers. The Forum is a good space to make PGS visible and inform Latin American consumers.

The internal balance of the Forum highlighted the level of maturity of the systems in Latin America and their capacity to propose public policies to support them. The work on the PGS "timeline" allowed participants to evaluate how since 1989, when PGS were initiated in the region, the internationalization of the experiences has given them more visibility with an impact on initiatives all over the world. This is largely thanks to the work of the members of the Forum and allies. Such an impact also means a high level of responsibility to carry the voice of those who are not listened to, as well as to make visible and recognize the different efforts and systems.

What links the PGS and CSA movements in France?



By **Magali Jaques**, group facilitator at **MIRAMAP** (Mouvement Inter-Régional des AMAP)

In France, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)¹ initiatives are known as Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP). These associations have the objective of preserving the existence and the continuity of local farms following sustainable agriculture practices, in other words: peasant agriculture, socially equitable and ecologically sound. The first AMAP was created in 2001. Since then, the numbers have increased exponentially, and in 2017 there were more than 2000 AMAP in France, involving more than 250,00

*members. The **AMAP Charter** is the reference document defining the values, principles and commitments of the French AMAP. To read the original French article please click [here](#).*

Formally created in February 2010, MIRAMAP is the Inter-Regional Movement of AMAP. Its purpose is to strengthen the cohesion of the AMAP and their networks by sharing a common ethic, pooling experiences and practices and ensuring the representation and development of AMAP at the national level. MIRAMAP is currently partnering with Nature et Progrès and others in the European project **EATingCRAFT**. PGS are at the heart of this project and this is a good opportunity for MIRAMAP to rediscover the historical bonds that links these

1 CSA is a direct partnership based on the human relationship between people and one or several producer(s), whereby the risks, responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared, through a long-term, binding agreement. To learn more about CSA visit URGENCI website: <http://urgenci.net>

two French movements, in order to reposition today's action and build the activities of the coming months. PGS and CSA are similar in their overall objectives of improving organic producers' livelihoods and increasing consumer access to safe and nutritious food.

How can we encourage the agricultural and food transition in our society? What place do peasants and eaters² have in these changes? And how do we act in our own organizations to build and support such a transition? In order to answer these questions, it seems important to recall some milestones in the recent history of our AMAP movement and rely on our past to better understand the activities we implement today.

AMAP initiatives started to develop rapidly across France about 10 years ago thanks to the support of the organisation *ALLIANCE Paysans Ecologistes Consommateurs*. In 2001, the first AMAP regional network ALLIANCE Provence, was created, bringing together farmer and consumer organizations. In 2003, Alliance Provence developed and adopted the first AMAP Charter. This charter, as well as the term AMAP, was then registered as a trademark.

Very quickly, several regional networks were created and, with this expansion the movement started to reflect on their needs, weakness and common

² The CSA movement prefer to define consumers as eaters.

vision. Some AMAP networks (Provence and Rhone Alpes and Ile de France) came up with the idea to adapt some of the approaches used by PGS, taking inspiration from the experience of Nature et Progrès.

In 2008, Nature et Progrès and MIRAMAP, together with other six organizations, came out with a joint plea calling for support to PGS and criticizing the political decision of enforcing compulsory third party certification for organic products. In this document, we called for a collective re-appropriation of methodologies that can improve agricultural practices and consumption behaviors rather than equate organic agriculture with the certification business.

Meanwhile, the reflection on PGS continued and developed further around several specific needs such as the necessity to address the lack of exchange of practices and mutual support between AMAP groups and between producers.

In addition, since AMAP became a registered mark, there was the need to protect the AMAP term from fraud. It was important to commit the means in the movement to verify compliance with the AMAP Charter - which regards the 'continuous improvement of AMAP practices' as fundamental. Thus, rather than a tool for certification, PGS in AMAP were seen as tool to reflect and bring forward this philosophy of continuous improvement of practices. They have been used



PGS visit of a farm in AMAP, organized by the AMAP Network Auvergne Rhône-Alpes in May 2014

as inspiration to build new tools adapted to the specificities of the partnership between producers and consumers, typical of the AMAP system, and to address questions such as: What is happening on the farm? How does the AMAP group work? How to understand, and especially how to take stock of the partnership between a group of consumers and a producer? How to move forward and improve collectively?

Since then, dozens of participatory farm visits have been conducted. Questionnaires were created, tested and redesigned. The echoes of these experiences are very positive. In 2014, an [interregional review](#) of such practices was

implemented to collect experiences and to draw lessons from them. Further evolutions have followed: some networks continue to use participatory farm visits, focusing on the initial visit that takes place at the beginning of the partnership between the producer and a group of eaters; the AMAP network in Provence has developed a [farmer-to-farmer support programme](#) while other groups developed self-evaluation tools.

So, four years after this interregional review, where are we exactly? The EATingCRAFT project is an occasion to structure new capitalization of experiences and extend our partnerships beyond France.

CONTINENTAL NEWS: WHAT'S NEW IN...

Global

In the recently published [analysis](#) of its working plan 2018-2019 for the transition towards sustainable food and agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) mentions the importance of PGS in strengthening markets that support agroecology. Transition to agroecology is only possible if markets promote the production of biodiverse and local foods. IFOAM – Organics International and FAO have been collaborating on PGS, especially in the greater Mekong sub-region, to support PGS development.

Recently, the Fondation Crédit Agricole du Maroc pour le développement durable also became involved in the project by providing financial support which will allow the PGS initiative to visit the French PGS *Nature & Progrès* and to exchange experiences. You can read the full article [here](#).

Africa

Morocco: The first Moroccan PGS is about to be launched, thanks to the collaboration between the Réseau des initiatives agroécologique au Maroc (RIAM) and the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD). The PGS will choose its logo in May and farm certifications will start this summer.

Americas

USA: The Green Business Certification Program, run in Montgomery County, the most populated county of Maryland, encourages businesses and other organizations to take steps to reduce their ecological footprint. This umbrella organisation promotes businesses certified by a number of organizations making it easy for residents to discover a variety of ecologically-minded services, restaurants, non-profits, farms and gardens certified through the PGS Certified Naturally Grown. Read the full article [here](#).

Asia

Laos: PGS will be presented within the framework of the national beekeeping meeting that will take place from 21 to 23 May in Vientiane. The gathering focuses on wild forest honey collection, for which there are currently no official standards in Laos. The proposal is to explore the potential of PGS as a tool to ensure low cost quality assurance systems for Laotian honey production. For more information read [here](#).

Thailand: On 19 April, the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives and the Thai Organic Agriculture Confederation signed a MoU to urgently develop organic agriculture with Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). The Minister of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Krissada Boonrach, said that this cooperation is expected to benefit organic agriculture in increasing the number of organic farms in the country. The cooperation will also help consumers find organic products more easily. The MoU is in support of the national strategy on organic agriculture, with a target to increase sustainable farms by 2021.

Philippines: Two Trainings-of-Trainers took place in the Philippines in March 2018. The trainings were organised by PGS Pilippines, the national network organisation of PGS supporters and practitioners. Farmers' organisations, institutional representatives and private sector stakeholder attended these events. The Training-of-Trainers aims to train and grow capacity of the member organizations of PGS Pilippines and assist in the growing need for PGS. For more information about PGS Pilippines and trainings in the country, please contact pgspilippines@gmail.com

Europe

Greece: Registration is now open for the 4th European CSA Meeting, which will take place in Thessaloniki, 9-11 November 2018. The Urgenci International Symposium and the Mediterranean Local Solidarity Partnership for Agroecology will also take place during this event. Within the framework of our [EATingCRAFT project](#), several PGS initiatives will be joining, as well as IFOAM – Organics International.

Imprint

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