

## Activism for Food Sovereignty in Italy: Valorizing Horizontal and Personal Contacts in Participatory Certification Systems



By **Alexander Koenler** (left) and **Fabrizio Loce Mandes** (right),  
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The Peasant Activism Project (2016-2018) is a research project based on long-term fieldwork with alternative networks of small-scale farmers in Italy. By recognizing small farmers' difficulties to comply with regulations and standards, the study focuses on PGS as a form of political activism that wants to re-appropriate the "right to certify" the quality and safety of agricultural products. The project is hosted by Queen's University Belfast (Northern Ireland/UK) and carried out in cooperation with University of Perugia (Italy).

The objective of the project is to understand the opportunities and limits of horizontal and inclusive practices of certification as opposed to third-party certification. One of the most interesting initiatives we met in Italy is the PGS implemented by the association TerraTerra, a network of small-scale farmers and food producers. Over the past year, besides organizing local markets and collective purchasing groups, TerraTerra has succeeded to create a horizontal and inclusive way to make decisions about the quality and safety of the products sold through its network. TerraTerra is also part of a growing national network called *Genuino Clandestino*, a movement for food sovereignty against the neo-liberalization of agriculture. During the project, a documentary focusing on TerraTerra was produced. Here we report a conversation between Andrea Zappa, a representative of "TerraTerra", and the main research team members.

**Andrea Zappa (AZ):** Why did we establish the PGS? In the past, many of us had worked with third-party organic certification, becoming aware of the numerous gaps in this institutionalized certification system. We felt that this system is based on business logic, linked to the idea that such certification allows to apply for grants and loans for organic farming. We are a network of small-scale peasants and food producers; therefore, we are involved only marginally in such business logic. For example, my own story of moving to the countryside and working as a peasant is a collective story: together with a group of friends, we decided to experiment a collective experience of life bound to the land. From our point of view, the PGS approach is important and innovative because the farmers who wish to be certified by our PGS

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arrange a public visit at their farm or processing facilities. The visit usually involves those farming realities that belong to our network and operate in the area; sometimes it can be extended to other neighboring farmers and is often attended by other reference producers. The farm visit gives the opportunity to exchange ideas. These talks go well beyond the scheduled meetings and continue at the street markets or, later on, sitting over by the bar.

**Fabrizio Loce-Mandes (FLM):** Okay, but why is it worth studying this kind of activism?

**Alexander Koensler (AK):** The anthropologist Clifford Geertz said that rationalists wearing square hats, sitting in square rooms, thinking square thoughts should try a sombrero. This describes the attempt to look beyond Slow Food and third-party certified organic farming. In this sense, transparency-oriented policies have become the most common governance instruments in our contemporary world, becoming a square hat. Everything must bear a label. Therefore, the idea of participatory guarantee of TerraTerra turns that paradigm of transparency upside down. This is mainly due to the fact that it is not recognized by the government and does not interface with the authorities, but creates a semi-autonomous reality and revitalizes face-to-face relations of trust.

**AZ:** You got directly to the point; the attitude of the government is quite detached and cold. This leads to the marginalization of citizens from their territories, physically and metaphorically.

**FLM:** What about the limits of your PGS?

**AZ:** Management is fairly simple; who wants to enter our group has to fill in a self-declaration form with details about their business activity. A local contact person of the association checks the declaration to



Convivial lunch meal during a farm visit of the PGS implemented by TerraTerra

see if there are any obvious contradictions with the criteria<sup>1</sup> shared by TerraTerra. If so, clarifications are requested. After that, the applicant is introduced to the assembly and can explain their experience. Then, a farm visit is organized with a group of producers and consumers. The limits are not fixed; the PGS is a work in progress. But, of course, we are anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-sexist and we sell our own products: these are the only conditions that we have established.

**FLM:** Does this always work?

**AZ:** From time to time it happens that farmers don't realize the nature of our association. For example, when we visit them, we found that they still use some chemicals for treating the vegetables. In these cases, we do not simply reject them, but we try to suggest a path for phasing out those chemicals, also by providing our technical knowledge. Another critical point we often see is the exploitation of workers in agriculture, which is a widespread phenomenon. For this reason, after long discussions in our assemblies, we have stressed the necessity



Discussion of a farm visit for a participatory visit of TerraTerra, Central Italy

to cooperate with the employees and involve them in the company projects. We regard agriculture as a form of collectivization of wealth and we reject the exploitation of workers.

**FLM:** How does the project engage with these discussions and the principles of participatory guarantee?

**AK:** With our documentary, “An Experimental Path”, we organize screenings and debate sessions in order to engage people in face-to-face contact, rather than just via the Internet, showing the values of personal interactions.

**AZ:** I strongly believe in the shooting of your documentary to raise awareness of such reality through personal relationships and the direct involvement of the protagonists. Even if there are only 20 persons sitting together to discuss and ask more questions, this is more important for us than reaching a big audience, because we create real discussions.

More information about the project and its documentary can be found at: [www.peasantproject.org](http://www.peasantproject.org). Or write to: [info@peasantproject.org](mailto:info@peasantproject.org).

## Revised Organic Regulation in Chile fully Recognizes Alternative Guarantee Systems



By **Flávia Moura e Castro**,  
IFOAM – Organics International

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the national system for certification of organic agricultural products in Chile, created with the promulgation of Law 20089. Policy makers have taken this opportunity to assess and improve the legal framework, introducing important modifications. A revised version of the document collecting all the policy tools (law, regulation and technical norms) has been published in July 2017 by the Ministry of Agriculture through the *Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero* (SAG), the competent authority for organic agriculture in the country.

Already in the introduction, this document states that the main modifications are aimed at allowing Small Ecological Farmers Organizations, adopting their own alternative certification systems, to access markets without restrictions. According to Angel Sartori Arellano, National Director of SAG, this will contribute to the growth and development of the sector. Previously, the law restricted the use of the words “organic” and equivalent, as well as of the national organic seal, to third-party certified

producers. It specified that “alternative certification systems” could be used for direct sales by small family farmers, peasants and indigenous people, and certain requirements were set, such as the maintenance of an Internal Control System and the submission of annual reports of their activities to the competent authority. In practice, this meant that the regulation enabled PGS as well as other alternative systems, but only for the domestic market and only when the products were sold directly to the consumers, limiting market access.

Some changes to this framework started to be introduced in 2015, with the approval of a draft law modifying Law 20089. It removed the sentence “direct to consumers” from Art. 3 of the law, making it possible for registered small ecological producers, adopting alternative certification systems, to sell their produce through any market channel. But with DS3/2016 coming into force in June 2017, a major change is operated: alternative guarantee systems implemented by Small Ecological Farmers’ Organizations (SAG), such as PGS, are now one of

the two conformity assessment systems for organic agriculture permitted under the regulation. As Art. 6 of DS3/2016<sup>2</sup> states, in order to be recognized as organic, products must be certified **either** by a certification body **or** by a Small Ecological Farmers Organization registered with the competent authority.

<sup>2</sup> From the original, in Spanish “Decreto Supremo 3, 2016, Reglamento, Artículo 6.: ‘*Todo producto silvoagropecuario que se haya originado en un proceso productivo orgánico, para ser reconocido como tal, debe estar certificado por una entidad certificadora, ya sea un organismo de certificación o una organización de agricultores ecológicos previamente registrada en el Servicio, de conformidad a lo dispuesto en este Reglamento.*’

The SAG, on their website, also refers to the two conformity assessment systems permitted as third-party certification, on one hand, and first party, participatory or self-certification, on the other. Specific guidelines were developed for each of the two possible accrediting organic certification entities, i.e. Certification Bodies and Small Ecological Farmers Organizations, but there are no geographical limitations for the second. The list or register of accredited organic certification entities in the country is available [online](#): they are currently 13, of which 8 are Small Ecological Farmers Organizations.

## Special announcement: The Organic Standard Journal

# THE ORGANIC STANDARD

[www.organicstandard.com](http://www.organicstandard.com)



The [Organic Standard](#) (TOS) is an international journal that enables individuals and organizations to keep up-to-date on development concerning worldwide standards and certification issues in the organic sector. The journal has a growing number of subscribers representing certification bodies, standard setters, sector bodies, governments, consultancies, and industry. It has become widely recognized as the credible source of international news and analysis for organic standards setting, certification, regulation, and accreditation.

The journal has different sections such as Certification & Accreditation, Standards & Regulation, Updates and Opinion, Country focus reports, and more. The recent issue 171/2017 has a special focus on PGS, looking into recent developments from different countries, including an analysis on how governments regulate PGS, by Federica Varini (IFOAM – Organics

International). Another hot topic is the new EU Organic Regulation, taken up by Nuria Alonso, Editor-in-Chief of TOS. Definitely worth reading!

TOS place external advertisements, such as calls for consultancy tenders, information on services, conferences and publications, general announcements etc. Every advertisement must be clearly related to the scope of the journal.

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TOS also invites you to propose topics and to submit full articles related to organic standards and certification issues.

# CONTINENTAL NEWS: WHAT'S NEW IN...

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## Africa

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**Mozambique:** A PGS project, started by French NGO ESSOR in 2013, is currently being implemented by the local organization ABIODES, in Maputo. More than 100 farmers are involved and 28 of them have already received certification. Production takes place in the districts of Kamavota and Kamubukwana and products are sold in Maputo. A very interesting aspect is that one of the market channels is “ComOrganico”, a social company integrated in the PGS which buys directly from producers at fairer prices, and sells the PGS products through online sales and a store. ABIODES provides technical assistance for production, commercialization and participatory certification. For more information contact Alzira Mahalamabe (alzira.mahalambe@abiodes.org.mz) or visit the [website](#) (in Portuguese).

## Asia

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**India:** The 19th Organic World Congress (OWC) of IFOAM - Organics International will be taking place in New Delhi from 9 to 11 November. The aim of the OWC and related activities (pre-conference, General Assembly, side-events and organic exhibition) is to share experiences, innovations and knowledge about the organic world. PGS is planned to be at the center of various events. A few examples: on 10 November a 90-minute-workshop organized by URGENCI will address PGS and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), their parallel development and what they can learn from each other. Later on the same day, three sessions under the Marketing Track will focus on PGS. On 11 November another three sessions from the same track will look into new trends and opportunities for small farmers adopting alternative approaches to organic and agroecological guarantee. The full program is available [here](#). This is a unique opportunity to share best practices and access global thinking on organic farming policies, in a country that has developed a particularly interesting PGS model with government support. **Registration is still open, don't miss this chance!**

## Europe & North America

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**Estonia:** In this presentation at the IFOAM EU Congress, that recently took place in Tallinn, Prof. Nic Lampkin (Executive Director of the UK based Organic Research Centre, Elm Farm) talked about the roots of the organic movement and the development of organic regulations, the benefits and risks associated to it. The topic is relevant for the organic movement in general but also for PGS initiatives, as we see increasingly government involvement in and regulation of PGS. Watch the [video](#) for interesting insights into this debate.

**USA:** Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) is celebrating their 15th anniversary this year. Congratulations! This PGS initiative created by farmers to address their own needs in 2002, has always made use of Internet and social media tools to maintain and develop their community, and has a successful marketing support strategy providing members with services that help increase visibility and reach out to customers. CNG is now run by 4 women, among which Alice Varon, CNG Director and member of the PGS Committee of IFOAM - Organics International. Check out their [blog post here](#).

## Latin America

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**Brazil:** The meeting “Women and PGS” took place in Inconfidentes, from 7 to 8 June this year. This meeting was a follow-up of the first meeting in Latin America focusing on PGS and gender, which took place in Torres, Brazil, in 2016, and was organized by Centro Ecológico. The topic is becoming increasingly relevant among organizations promoting agroecology, as women play a crucial but often not recognized role in agriculture, particularly in family farming. The 67 participants discussed and proposed actions to support women's empowerment in PGS initiatives. A video gathering testimonials is available [online](#) (in Portuguese and Spanish).

**Colombia:** The *Red de Mercados Agroecológicos de Bogotá* Región is a recently created Colombian network, composed of ten different initiatives (markets, food coops, etc.) that were officially launched in June this year. Their goal is to promote agroecology, responsible consumption, a solidarity economy and fair trade. They are currently developing a PGS that will apply to the whole network, in order to provide guarantee that the production practices adopted and the products offered by the members are in line with agroecological principles. The PGS under development is based on previously implemented experiences such as the “SPG de UNIMINUTO”. For more information please see the [website](#) (in Spanish), their FB profile (@RedMercadosAgroecologicosBogota) or contact Prof. Adriana Chaparro, Technical Coordinator for PGS ([achaparro@uniminuto.edu](mailto:achaparro@uniminuto.edu)).

**Peru:** The National Council for PGS (*Consejo Nacional del SPG Peru*) has organized a national gathering from 12 to 13 June this year. The main goal was to discuss proposals for a national regulation recognizing PGS, which would make it easier for small farmers to obtain organic certification and market access. It was an important moment for PGS in the country, after over 12 years of PGS implementation at various levels, to systematize the work done so far, discuss

lessons learned and coordinate strategies for the future. Advocacy for PGS recognition is ongoing and it was also a central topic during the 17th meeting of agroecological producers (ENPE), convened by ANPE Peru from 12 to 14 October in Huancayo, Junin. International experts, producers and representatives of government agencies took part in this event. For the full program see [here](#) and for more information please contact the technical secretary of the National Council for PGS, Luis Ravello ([luisravello@hotmail.com](mailto:luisravello@hotmail.com)).

## Oceania

**Australia:** The Northern Rivers Farm Endorsement Ecological Development (FEED) is a PGS implemented by Future Feeders, a young farmers hub, peer support and community-farming program based primarily at the Mullumbimby Community Gardens. This is a very interesting PGS initiative with focus on young farmers, launched in April this year, so still under development. They have made available online the templates and examples of documents used, and are currently documenting, with beautiful photos, the peer review farms conducted so far. For more information, please visit their [website](#) or contact Joel Orchard, founder of Future Feeders ([joel@futurefeeders.org](mailto:joel@futurefeeders.org)).

## Imprint

The **Global PGS Newsletter** is published bimonthly by IFOAM - Organics International. It is a free electronic publication. For a subscription to the newsletter, please write to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio). You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on our website.

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome at any time. Please send your PGS-related articles in English, French or Spanish to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio).

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