

Three years of Global PGS updates

By the IFOAM PGS Team



The very first issue of the IFOAM Global PGS Newsletter was published in October 2009, exactly three years ago. The layout was a bit different back then, the PGS logo did not exist and our distribution list was just about one hundred contacts long. Since then, PGS updates have been spreading fast and the number of subscribers to the Newsletter, already over 700, has been growing at great speed, with new requests arriving every day.

In January this year, as we presented an overview of PGS developments in 2011, we reminded our readers of the important role they play for this publication. In this spirit, we decided to launch a request for feedback during the preparation of this anniversary issue. We were curious to know from our readers how important it is for them to receive this publication, if it has helped in the development of PGS in their regions and, of course, what they think should be improved.

The responses arrived (and keep arriving!) in many languages and from different parts of the world. It was great to hear from you that the Newsletter is really appreciated, and not only among PGS stakeholders: Sergio Carrano from Brazil, B. Tamang from Nepal and Munshimbwe Chitalu from Zambia (OPPAZ) all pointed out that the PGS newsletter is a relevant publication for those working in the organic sector as a whole, as it is a good source of information not only on PGS but also on Organic Agriculture.

These were rewarding messages, which we are proud to share in detail:

Famara Diédhiou from Senegal: *„I find the newsletter easy to read (neither long or short) with the necessary links for those who want to go further. The information on the development of PGS in the world (both in terms of initiatives and of national policies) is very encouraging for anyone wishing to engage in the process. The practical cases on how PGS is a real alternative to certification costs, corruption, reduction of intermediates and especially to support the producer (economically and socially), inspired me a lot: I have used these examples during my rural facilitation sessions (rural community workshops), and above all in the rare discussions with local decision makers (...). It is a pity that initiatives from West Af-*

Table of Contents

Three years of Global PGS updates	1
Learning from the COMAC Lozère of the Federation Nature et Progrès.	2
PGS in Costa Rica: opportunities and difficulties	3
The PGS Committee end of term and revision	4
Continental news: what's new in...	6

rica are still missing, but you will certainly hear about AGROECOL from Senegal once the experience is better established."

Ron Khosla, from USA (Certified Naturally Grown): „I really appreciate the PGS newsletter. From an outreach perspective, it provides an efficient means to share information about PGS in an easily transferable format that details the international scope of PGS. Internally, I find inspiration and ideas from other PGS groups internationally. Please keep up the great work!“

„This Newsletter provided many references to legal frameworks in many countries, notably India and Latin America, where such alternatives to formal certification exist.“

Tatjana Jovanic, Professor at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, in Serbia: „This Newsletter provided many references to legal frameworks in many countries, notably India and Latin America, where such alternatives to formal certification exist. Without those references I probably would not have been able to assist local associations of producers in Serbia to initiate a national PGS within BIOBALKAN network.“

Dr. Shaikh Tanveer Hossain, OFIA winner and INOFO Country Convener for Bangladesh: „We are working with small-scale farmers and establishing the organic farmer's society and linking with local markets. As we are still building the participatory guarantee systems (PGS) in our programs, the PGS newsletter is very useful and acts as a knowledge sharing tool and guide for the staffs and helps us to motivate the stakeholders.“

Alastair Taylor, from Uganda (KALIP/NULEP): „Many thanks for the PGS Newsletter and for the general IFOAM support for the PGS approach to ensuring organic quality. I like the fact that the PGS newsletter is short, angular and contains a lot of feedback from up and running PGS schemes. (...) I think this is also an encouragement to some who find they are not having an easy struggle in their own locality to get a PGS accepted.“

Some negative aspects were also mentioned but the main one was, as Rasdi Wangsa from Indonesia (AOI) put it, „the fact that the PGS Newsletter is in English: it is a limit, for those who read but also those who would

like to contribute to it". In fact, most of the suggestions for improvement referred to this aspect. For example, Benjamin Macas, from Ecuador (Red Agroecológica Loja) would like to see a Spanish version, which he would share with stakeholders in local markets and PGS initiatives in the country. Pedro Jovchelevich from Brazil (ABD) expressed the same concern, suggesting that a Spanish version might contribute to increase the reach of the publication among producers.

Another suggestion, referring to content, came from Imam Suharto from Indonesia (VECO) and Juan Carlos Ramirez from Argentina (SENASA - CIAO), who would like the Newsletter to emphasize the interaction between consumers and producers, reporting on success stories of how producers and consumers benefit from PGS and articles coming from consumers themselves.

We would like to thank all of our readers for the encouraging messages, especially for the suggestions on how to improve and topics to cover. Even though we could not fit all your responses into this article, they will be carefully considered and addressed at our best.

Learning from the COMAC Lozère of the Federation Nature et Progrès.



Maria Eugenia is from Peru and worked as an intern at the IFOAM Head Office until early August 2012. She assisted with data collection for PGS and provided a helping hand as part of the PGS Team. She recently concluded her Masters' degree in France and in this article she tells us about her experience.

The Federation Nature et Progrès (N&P) is one of the first PGS initiatives established in the world. It was created in 1964 with the main objective to promote organic agriculture in France and Europe and has been working since then closely with producers, processors and consumers. N&P comprises 16 COMACs¹ of which 5 are recognized as independent ones². The COMAC Lozère - located in the natural region of the Cévennes - is one of the oldest COMACs of the Federation, and is acknowledged as an independent COMAC.

1 Commission Mixtes d'Agrément et de Contrôle is a local group formed by consumers, producers and processors.

2 An independent COMAC sets its own fee for each member to do surveys and farm visits..

As part of my internship at IFOAM Head Office, I had the opportunity to visit the COMAC Lozère in order to collect data in the framework of the Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and Participatory Guarantee Systems³, together with Hervé Bougnimbeck, coordinator of the study. I then wrote my Masters' thesis based on this case, as an

analysis of the success factors in this PGS initiative and of whether these are context specific or can be transmitted to other PGS.

Coming from an Industrial Engineering background, I have been working for almost six years in different industries in Peru; but agriculture has always been a main interest of mine. As a result of this internship and my research with IFOAM, I realized that organic is more than a label. Organic Agriculture is related to high quality products and in order to differentiate them from others, with a logo, it is necessary to follow standards and regulations.

I could see that all farmers we met from COMAC Lozère shared a common vision, reflected in the Charter of N&P⁴, of how Organic Agriculture should be practised, as so many pointed at the differences between the Charter and the organic national standards (AB⁵).

For the members of the COMAC Lozère, the premium price or higher profits did not seem to be their first goal. On the contrary, being part of the N&P federation represents for them a vision and a wider-reaching project of society, considering environmental, social, human and economic ideals.

The working conditions in this region are hard because of the poor quality of the soil and the unfavourable climate conditions. Additionally, the access to Cévennes is quite difficult. Despite these factors, the farmers decided to settle in the Cévennes and do Organic Agriculture.

It was incredible to hear and find out about their feelings towards practicing organic farming. The members of COMAC Lozère have different backgrounds, ideas, realities, beliefs and opinions; but this is not seen as a problem when it comes to working and organizing their different activities together. On the contrary, this diversity has permitted to develop and create a very strong group in order to be innovative in addressing different problems.

³ The international PGS study is implemented by IFOAM under the AGROECO project coordinated by UNALM, Peru and funded by the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF).

⁴ N&P Charter summarizes the way in which the producer should practice Organic Agriculture

⁵ Agriculture Biologique – Organic Farming

The PGS in the COMAC Lozère represents an important social network for its members. For instance, during the interviews the majority mentioned that the farm visits were very important, because they felt they provide an opportunity to meet people and to discuss farming challenges with other farmers, producers and consumers.



Organic farmer in Lozère, during the field visit

I have completed my Master's degree and my final study project contains the outcomes of the field research, which will be included in the final report of the global study conducted by IFOAM. It emerged for example that involving consumers in the annual farm visits is one of the main challenges faced by the COMAC. In order to address this challenge, the COMAC has been investing in promoting consumer participation, reminding consumers on the importance of their opinion and engaging consumers through new communication channels. Involving other stakeholders, such as retailers, is also one of the strategies this group is adopting, as they consider participation to be the key to the system's strength.

PGS in Costa Rica: opportunities and difficulties

By Flávia Castro



With more than 11000 Ha of agricultural areas under organic management, Costa Rica has a well-developed organic sector. The legal framework for organic production has been in place and fully implemented for many years, and the country has obtained

“third country” status with the European Union (meaning equivalency status for organic regulations). The legal framework also recognizes PGS (or participatory certification) for the domestic market. In fact, PGS certified producers can apply the expression “Producto orgánico, ecológico o biológico certificado por el SGP” (organic, ecologic or biologic product certified by PGS) to their products, indicating the place of origin. Since 2004, several PGS pilot projects have been initiated with support from local organizations and the Government, with the experience implemented by the Asociación de Productores Orgánicos de Turrialba - APOT as the main reference.

According to the [Decree 35242 \(2009\)](#), which regulates the implementation of the law on organic production in the country, a PGS must be set up by a group of organized producers (small and medium), which must be registered and apply for accreditation to the competent authority. Together with their application, the PGS must present a description of its values, principles, procedures, controls and sanctions. If approved, the PGS is then subject to annual audits for monitoring by the competent authority⁶.

Notwithstanding the legal framework, it seems that obtaining official recognition can be in practice difficult for PGS initiatives. [An article by Hannah Ryan, published by The Tico Times in August](#), covered this issue focusing on the case [Feria Verde de Aranjuez](#), a farmers’ market in San Jose. According to Ryan, difficulties with local authorities are creating obstacles for PGS to obtain formal recognition. We contacted the responsible of Feria Verde, Faviana Scorza, to learn more about this PGS initiative and to understand what

are the difficulties faced in Costa Rica.

Feria Verde is coordinated by the “Asociación Amantes de lo Organico en Costa Rica - AAMOR”. About 30 producers and processors offer their products in the market, ranging from producers with third-party organic certification, groups of organized producers and producers that are part of [AAMOR-Feria Verde PGS](#), which involves now 10 farms. The association has applied for accreditation of this PGS and all 10 farms have been registered, being now formally “In Transi-



Feria Verde de Aranjuez (Source: Feria Verde)

tion”, as the law foresees it. Currently, only the seven producers that have third-party certification can actually sell their products as “organic” in the market. The others must wait for the PGS to be approved and this is when the challenges arise.

According to Faviana, the process for obtaining approval has been slow but also incoherent, in terms of how the follow-up is carried out: “It seems that revisions (to the application) are requested without taking into consideration what we have already submitted. For example, we submit it the first time and received a request for correction. We submitted the correction and received a request for what had already been correctly submitted in the first round”. In 2010, Mauren Lizano (CEDECO) mentioned that two of the challenges faced by practitioners implementing participatory certification in Costa Rica were the lack of implementation of the existing legal framework and the need to build technical capacity.

Government support for participatory certification was announced in 2011, by Tania López Lee, Vice-minister for Agriculture and Mauricio Chacón Navarro, Manager of the National Program for Organic Agriculture, through a [press release](#) following a request com-

⁶ The Ministry of Agriculture (MAG) Plant Protection Directorate, which oversees and controls organic certification through the Accreditation and Registration in Organic Agriculture system (Acreditación y Registro en Agricultura Orgánica - ARAO).

ing exactly from APOT and AAMOR.

In this occasion, the vice-minister mentioned that this support is coherent with the fact that promoting organic, family farming as well as rural development were important topics in the Government strategy, adding that the process towards participatory certification must be “clean and rigorous, so that the system



PGS in Costa Rica: during a peer visit. (Source: Feria Verde)

can be credible and accepted (...).”

The lack of formal approval has not kept the AAMOR-Feria Verde PGS initiative from conducting farm inspections and carrying out activities within the group to ensure consumer confidence. In fact, the group is developing an internal seal that will communicate the quality of the products without making organic claims. The development of the internal seal will also cover areas that are not included in the current legal framework. As Faviana says “the Costa Rican law doesn’t address organic certification for processed food just as there aren’t references on meat or dairy products. We are planning to start this process under the Feria Verde seal and also to push for addressing these products under national law. (...)

We will continue working with the Ministry of Agriculture so that we can gain them as allies in the process.”

The PGS Committee end of term and revision

IFOAM technical committees are composed of experts appointed by the IFOAM World Board for a defined term period, to advise the IFOAM Head Office on the development of norms, references and tools related to guarantee systems.

- the PGS Committee is one of them and its members have a fundamental role in: assisting the development of PGS;
 - providing advice on how to promote;
 - facilitate and encourage PGS around the world;
 - participating in mid-term and long-term strategic planning for IFOAM’s activities on PGS; and
 - contributing to the development of PGS concepts and tools.
 - The PGS committee was first appointed in 2009 and each term lasts three years (the Terms of Reference are available [online](#)).
- IFOAM has launched a call through a special announcement on September 26, inviting potential candidates to submit their application to renew the PGS Committee. The deadline for submission was October 14 and the applications received are currently being assessed. The nomination will take place during the upcoming IFOAM Executive Board meeting in Bonn, and the result will be announced on our next issue of the Global PGS Newsletter.

Continental news: what's new in...



...Europe and North America

USA: Certified Naturally Grown's Alice Varon participated on a panel discussion titled „The Educated Eater: What's Behind the Label?“ sponsored by the New School University and the New York City Greenmarket program on September 19. The three other panelists were Cheryl Rogowski, the first farmer to win the prestigious MacArthur Fellowship whose farm is CNG; John Gorzynski, a formerly certified organic farmer featured in „What's Organic about Organic?“ and a representative of the third party certification program Animal Welfare Approved. The event was fully booked many days in advance! For details, please contact [Alice Varon](#). Germany.

Spain: PGS and alternative guarantee systems will be the topic of the seminar „Pequeños productores agroecológicos y certificación en la Europa mediterránea“, which will take place at the University of Granada on November 7-8. The aim of the seminar is to analyze the issue of ecological certification of smallholders, disseminate and discuss new certification systems, with the participation of farmers. IFOAM World Board and PGS Committee member Eva Torremocha will participate as a speaker and will discuss PGS and Internal Control Systems (ICS) during a panel on the second day, together with Cesar de la Cruz. It is still possible to participate. For details and registration, please visit this [link](#).

Italy: In 2012 a PGS initiative started to be implemented in the north of the country in Varese, Como and Monza. A video (in Italian) explaining the initiative and the implementation of the system, including images of the first peer review visits conducted in July, is now available [online](#). For details about the project, please contact [Giuseppe Vergani](#).

Italy: Three Mediterranean networks – Slow Food Morocco, Maroc Taswiq and Reseau Afourer – have come together with a shared objective: to support and promote the work of thousands of small-scale Moroccan food producers. The networks will be meeting at the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre (25 -29 October, Torino) to concretize a common endeavor, to exchange skills and to present a new model for marketing (Maroc Taswiq), a participatory certification model (Equobio) and many small projects focusing on producers, often set up in collaboration with migrants in Italy.



...Asia and Oceania

Philippines: A training of trainers was conducted on October 1-5 by the Philippine PGS Network to facilitate the further promotion, development and expansion of PGS in the country. 33 individuals participated in this training, including representatives from farmers' organizations, NGOs, producers groups and entrepreneurs from all over the country. The training was also part of the plan of the network to capacitate member organizations to conduct PGS orientation, training and installation. For more details, please contact [MASIPAG](#).



...Latin America

Argentina: The legislative team [Verdealsur](#) presented on 11 October a bill entitled „Urban Agroecology for the City of Buenos Aires“. The project's objective is to promote agroecological practices as an articulated system of production, distribution, consumption and composting. This will be achieved by promoting and sustaining urban agriculture, organic markets and composting, integrating citizens, institutions (schools and hospitals), neighborhoods and communities. One interesting point of the project is the inclusion of participatory certification as one of the systems for guaranteeing the quality of the agroecological produce. The project will be subject to discussions by experts and civil society in coming days in the Legislature of Buenos Aires. Colombia



...Africa

Benin: Interest for PGS is particularly vivid in the country and an initiative called “SPG-BENIN” is methodically being developed through the work of a Task Force including representatives from producers, consumers and local NGOs, with the support of the international NGO HELVETAS. During a workshop organized last month in Porto Novo, PGS tools including the logo „ SPG-BENIN „ were validated by stakeholders. In the coming weeks, the members of the Task Force will meet to define the activities to be implemented and the certification of the first products is expected soon. Togo

South Africa: South Africa: On 13 November a special meeting of the Technical Committee drafting the South African Organic Standards will be taking place. As we reported previously, there is a growing support for PGS recognition under the South African Standards. This meeting will specifically deal with the topic of the use of the proposed Organic Mark, and how or whether PGS will receive recognition, be endorsed and given the right to use a South African Organic Logo. Konrad Hauptfleisch, IFOAM Academy and Program Manager, will attend this meeting to advocate for the inclusion of PGS under the stipulations on use of the logo.

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.

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