

Updates on Participatory Guarantee Systems worldwide.

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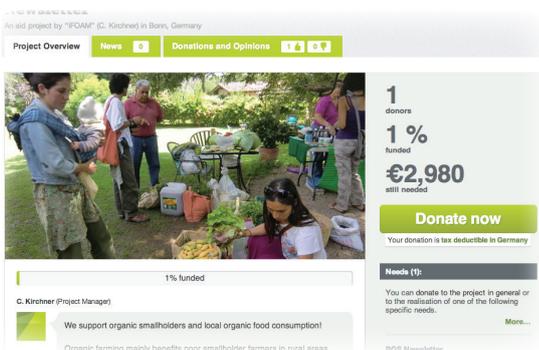


IFOAM has been publishing the Global PGS Newsletter as a tool to promote PGS since 2009. You are now reading the 43rd issue together with more than 1,000 PGS Newsletter subscribers spread over all continents. Over the years, more than 200 articles have provided up-to-date information about PGS development worldwide.

The PGS Newsletter has been without funding since early 2013. As a result, we have had to reduce the number of issues from 10 to 6 per year. Still, the situation remains difficult. We want to continue publishing the newsletter, at least bi-monthly, and would like to keep offering it free of charge, without asking for subscription fees.

Therefore, we need your support!

If you like the Global PGS Newsletter and want to support our work, even small contributions can make a difference. This is the first time that we are trying crowd funding and, with the aid of this fundraising campaign, we hope to show that there is indeed enough interest from readers to continue publishing the PGS Newsletter. We created a page on the crowd funding website www.betterplace.org. Making a donation is very easy: Just press the green "Donation" button and transfer per direct debit, credit card or PayPal. All donations with credit card or PayPal are exempt from transaction fees. There are no extra fees and 100% of the donations are passed on to IFOAM for the PGS Newsletter.



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We are counting on your support!

IFOAM PGS TEAM

Opinion article: When organic laws do not include PGS - A cautionary tale

By Alice Varon, Executive Director, Certified Naturally Grown



Recent developments in the United States may serve as a cautionary tale for leaders seeking to formalize the organic certification process in their own countries. When the use of the word “organic” is regulated by law, and requires third-party certification without allowing for a PGS model, it can

complicate and even hurt the organic movement.

In February, leading organic food brands in the United States, under the banner of a new organization called Organic Voices, launched a campaign called “Only Organic”. This campaign is a response to the misuse of the word “Natural” by food companies to market processed foods that contain genetically modified ingredients and synthetic additives. Organic food brands are concerned that these imposters are misleading consumers and eating into their market share. Their response, however, has been to vilify the word natural and make an exclusionary claim: “only organic”. The approach of the Organic Voices campaign, paired with the regulatory context in which it occurs, has the potential to hinder the growth of the organic movement at the grassroots, though this is surely not what was intended.

At one level, anyone committed to the organic movement and integrity in food labeling can appreciate the Organic Voices campaign. The organizers were smart to launch it with a [humorous video](#) featuring a slimy ad executive from the “false advertising industry” who delights in helping clients sell more processed food to unwitting consumers simply by slapping the word Natural on the packaging. In one scene, rows of office workers rubber-stamp “applications” to use the word natural – no application is denied – illustrating the campaign’s point; “Natural” on food products does not signify that certain standards have been met.

Where the campaign goes off track is at the end of the video. Words appear on the screen:

“Only Organic means:

- No Genetically Modified Organisms
- No toxic pesticides
- No growth hormones or antibiotics



People deserve to know the truth about their food. Look for the Organic seal.”

In the context of a conversation about packaged food brands, these statements are not controversial, and they include good advice. But if you expand the context to include fresh produce and the farmers growing it, then these claims are false and exclusionary. There is at least one seal besides organic that makes these very same assurances – Certified Naturally Grown (CNG).

It would be unrealistic for us to expect that a coordinated marketing campaign of some of the world’s largest organic brands will take into account the concerns of a grassroots group of farmers and food activists, especially when the organic brands are taking on the false advertising of their GMO-friendly counterparts in the processed food arena. However, for the sake of the public record, we felt it was necessary to respond. ([Read CNG’s response to the Only Organic campaign.](#))

How is it that Certified Naturally Grown producers find themselves lumped together in the same category with unscrupulous processed food marketers? Why must they now be on the defensive for using the concept of natural, when they’re using it appropriately, according to its true meaning?



This situation is a byproduct of the approach to organic certification that was taken in the United States. Three features are particularly significant here. 1) The US Department of Agriculture certification is mandatory for almost any producer wishing to use the word organic; 2) there is no accommodation in the regulations for a PGS model, such as CNG uses and 3) the exemption for small-scale producers is extremely low, applying only to those “farms” whose gross agricultural income from organic sales totals \$5,000 per year or less.

Certified Naturally Grown was founded twelve years ago on the PGS model, tailored specifically for direct-market farmers committed to organic practices. CNG’s standards – just like the organic standards – prohibit the use of genetically modified organisms, synthetic pesticides, growth hormones and prophylactic antibiotics. However, because the National Organic Program does not

accommodate PGS, CNG producers are not allowed to use the word organic to describe their farm or products unless they also go through the USDA's third-party organic certification process. (A small percentage of CNG farmers do have organic certification as well.)

The advantage of the approach taken in the United States – and it is significant – is that the GMO-friendly processed food companies cannot use the word organic on their packaging without breaking the law. This is a hard-fought victory that should be honored. The organic seal is an important and valuable tool for consumers. But it is not the only game in town.

And that should be embraced as a positive development. After all, diversity is our strength, both in nature and in our movement. More choices for farmers will mean more farmers participate. Whether it's a single government-run program or a set of certification options that encourage and uphold sustainable practices, what's most important is that more producers choose to participate, and that they'll find greater success – in the form of increased productivity and community support – as a result. This is how our movement will grow.

What do you think about the “Only Organic” campaign? If you would like to share your comments or opinions on this topic, please send a message to: pgs@iffoam.org.

Agroeco Project: Developing local markets in Cusco and Cajamarca (Peru)

By Jannet Villanueva Escudero



Background: The Agroeco project¹ is following the collective action model of institutional innovation by Hargrave and Van de Ven (2006). It uses strategies to develop and strengthen the linkage between markets, sustainable farming practices and smallholders in Peru and promotes the collective brand “Fruits of the Earth”. This brand was developed

by ANPE² in 2012 as an alternative way to indicate that products were produced without agrochemicals, that agrobiodiversity is being protected and fairness is considered during the process. In combination with PGS, the brand has shown positive effects on production, marketing and organizational processes through strengthening and diversification of short marketing channels and an optimization of distribution routes. Although prices for

organic might be the same as for conventional products, these innovations contribute to improving food security and bring benefits to small producers and consumers.

Since the Agroeco project was launched, in partnership with ARPE Cusco³ and APERC⁴, great innovations have emerged: The development of new short marketing channels in Cusco and Cajamarca as well as the linkage between local food distribution and the involvement of local governments in organic fairs. In the course of the project, the position of the new brand “Fruits of the Earth” was strengthened. The complementary effect between PGS and the brand is an important aspect contributing to this success. We believe that the combination of the two is greater than just the sum.

Another project result that can already be observed is the strengthening of PGS in both regions covered by the project. Currently, there are 27 local PGS groups, a total of 227 producers and 40 evaluators that ensure the continuity of the PGS process.

1 The Agroeco project is funded by the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund and coordinated by the Peruvian National Agrarian University - La Molina (UNALM). The project aims at the ecological and social intensification of smallholder organic systems in two regions of the Peruvian Andes.
2 Asociación Nacional de Productores Ecológicos del Perú

3 Asociación Regional de Productores Ecológicos de Cusco
4 Asociación de Productores Ecológicos de la Región de Cajamarca

N °	Region	Province	N ° of PGS producers recorded	Evaluators
1	Cusco	10	51	13
2	Cusco	3	29	6
3	Cajamarca	14	147	21
4	Cajamarca
Total		27	227	40

Source: Agroeco Project

In Cusco, unsatisfied demand for organic products enabled the development of various marketing channels:

1) Organic fair “Fruits of the Earth”, Cusco: One of the leading supporters of this fair is the Provincial PGS Council of Quispicanchi, which is chaired by the respective Municipality. The main sponsor is the local government or Municipality of Cusco.

2) Organic fair “Fruits of the Earth”, Calca. The PGS council of this province is chaired by the Municipality of Calca, which is interested in implementing PGS as part of its political agenda.

3) Information and Customer Service Centre – CIAC, Cusco: This is a green store that provides information and services to the general public, consumers and producers.

4) Hotels and Restaurants – HORECAs: In Cusco, which is frequented by tourists, the demand for organic products is high and some hotels and restaurants order organic products.



Information and Customer Service Centre - CIAC Cusco

3) Green store in Cajamarca: This shop is run by the Provincial Association of Ecological Producers of Cajamarca in a public-private partnership with the Agroeco project and the Andes Association.

It is very important to promote the diversity of marketing channels so producers have different alternatives to offer and sell their products. Each channel has its own characteristics, context, technical specifications, information necessity and timing, etc. The way in which producers and market players organize themselves and work together is part of the learning and strengthening process.

We think that only by turning towards the market and getting in direct contact with the consumers, small farmers learn and develop further and we as consumers can show them how much we appreciate their work and value the fact that small family farmers produce our food!



Fair in Cusco

Also in Cajamarca new marketing channels for organic products developed:

1) Organic fair “Fruits of the Earth”, Cajamarca: This fair has a regional concept; it collects products from all partners of the regional organizations of organic producers.

2) Organic fair “Fruits of the Earth”, Bambamarca: A PGS has developed in partnership between the PGS and the Municipality of Bambamarca.



Producer from Quispicanchi delivering organic products to a Hotel in Cusco



Local food movement in Europe: Interest in PGS grows

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM PGS Coordinator

In many European countries organic products are easily available in supermarkets or organic shops. Whilst many products sold in these places have travelled over long distances, consumers are increasingly interested in purchasing regional food and getting in touch with farms close by. As a result, short-supply chain systems like [Community Supported Agriculture \(CSA\)](#), box schemes or consumer-

producer cooperatives have become increasingly popular. In Europe, farmers that participate in these systems are commonly either third party certified or non-certified. The latter is common when the relationship between the farmer and consumers is very close. In many CSAs for example one single farmer delivers his/her harvest to a group of consumers out of whom many visit the farm regularly and participate in voluntary work assignments on the farm. In such systems a formalized guarantee system is often seen as redundant.



However, as a side effect of the growth of this movement, the size of many networks expands and approaches with looser relationships between consumers and producers arise. As a result, questions about the guarantee of the products are asked more often and also the issue of how to keep the systems horizontal and what mechanisms to use to facilitate a participation of many stakeholders in decision-making comes up. So it is no surprise that interest in PGS is growing also in Europe and discussions about PGS are increasingly taking place.

I was invited to attend an open encounter on Participatory Guarantee Systems on 1st April in Leuven/Belgium organized by the Belgian movement Voedselteams, as part of a 3 day meeting in the framework of the Grundtvig Partnership: Building Regional Produce Supply Chains - Logistics for Short Circuit Agriculture. During the event, Isabelle Vallette from AMAP Ile-de-France/France, Wim Merckx from Voedselteams/Belgium and Peter Volz from Agronauten/Regionalwert AG/Germany presented their experience or interest in PGS.

AMAP Ile-de-France (AMAP means Association for the Maintenance of Peasant Agriculture in French) is a network comprising about 160 farmers that provide food to approximately 15,000 families in the Paris Region⁵. While the network is rather loose, leaving a lot of freedom to each individual farmer, there is a code of conduct that includes criteria for production as well as the operation of

the AMAP itself. Between 2010 and 2011, a 2-year project was undertaken to implement PGS in order to better evaluate the way the code of conduct is implemented by the participating farmers and to improve the practices in a participatory way. However, during 2011 these efforts came to a halt. The reason was that the task was seen as too big and PGS as too bureaucratic and rigid. In particular, the terminology “system” and “guarantee” was perceived as too constraining. Ultimately, the decision was made to carry on with the integration of PGS elements into the system, but to name it in a different way. The term “system” was replaced by “approach” and the expression “guarantee” by “progress”. What AMAP Ile-de-France is implementing now is therefore called: “participatory approach for progress” or DPDP⁶ to use the French acronym. The DPDP approach is still new and under development. We are curious about how the system will evolve with time and how it will compare with other PGS initiatives. Learn more about AMAP Ile-de-France by visiting their [website](#).



Voedselteams, which literally translated from Flemish means “food teams”, is a network in Belgium comprising about 100 farmers and 165 groups of 10 to 40 consumers all located in Flanders. Through its network, Voedselteams organizes the direct marketing of local and seasonal food. Each “team” of consumers is brought together with farmers that are located in the same province and from which they order and receive weekly deliveries. While not 100 % of the farmers that are part of the network are organic, Voedselteams has developed a set of criteria that have to be followed by all farmers. The organization is now considering implementing PGS for two main reasons: Firstly, the current set of criteria was developed a few years ago by the staff, without the participation of farmers or consumers. Voedselteams hopes to conduct a complete revision of the criteria (plus regular evaluations) strongly involving the farmers as well as consumer members. This way they want to improve the criteria and better reflect

5 http://www.amap-idf.org/le-reseau-des-amap-ile-de-france_65.php

6 Démarche participative de progrès

the needs and concerns of the members of the network. The second aspect for which Voedselteams considers PGS a valuable tool is to check if the producers follow the criteria. Currently, primarily the NGO staff conducts visits to the producers. By introducing farm visits by small groups comprising at least one staff, one peer farmer and two consumers, Voedselteams hopes that the inspections could become an educational tool both for farmers as well as consumers. Currently the organization is still evaluating whether PGS would be the most appropriate model for them and if yes, how to adapt it to their specific situation. To learn more about Voedselteams, please visit the [website](#).

The third case presented at the meeting was “Die Agronauten” from Germany. “Die Agronauten” is a non-profit research society for sustainable regional agriculture working closely with the citizen shareholder company Regionalwert AG. RWAG is considering to adopt PGS elements, but in their case not as a tool to “guarantee” the quality of organic food, but as a tool to enable exchange on the indicators amongst entrepreneurs and shareholders/consumers. It can also help to follow an integrative, interdisciplinary and participatory approach towards research. Democratization of agricultural research is of high importance to “Die Agronauten”. Research criteria, as well as topics covered by Agronauten are closely linked to the farmers, for example: What is the real value and cost of agriculture? How do agricultural systems affect the number of farmers and the quality of their work? The idea with regards to PGS is now to establish a system that helps to evaluate data collected during the research and to define and improve the indicators used in a participatory way together with the farmers. To learn more about them visit the websites of [Agronauten](#) and [RWAG](#).



During the three hours of the encounter we had lively discussions on challenges of PGS as well as the benefits it can bring. It was a positive and inspiring meeting, and I believe each of the participants went home with some new insights and ideas. While the number of PGS groups in Europe is still small, interest in and knowledge about the concept is growing and initiatives that consider PGS or its elements as useful for their systems are emerging in many places. It will be exciting to observe what will happen in Europe during the next years, with regards to PGS, as well as the short-supply chain movement in general.

Reflection on PGS workshop in Vietnam/ADB-PGS Project

By Mathew John, Keystone Foundation/India

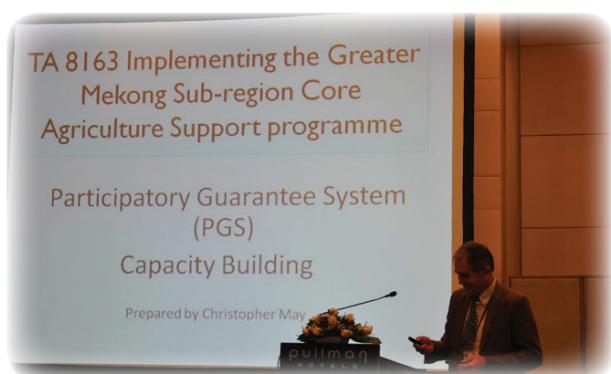


In October 2013, a project was launched by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to promote PGS in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Under the Core Agricultural Support Program Phase 2, ADB envisages the GMS to be recognized as the leading producer of safe food, using climate-friendly agricultural practices and integrate them into global markets through regional economic corridors. The attempt

to introduce PGS at a regional level in the framework of this project is quite noteworthy. As the main implementer of the project Chris May says: “Who would have thought in 2004, sitting in Torres/Brazil at the first international workshop on alternative certification, that PGS would slowly evolve and develop into such a buzzword.” Now ADB supports and finances pilot projects in six countries in the region.

I was invited to come to Hanoi (Vietnam) to be part of the regional workshop on March 5 – 6, 2014 and the Vietnam national workshop on March 7. Participants represented the government as well as civil society. For me, the response was a pleasant surprise – even though many of the countries in the region have taken only small steps at exploring organic agriculture, many of the participants knew that here was something about organic and PGS that they could take

back home and show that it could work. A presentation by Ms. Sununtar Setboonsarng, Southeast Asia Department/ ADB set the background for the regional workshop. It was followed by a presentation by Chris May who gave a brief overview on PGS. Thereafter, it was an opportunity for me to share how the process has moved in India; how IFOAM has recognized PGS at a global level and how the Indian civil society and governments have moved simultaneously on building the PGS platform. Presentations from all the other countries – Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and China (2 provinces) gave a glimpse of efforts being made towards PGS in their countries.



The diverse experience provided participants with an opportunity to understand various approaches taken in different contexts. The presentation by Karen Mapusa on

the efforts of POETCom (Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community) was excellent. Vitoon Panyakul's attempt in Thailand is noteworthy; he was there in Brazil in 2004 but had sort of withdrawn after that. This revival bodes well for the region.

On the second day of the workshop, participants went on an encouraging field visit, witnessing the confidence with which the Vietnamese farmers spoke about PGS. Many of the women farmers were there for the national workshop. I hope that the enthusiasm remains with the participants as they head back to their countries and organizations.

The next project activities planned are the national workshops in Laos and Thailand in May 2014. For more information please contact the [IFOAM PGS Coordinator](#) or [Chris May](#).

Continental news: What's new...



...in Asia and Oceania

- India: A new video with Matthew John, member of the PGS Committee and IFOAM World Board is available. Matthew talks about advantages of PGS and explains how PGS systems work today in India and abroad. Access the video via YouTube here: [Organic by Trust](#).



...in Latin America and the Caribbean

- Bolivia: The Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos de Bolivia (AOPEB) is running an [online platform](#). In early 2014 they [announced](#) that there are 1475 families from 7 municipalities and 150 products registered as PGS on the platform. The data collected on the platform is used by AOPEB to provide information to producer organizations and municipalities for planning the implementation of public policies to support organic production. AOPEB conducted [trainings](#) to teach farmers how to use computers to include their data in the platform, where information on products, prices and producers is available.



...in North America and Europe

- Italy: [During the 5th Global Farmers' Forum](#) from February 17 – 20, 2014 in Rome, IFOAM president Andre Leu and Vice President of IFOAM Asia Ashish Gupta took the opportunity to meet Anne-Sophie Poisot and Allison Loconto from FAO to discuss PGS. FAO is currently working on an analysis of several PGS systems around the globe with the intention of determining the factors that allow them to work effectively and why some PGS systems do not last long. IFOAM will supply additional information. The analysis is expected to provide valuable material to effectively advocate for PGS. Having the United Nations' largest agriculture organization supporting PGS will ensure enormous credibility for PGS in the 196 UN-member countries.
- France: PGS is increasingly being adopted by non-organic or even non-agriculture related sectors. An example is Bâtiments Durables Méditerranéens (BDM), an association that promotes sustainable building in the South of France. BDM has developed an approach to assess and certify the environmental quality of buildings. It is based on a combination of self-assessment, validation of performance by an inter-professional committee, and a system of human and technical support for all project stakeholders. Projects are usually accompanied during the design phase as well as in their implementation, and the first 2 years of the operation. For more information read the [blog](#) or visit the [BDM website](#).

Imprint

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