

Developments from the organic sector and PGS discussions in Colombia

By The IFOAM PGS Team

The Government of Colombia is adopting policies to promote organic agriculture in the country. In order to fight back a negative trend, which has led to a significant decrease in the total certified area under organic management (from 55,072 hectares (ha) in 2007 to 33,334 ha in 2012¹), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) has decided to resume a National Program for Organic Agriculture, created over seven years ago. Last year in December, the National Organic Farming Chain (*Cadena de Producción Agropecuaria Ecológica*), a coordination body which brings together various organic stakeholders, was launched in the framework of this program, as a joint initiative from the private sector and the MADR. The Vice Minister Ricardo Sanchez announced the creation of the Chain during the VI ELAO² (Cali, 2011). This year, in May, another development was the establishment of the national federation for organic agriculture, FEDEORGANICOS.

Some of the achievements so far also include the creation of a technological and scientific agenda for the organic

sector, the recognition at governmental level of the relevance of the organic sector and the creation of a national Council and different working groups, to address specific areas. For PGS initiatives in the country, the good news is that the working group on Standards and Certification has included in its annual working plan a component to identify and support alternatives to third party certification, to be eventually included in the proposal for reform of the national regulation on organic certification (Resolution 187/2006). The current legal framework only recognizes third-party certification. According to Alejandro Cuezva, secretary of the National Organic Farming Chain, the estimated total area under organic management in Colombia could reach 150,000 ha, including the area that is not certified. Since the MADR is aiming at supporting small producers, most of who are likely to be included in these estimations, PGS is being considered as a strategy to adopt, especially for local and regional markets.

During 2011, different initiatives to promote the recognition of PGS took place in Colombia, and there are interesting experiences being developed or in early stage of implementation in Valle del Cauca and Bogotá (for details, please see The Global PGS Newsletter, March, April and June issues). It is early to say if and how PGS will be fully

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1 For details on the figures, please see the FiBL and IFOAM publication The World of Organic Agriculture – Statistics & Emerging Trends 2012. For other references, see Noticias Aliadas: <http://www.lapress.org/articulos.asp?art=6637>.

2 VI Encuentro Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Agricultura Ecológica.

implemented in the country, or if and how PGS could be included in the legal framework, but it is encouraging that the current political arena is open to discussing

alternatives that are suitable to the specific needs of different stakeholders in the organic sector, more specifically small farmers.

Bolivia supports PGS

By Carlos Escobar

This article was originally published in The Organic Standard (TOS), Issue 133/May 2012.

On 17 January 2012 the National Technical Rule of Participatory Guarantee Systems for the local and/or national trade of organic products was approved in Bolivia. The Rule comes under the Ministerial Resolution No. 20 of Ministry of Rural Development and Land (Spanish acronym: MDRyT). It was recommended by the National Council of Organic Production (Spanish acronym: CNAPE) and its coordination unit, in fulfillment of the Law 3225 of November 21 of 2006, in which article 23 recognizes alternative guarantee systems as a type of organic certification.

The technical rule, which has nine chapters, 49 articles

and six annexes, establishes the principles, definitions, rights, obligations and requisites for participatory guarantee systems in Bolivia. It also identifies CNAPE as the responsible entity for the fulfillment, execution and application of the program, and the National Service of Agricultural Health and Food Safety (Spanish acronym: SENASAG) as the supervising body.

In addition, a national logo for organic or products in conversion was approved. For further information on the Bolivian Regulation see TOS no. 59 (March 2006) and TOS no. 72 (April 2007).

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PGS for Sustainable Development: updates from Rio+20

By Flavia Castro



After 20 years since the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), world leaders, governments, NGOs and other groups met again this year in Rio de Janeiro. The high level conference commonly referred to as

Rio+20 took place from 20-22 June, and a vast range of parallel sessions and side events were organized by the civil society during the weeks leading to it. Since June 12, IFOAM was present, leading, contributing and participating in strategic events with stakeholders from within and outside the official Conference.

PGS, which are promoted by IFOAM as a tool for sustainable development, were a recurrent topic used as a reference and discussed in many occasions. In this process, a series of high-level statements have been expressed, reinforcing the relevance of organic agriculture and of PGS for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, and stressing the need to support its recognition and dissemination.

Led by Urs Niggli from FiBL, the first IFOAM side event took place on June 12. With the title “Setting the Post Rio Knowledge & Science Agenda for Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication” the event discussed strategic priorities for the global organic research agenda, including the need to share farmer’s knowledge, and was illustrated by good examples from PGS initiatives. As Urs reports from the Conference through his [blog](#) “Maria Fernanda Fonseca who has worked for many years at the Brazilian Research Institute PESAGRO, disagrees with the idea that organic agriculture is only for export to Europe, Japan or the US. She presented four Brazilian initiatives, which were founded on the principles of self-responsibility and organic products for the local market. The model of a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) that was developed in Brazil is strongly based on the principle that is widespread in science: namely peer review. Why shouldn’t farmers be able to judge whether their neighbor is farming ecologically or not? Why does it need an inspector who usually comes from Europe or the US?” he asks himself.

At the IFOAM side event on “Mainstreaming Organic

Agriculture as a Means of Implementation” on June 15, the importance of PGS in building local markets was acknowledged by the European Commission (EC). According to Mrs. Loretta Dormal Marino, Deputy-Director General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the EC, “for developing local and regional markets, especially in developing countries, alternatives to third party certification, in particular the participatory guarantee systems (PGS) developed and promoted in particular by IFOAM, offer a practical solution to move forward.” Despite a positive attitude towards PGS outside the EU, Mrs. Marino also said that “PGS cannot be accepted for organic certification in the EU”, a message that could be interpreted by the European PGS movement as an invitation to strengthen advocacy activities in order to change the approach towards organic guarantee in the region.

On June 18, the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Supply (MAPA) organized an event entirely dedicated to PGS, discussing its importance for the Brazilian organic sector and in the global context. The Brazilian regulation on organic agriculture recognizes PGS at the same level as third-party certification. During the event, Rogério Dias, coordinator of the competent authority in the country (COAGRE), emphasized that Brazil is one of the pioneers adopting PGS. He noted that “this system can be adopted not only for organic produce,” and that the Government is considering possibilities for expansion. The representative of the Brazilian Forum on PGS, Romeu Mattos, shared this idea, stating that “it’s a very scalable system, where the organic label is only one of the results, while the participatory process remains the most important factor,” said Mattos.

Markus Arbenz, Executive Director of IFOAM, who also participated in the discussion organized by MAPA, said: “Brazil is already one of the main role models for other countries, and an example to the world”. He also reiterated France’s pioneering implementation of participatory systems, but stressed the need for legal recognition of this alternative guarantee system in France and Europe, just as it has happened in Brazil.

On the same day, the [Agriculture & Rural Development Day](#) took place and IFOAM co-organized a learning event with Biovision which tried to provide an answer to the question “How can affordable, accessible, inclusive and resilient food and farming systems be achieved through ecological and social intensification?”. Sue Edwards, head of the Institute for Sustainable Development in

Ethiopia was the main speaker. Laércio Meirelles, from Centro Ecológico (Brazil) participated as a panelist, showcasing the benefits of PGS. The slides from the presentation are available online [here](#).

On 19 June, the IFOAM Sustainable Development Learning Course took place, and Laércio Meirelles joined it as well, sharing the floor with other participants such as Moises Quispe (ANPE-Peru) and Sue Edwards (ISD-Ethiopia). The Secretary-General of Rio+20 Sha Zukun welcomed the participants, followed by [an inspirational speech](#) delivered by the Prime Minister of Bhutan, Lyonchoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, who announced that the Government of Bhutan “has pledged to become 100% organic in food production” and that they have “a national Participatory Guarantee System program being initiated for the domestic organic market.” The potential contribution of PGS to sustainable development, if promoted and supported by the right policies, was illustrated by Laércio Meirelles through the examples from the south of Brazil, where small-scale organic producers nourish millions of people a day through public procurement policies.



Panelists at IFOAM SD Learning Course on June 19.
(Photo by Laercio Meirelles from his blog: [laercio.meirelles.blogspot](#))

As the Rio+20 negotiations come to a conclusion, a final text is about to be adopted that recognizes, among others, the role of small-scale farmers in contributing to sustainable development through environmentally sound farming practices, and that underscores that sustainable development requires involvement and active participation of all stakeholders. Even though it is not possible to foresee to what extent the official commitments will be translated into practical actions, it is a fact that the opportunities created by the event open up new possibilities for PGS to be considered and included in the international agenda for sustainable development, a well-deserved achievement for PGS initiatives worldwide.

News from the Global comparative study on interactions between social processes and Participatory Guarantee Systems

By *Hervé Bouagnimbeck, Organic for Africa! Coordinator at IFOAM*



In the framework of the global comparative study on interactions between social processes such as seed conservation systems and PGS, which IFOAM is currently carrying out, one of the selected cases is from Brazil.

The data collection will now start in southern Brazil, in early July, immediately after the training of local researchers which will be held in Passo Fundo. The data collected will draw from interviews with representatives from Rede Ecovida and Centro de Tecnologias Alternativas Populares (CETAP) and in-depth interviews with PGS farmers in the nuclei of Planalto and Alto Uruguai.

Meanwhile, data has already been collected among several cases in other parts of the world. Below is a short summary of preliminary results in Bryanston Organic and Natural Market (BONM), South Africa and Green Foundation, India. Further impressions will be shared in the next issue of The Global PGS newsletter.

The Bryanston Organic and Natural Market, South Africa

The BONM, located in the up-market suburb of Bryanston, Johannesburg, initiated its own PGS in 2005 to ensure the organic integrity of all fresh produce sold at the market. The cost of running the PGS is currently borne by the BONM. Drawing from interviews with farmers as well as key stakeholders in the BONM, the results indicate the BONM is more of a market-driven PGS than a producer-driven PGS. The social process interacting with the BONM PGS relates to joint marketing, that brings together urban and rural farm produce to the Market space. This PGS has enabled farmers, in particular women



Vegetables on the shelves of Bryanston Organic and Natural Market

in rural areas, to realize improvements in their household food security. It has provided a framework for a form of joint marketing that creates increased incomes and secured market access for both urban and rural producers. It is clear that the PGS will continue to function if the Market remains a supportive structure.

The GREEN Foundation PGS, India

Drawing from interviews with PGS farmers in the Kanakapura Taluk of Ramanagara District, in Karnataka, key stakeholders of GREEN Foundation and members of the farmers' society of Janadhanya, results indicate that social processes such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), Community Seed Banks (CSB), joint credit and savings systems are relevant to the GREEN FOUNDATION PGS. In particular CSBs have impacted PGS initiatives in many ways, thereby improving the sustainability of the PGS. Some examples are facilitating mobilization of PGS initiatives and a positive impact on the dynamics of PGS groups.



Women members from the Green Foundation PGS, India

As a platform for information and knowledge exchange, CSBs have helped disseminate the organic principles and practices, thus enabling the farmers to switch to organic production. With regard to the dynamics, CSBs bring together community members who often have common interests in agriculture. This strengthens social bonds and positively impacts the way the PGS group interacts.

The benefits for producers associated with participation in PGS include improved market linkage, improvements in household food security, increased cost savings and improvements in the health of soil and farm environments.

For details on the global comparative study, please contact [Hervé Bouagnimbeck](#).

PGS Basics

The IFOAM PGS Portal is an online reference with extensive resources on PGS, including publications available for free download, data on PGS initiatives around the Globe, and the full archive of previous issues of this Newsletter.

A new section dedicated to videos about PGS has now been created on the PGS Portal. The section features videos produced by IFOAM as well as a compilation of videos available online, produced by different organizations and PGS initiatives. For the launch of this section, IFOAM has published two new videos: a message from the IFOAM World Board Members, introducing PGS, and the reasons to support it; and the second episode of the series “PGS Around the Globe”, focusing on the Philippines. The videos can be accessed [here](#).

More videos will be regularly updated to this page, and we are looking forward to receiving your feedback. So don't forget to leave your comment after you watch the videos on YouTube!



Continental News: What's new in...



...Africa

West Africa: HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is currently facilitating PGS discussions in several francophone countries of West Africa. Progress is particularly noticeable in Benin where a workshop to explain PGS to stakeholders (producers, consumers, researchers, distributors, certifiers, NGOs, etc.) took place in October 2011, followed by consultations to draft the national PGS standard in May 2012. The Benin stakeholders intend to have IFOAM evaluate their newly developed standard and their PGS. Lazare Yombi, regional technical adviser to HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation in the region, also recently provided information on PGS to the national organic association (CNABIO) in Burkina Faso, and has detected interest in Mali as well. For more information, contact lazare.yombi@helvetas.org or benin@helvetas.org



...Asia and Oceania

Philippines: The “Organic Market sa Perez Park” in the province of Quezon celebrated last May its first anniversary. The market sells organic products such as rice and vegetables produced by farmers in Quezon. This market mainstreams the benefits of organic agriculture for the health of people and the environment. During the celebration, the local authorities launched the Quezon participatory guarantee system (QPGS), which verifies that organic products produced by Quezon farmers follow the organic standards set by the province. IFOAM has launched a video from the series “PGS Around the Globe: the Philippines” including information about MASIPAG, a PGS involving over 10000 farmers, and an interview with Roberto D. Gajo, the provincial agriculturist in Quezon. The video is available on the IFOAM PGS Portal in the [Videos section](#).



...Latin America

Brazil: At the end of May, the 8th annual meeting “Taste and Knowledge Fair” (Feira de Saberes e Sabores), organized by Rede Ecovida took place in the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis. More than 900 people gathered in the three-day meeting, discussing about participatory certification, marketing for organic products, inputs for organic production and agroforestry systems. Moreover, the fair provided a meeting space for consumers and farmers, where recipes, experiences, stories, and culture were exchanged. Rede Ecovida groups over 4000 families, including 2500 operators guaranteed through PGS.



...North America and Europe

Italy: The international network URGENCI has launched a call to invite those interested in joining the European meeting on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), which will take place from 10 to 12 October 2012 in Milan. PGS will be discussed during the event and this will be a good opportunity for the European PGS community to network and exchange experiences with like-minded entities, stakeholders and organizations. The registration for the meeting is open until September 1 2012. For more information, please visit this [link](#).

Spain: La Via Campesina Europe is organizing an European Agroecology Meeting, in the Basque Country 30 June - 3 July. Eva Torremocha, IFOAM World Board and PGS Committee member, is going to present PGS in a workshop focusing on techniques and tools to implement agro ecological approaches in production systems. Other workshops during the event will be focused on the political dimension of agroecology.

Imprint

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