

## Government involvement in certification systems and PGS in Ecuador

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In Ecuador, a variety of experiences in agro-ecological production and commercialization, as well as a number of PGS initiatives, have developed at the local level. Many of these systems are organized by producers' organizations, with the support of NGOs. The Ecuadorian government has recently increased interest in these initiatives and formulated public policies that refer to them, as well as to organic and Fair Trade certification more broadly.

The constitution of Ecuador adopted in 2008 affirms the responsibility of the state for Fair Trade in various articles<sup>1</sup>, though this is not defined necessarily in terms of certification. Since 2012, the government has been developing a national Fair Trade strategy both for internal markets and for exports. The consultation concluded in July 2014, with the official presentation of the strategy documents to a national development-planning agency. In the current national development plan<sup>2</sup> certification systems for sustainable agriculture are conceptualized as a mechanism to promote sustainable rural development. The plan foresees that the state must take an active role in encouraging, fostering and promoting "sustainable goods and services, in particular organic products, with cultural or ancestral characteristics produced under Fair Trade or social and solidarity economy conditions"<sup>3</sup>.

Even before the current legal framework was put in place, various initiatives for certification of organic and sustainable production developed at local and national level, along with local policies and regulations. New models of public certification have emerged at the level of provincial governments throughout Ecuador based on multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms, in order to fill the need, identified by producers' organizations, for a public service differentiating organic, agro-ecological or 'sustainable' production practices. Some provincial governments have also created and adopted their own technical norms for the certification processes.

In the province of Tungurahua, the provincial government developed a technical norm for certification under the principles of clean production (*producción limpia*) and created a public agency that certifies producer farms, the Unidad de Certificación Agricultura Limpia Tungurahua (UCALT), based in the Technical University of Ambato. In the southern Amazonian province of Zamora-Chinchipec, the provincial government has developed a similar initiative, declaring the whole province as *Territorio de Producción Limpia* (TPL). Two coffee producers' associations that have been in the Fair Trade and organic certification systems for over a decade, supported the

1 More precisely, the articles mentioned are 276, 281, 283, 284, 304 and 306

2 Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir (PNBV 2013-2017)

3 PNBV 2013-2017: 238

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development of this certification system, based on a territorial or origin certification of sustainable production practices. In the province of Pichincha, the provincial government has developed a framework to recognize PGS that are implemented by small producers' organizations.

In each of these cases, the provincial governments have established multi-stakeholder committees, including representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries (MAGAP), provincial and municipal governments, representatives of producer organizations, consumers and representatives from universities, among others, which are responsible for the governance of the certification processes. These are all models of public agricultural certification that transcend the third party certification model. The MAGAP has established a department for overall coordination of initiatives for alternative commercialization, which works directly with small-scale producers to strengthen their access to local markets, through short chains and direct sales (food baskets, farmer's markets, etc.). Many of these alternative commercialization models adopt PGS at the local level.

In 2013, the Ecuadorian government passed a new law to harmonize the law regulating organic production with the European Union's regulation and other international standards for organic production, to simplify the export process and create conditions to access to the EU's Third Country equivalency list. This new law appoints the agency

Agrocalidad (*Agencia Ecuatoriana de Aseguramiento de la Calidad del Agro*) as the national competent authority, responsible for regulating organic production, setting up a technical norm for organic production and for controlling all the organic operators involved in the organic value chain as well as organic certification bodies.

The current law refers to PGS and establishes that a national regulation for PGS must be developed. For this reason, since early 2015, Agrocalidad began a participatory process to create a national norm to regulate PGS, including as much as possible the existing initiatives and current achievements. This process adopted the example of the Bolivian government, which has developed a national regulation and program to promote and support the development of PGS through the National Council for Ecological Production (CNAPE).

The existing local (provincial government) initiatives that we highlighted in this article are regulated by different technical norms for agricultural production and different models of administration and governance. This leads to questions such as if national oversight through Agrocalidad would be possible under either the organic production norm or the new norm that is being created to regulate PGS, and how could this be implemented. The debate is ongoing and the opinions from stakeholders diverge. In this sense, Ecuador remains an interesting case to consider with reference to the relationship between PGS and public policies or regulations.

## Stand Out in Your Field – Connecting to customers with better branding and storytelling

By Alice Varon, Executive Director, Certified Naturally Grown



Farmers often feel that they are too busy running the farm to invest time developing a marketing plan. But the most successful farms are those that have found a way to connect personally with their customers and to convey a sense of who they are to an ever-widening audience. In our (North

American) culture of information overload and shortening attention spans, the most effective marketing stands out with visual content and stories that have emotional resonance.

Fortunately, there is no shortage of compelling images or stories on farms. The trick is to help farmers tap into the enormous potential at their fingertips. They can dramatically improve their marketing by deploying

visual imagery and tales of farm life to connect with their current customers and reach new ones.

In the autumn of 2014, [Certified Naturally Grown \(CNG\)](#) initiated a new project to enhance farmers' marketing capacity through visual storytelling and branding.

**While we still recommend our certification programs for direct-market farmers and beekeepers who use ecological practices, certification alone isn't a marketing plan.**

And we want to see our farmers' businesses thrive. The project's website, [Stand Out In Your Field - Marketing for Farmers](#), includes a section for Marketing Lessons which are designed to help farmers tell their stories. To date the lessons include using Instagram, writing



Website banner with CNG logo

a Press Release, Branding, and making and sharing videos about farms. Lessons are available for free on our website, though more detailed lessons are made available for downloading to those who register for updates on the website with their email. A series of short blog posts feature “Shining Examples,” farmers who excel at these marketing techniques, and provides more detailed examples of how it is done (like [how Instagram is used by CNG member Origins Farm](#)).

As part of this project we’re offering free marketing services. In particular, we are offering free logo design services for up to 40 qualified applicants, and the development of a promotional video for 10 producers. The first round of applications has closed, and the next round will be announced this fall. The application process is open to direct-market producers using ecological methods in the United States. We will use the project website to share the logos and videos that are developed as they’re produced.

To support improved branding we are also offering design services for a modest fee. On the website are several design options for banners and business cards based either on a farm’s logo, or, if they are CNG certified, based on the themes we have created for our own marketing materials. There are options for farms

without logos and without certification.

The work of this project is funded through a grant from the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program of the United States Department of Agriculture, AMS division.

The media landscape has changed so much in recent years, how can farmers be expected to keep up? Add to this the increasing sophistication – and confusion – of customers about their food choices, and direct-market farmers today face an urgent need to develop a marketing approach that resonates with customers and strengthens their sense of affiliation. Savvy farmers not only have quality products and an attractive presentation at the farmers market, they stand out with a story and a brand that is consistent across venues, and extends beyond the market to include an online presence with visual stories about the farm that people can access wherever they are.

Effective farm marketing requires ongoing efforts to reach new customers, and make a lasting impression so customers will return to purchase from the farm again and again. One key to success is telling your story. Farmers are fortunate to have a particularly interesting workplace that customers want to hear about. To get the latest on this project, register for updates at [www.StandOutInYourField.org](http://www.StandOutInYourField.org).

## PGS gaining ground in Belgium

*By Cathy Banken - member of organizations active in environmental and food-related issues. She shares her experiences as a volunteer in PGS-initiatives in Belgium*



I first heard about PGS in 2013 at a conference organized by the organization Nature & Progrès Belgique. I was blown away by what I heard and felt PGS was an important tool to evolve to a truly sustainable food system, which also gives us consumers a chance to be part of it.

Nature&Progrès Belgique is an organization advocating for organic agriculture in Belgium. In 2008 they started a PGS. Seven market gardeners wanted to go beyond organic and emphasize the sustainable and local origin of their fruit and vegetables baskets. Today, 61 producers are certified including farmers, cheese makers, beer brewers, bakers and even a cookie-maker.

**This PGS has one particularity: All food producers are already certified organic by a third party.**

Their participation in the PGS adds to the certification, as they sign a charter committing themselves to pay special attention to a wide variety of subjects such as: the environment (biodiversity, efficient water use, soil fertility), the use of energy (less fossil energy, less transport, less packaging), social aspects (working conditions, solidarity and collaboration between farmers) and the local sourcing of the produce used as well as the link between producers and consumers. Currently, each one of those 61 producers has received one or more PGS-visits (peer review) with a thorough evaluation, involving at least another producer, consumer and staff member

of Nature & Progrès Belgique.

I have assisted to a couple of these visits and was invited to a meeting in the beginning of March. The purpose was to discuss the development of the PGS so far and see how it can be improved. Approximately 25 people were present, most of them producers, but also some consumers and staff members. The main conclusion was that external communication is an important area that requires improvement. Even though Nature&Progrès Belgique producers are very dedicated to a sustainable food system, they rarely get questions from their consumers concerning their efforts and the meaning of the label on their products. This lack of awareness from consumers is also reflected in the fact that few of them volunteer to go on a PGS-visit. The association communicates about PGS in its magazine, on its website or at different events, but is now willing to invest more in the communication to a larger public. Some ideas that emerged were: developing flyers to hand out to consumers, for events and special occasions or for display in the shop; improving visibility of the Nature&Progrès-label; and involving the local groups of the association. Moreover, it is important for all members of Nature&Progrès to feel PGS is "their" certification as well. Training sessions will be proposed to the volunteers so they can fully benefit from the PGS-visits.

Nature&Progrès Belgique PGS is developing well in the French-speaking region of Belgium, but there is also great news coming from the Flemish region, where the first PGS has just been launched by the network "Voedselteams". This network with about 170 food producers, is well known in Flanders for its promotion of sustainable agriculture and short chain circuits. The consumer members are organized in local groups that enable them to order from a wide variety of locally produced food. As explained in the previous issue of [the Global PGS newsletter](#), the PGS of Voedselteams is the result of a long period of extensive research and networking. The main purpose for creating this PGS

was to include the members and the farmers in the screening and evaluation of producers.

The first PGS-visits are scheduled for June. The introduction days organized in April and May were very successful as they were attended by more than 40 people. Aside from a few staff members and producers, most of the people present were members who volunteered to take an active part in the PGS-process. I had recently joined the network and met a lot of people who considered this project to be a unique opportunity to learn more about and to support a sustainable food production system. We commit for a period of two years, with two PGS-visits every season and a few days dedicated to training. As for the producers, they will attend at least one peer visit for this period of two years. This way, two members as well as a producer and a staff member will be present at every visit. A steering group will also be created with all stakeholders (staff, members, producers). For Voedselteams this is the beginning of a new and exciting project.

It is undeniable that PGS is gaining ground in Belgium as there are also other groups like the CSA-inspired GASAP in the region of Brussels that are actively preparing a PGS. I'm definitely looking forward to meeting people from all these PGS initiatives and to exchanging ideas about how we can all contribute to a more sustainable food system.



*Introduction days of Voedselteams at the farm 't Uilenbos, in Moerbeke-Waes*

## Upscaling PGS benefits for Smallholders in India

*By Ashish Gupta, Organic Ambassador and Former Vice-President of IFOAM Asia*



Smallholders populate all countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa. The average land holding of such smallholders is less than 5 hectares and they constitute a large part of the population. It is also the case that a large number of such farmers are practicing some

form of organic agriculture, but are not certified nor organized towards the markets; this makes them susceptible to market shocks, where prices and volumes are fickle. It is here that PGS assists small farmers groups to organize and connect with the markets as a collective.

In most organic agriculture interventions, farmers are encouraged to grow organic and assisted through

training of cultivation techniques and certification.

However, in India the PGS Organic Council takes this step further by actually creating structures to allow the farmers groups to create products, to process their produce and connect with the market.

Typically, it is difficult for individual farmers to connect directly with the markets. As agronomic theory proposes, farmers need at least two out of three possible conditions to conclude a successful market transaction: 1. Get the price which suits the farmers; 2. Get the money paid at the right time; 3. Get all the produce sold. Now, in a typical market, if a farmer is able to conclude a transaction with a minimum of two of these conditions, the transaction is possible. It is interesting to note that all three are needed for a successful transaction however, realistically, farmers normally have to settle for only two out of three. In the case of PGS, each transaction is strived to ensure that all the three conditions are met always.

The way this happens is actually quite simple: the first step to connect the farmer to the market should be a to create a group, with the support of a non-profit organization or an institution, in which the farmers themselves have some manner of equity. In India, the PGS Organic Council is a group of Non-Government or Voluntary organizations that handholds the process of applying PGS to local groups of farmers. Now, in addition to the creation of groups, another commercial entity formation is encouraged by these NGOs. In India there are various cooperative structures that farmers can create to connect with the market, such as Producer Companies, Self Help Groups and Cooperatives. These

organizations then provide the first fair access to farmers, by allowing collective marketing and bargaining. This is one of the most important steps in assisting farmers to connect to the markets that in a conventional system are the source of most of the problems farmers face.

In this case of market economics, there are two ways smallholders function in the market. Either the smallholder brings their produce on a daily basis to the market, similar to daily informal bazaars; or they succumb to available prices in the competitive markets. PGS here offers the third option, whereby smallholders can gather and connect to the markets from a position of strength and increase their income to levels that they deem as satisfactory.

Going forward, the government of India plans to involve more civil society organizations to significantly increase the number of small holders involved in PGS. This is expected to go up from the current number of approximately 25,000 to over 1.2 million farmers. As a way to upscale the benefits of PGS for smallholders, it is expected that the government through its nodal department, National Center of Organic Farming (NCOF) will invest heavily in promoting the ideals of PGS in India, to make it one of the biggest such inclusive program in the world.



*PGS Farmers in Dharani Cooperative collectively selling rice*

## Continental News: What's new in ...

### ASIA

**SRI LANKA:** The Good Market from Colombo was featured as topic of the week on 13.05.2015 on [Organic Market.Info](#). A report on this initiative showcases their achievements, but it failed to mention that they work with both third party and PGS certified producers. But this initiative is very transparent and provides a wealth of information on their website, which includes details about their PGS, the process for application, documents, lists of vendors, etc. A visit to their page on organic certification is a very good starting point to understand their approach.

### AFRICA

**NIGERIA:** The 3rd African Organic Conference will take place from 5 to 9 October 2015 in Ibadan. There will be a break out session on Guarantee Systems with discussion and presentations of PGS case studies. The conference is organized by the African Organic Network (AfrONet). For more information, please contact Dr. Olugbenga O. AdeOluwa, Ph.D., IOIA, [adeoluwaoo@yahoo.com](mailto:adeoluwaoo@yahoo.com) or [oo.adeoluwa@mail.ui.edu.ng](mailto:oo.adeoluwa@mail.ui.edu.ng)

**SENEGAL:** The National Organic Federation, FENAB, is

considering the establishment of a national PGS initiative associated with a national organic label, to promote the consumption of local organic products in Senegal. As a first step, the Swiss cooperation agency HEKS mandated IFOAM – Organics International to conduct a feasibility study of such approach. The results of the field mission were presented in Thiès, on the 28th of April, during a workshop gathering 41 local participants. For more information, please contact Ibrahima Seck at [iseck@yahoo.fr](mailto:iseck@yahoo.fr).

## EUROPE & NORTH AMERICA

**HUNGARY:** From 15 to 16 May 2015, the Association of Conscious Consumers (Tudatos Vásárlók Egyesülete - Tve) organized a conference and workshop focusing on PGS and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), in Budapest. More than 60 people joined the public conference day, including members of the government. Local farmers, representatives of URGENCI and Eva Torremocha (IFOAM - Organics International World Board and PGS Committee member) joined as panelists. Presentations consisted in introducing the different concepts, as well as exploring similarities and complementariness of PGS with CSA. An internal workshop took place on the second day, with 12 farmers from several regions of Hungary and 5 representatives of Tve. Specific aspects of PGS and CSA were discussed and clarified: peer review, organization of visit group, processes, price setting, definition of the

norms. The group particularly liked the idea of being allowed to define their own norms. As a follow-up, the idea is to launch a national network for PGS and to address the challenge to “gain” consumers to their movement. For more information, please contact: Zsofia Perevsni, [zsofi@tve.hu](mailto:zsofi@tve.hu)

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

**COLOMBIA:** The Researcher-Practitioner Workshop “Innovative approaches to linking sustainable and agro ecological production with markets in developing countries” is taking place from 23 to 25 June in Bogotá, Colombia. Organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), the workshop is a way to create visibility for experiences about sustainable practices and linkages to markets and to work towards future collaboration. Various PGS initiatives are among the selected case studies and their representatives will join practitioners and researchers from civil society, private sector, government, academia and development agencies from all continents to share experiences, identify lessons to initiate a practitioners’ guide. Patricia Flores Escudero, IFOAM Latin America Coordinator, will moderate the session on PGS. More information will be available on the next issue of the PGS Newsletter.



# Does your government support the development of organic agriculture and markets, or has it done so in the past?

IFOAM - Organics International is collecting documentation of government policies and programs (besides regulations) that support organic agriculture and markets. The aim is to compile and organize these in a Toolkit that can assist organic advocates and governments in their dialogue on support strategies for expanding Organic Agriculture and markets.

Examples of such government policies and programs include but are not limited to comprehensive organic strategic plans, promotion programs, organic data collection (prices, markets, production), support for research on organic systems, training and extension, direct financial support to operators (subsidies, certification cost-share), capacity development, public procurement, export assistance. We are also interested to include policies that remove barriers for organic farmers such as removing subsidies or tax breaks for conventional production inputs. Programs could be fully government driven, or could be based on public-private collaboration. However, they should entail some substantial government participation.

The perspective of PGS or other non-third party certified organic players is particularly important in this exercise. Indeed, many supporting policies for

Organic Agriculture use third party certification as a precondition for access to government support (e.g. in the case of direct subsidies for organic farmers, cost-share programs for certification access, etc). We want to make sure that we collect also best practices of supporting policies that are inclusive of non-third party certified organic farmers.

We are seeking both policy documents and program descriptions in English, French or Spanish. We would be happy to accept translations from other languages into any of these languages.

What you can do:

- Send us government documents or descriptions of relevant government policies and programs.
- Send us secondary sources describing the policy/program, such as from newsletters.
- Alert us about policies/programs and provide relevant contact information, so that we can follow up to obtain a documentary description.

For more information, and to participate, please contact: Diane Bowen, [d.bowen@ifoam.bio](mailto:d.bowen@ifoam.bio).



## Imprint

The **Global PGS Newsletter** is published bimonthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio).

The Global PGS Newsletter is a free electronic publication. To receive the newsletter, please write to [pgs@ifoam.bio](mailto:pgs@ifoam.bio). The newsletter is published by IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. You can find out more about PGS [here](#) on the IFOAM - Organics International website.

Editing: Flávia Castro, IFOAM - Organics International  
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