

GAS, DES and PGS in Italy: Experiences gathered in the project “For a Pedagogy of the Earth”

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Organic certification is often discussed within the Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale- GAS¹ (solidarity based purchasing groups), from different points of view: from those who consider it an indispensable criterion for the choice of a food producer, to the many for which it represents a mere imposition of the market. The former highlight the need for consumer safety; the latter recall the scandals that even recently have plagued the organic world, the bureaucracy that cannot replace direct knowledge,

the normalization imposed by rules of globalization, often sacrificing the diversity of those (small-holders and family) farmers closer to GAS.

Nevertheless, such a debate often fails to include all different levels on which a discussion about certification should be based: not only “what” is certified, but also “how”, “why” and “for whom”. A discussion of this kind begun at the national assembly of GAS and Distretti di Economia Solidale - DES (solidarity economy districts)² in June, 2010. It started as a simple question: is third-party certification the most appropriate system to guarantee quality according to the principles of solidarity economy? It was not a question on the objective of certification, but on the method by means of which the guarantee is created.

It emerged during this debate that the third-party approach, the only possibility to obtain access to the organic logo in the European Union, has intrinsic characteristics that are in contrast with the solidarity economy approach. On the other hand, the solidarity economy approach has been from the very beginning very similar to the PGS approach (in Italian SPG: Sistemi Partecipativi di Garanzia).

The project “For a Pedagogy of the Earth”³ implemented throughout 2012 the application of PGS inside the DES of Como, Monza and Varese (Italy).

- 1 Usually, a purchasing group is set up by a number of consumers who cooperate in order to buy food and other commonly used goods directly from the producers (especially small-holder and family farmers) chosen on ethical basis. For more information, please visit these links: <http://bit.ly/eeP4CM> , <http://bit.ly/rrzcI5>
- 2 Solidarity economy districts are geographically based networks linking people with a common ‘solidarity’ approach in order to develop an alternative local economy. In Italy, these networks are often promoted and created by members of GAS and similar initiatives.
- 3 The project is conducted with the consultancy of Eva Torremocha (IFOAM World Board and PGS Committee members), IFOAM Europe, and Alessandro Triantafyllidis, President of the Italian Association for Organic Farming (AIAB), with the methodological support of the Cooperative Scret and with the financial support of Fondazione Cariplo

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The aim to qualify and innovate practices of responsible consumption and of short supply chain started in these contexts. In Lombardy, the experiences of this type mostly refer to GAS, with several more advanced forms, which aim to lead to stable partnerships between farmers and consumers (such as in CSA). One of the specific objectives was to test the involvement of GAS members in the process of participatory guarantee.

A pilot is running which has local Committees as protagonists (one in each of the three areas involved), with mixed groups representing the stakeholders (at least one third of the members must be composed of producers and another one third must be composed of consumers). In this pilot all issues relevant to the creation of the guarantee system are examined: the formation and construction of a shared vision (what is considered as important for all), the definition of protocols (which aspects we want to guarantee) and the operating rules of the PGS.

The PGS being tested is configured as a horizontal federation of local Committees, a network sharing rules and the guarantee mechanism, as well as operational resources (financial and technical). Three local Committees were formed and worked together in order to define unique protocols and rules.



One of the farms visited in October, 2012

The PGS structure consists of:

- The visiting groups: composed of a producer (who is specialized in the same kind of production as the visited producer), a consumer and a technician (often an agronomist, at least during the first two visits). The members of the visiting group must not be members of the same Committee as the visited producer;
- A unique guarantee Commission: the body who

issues, renews or suspends the certification on the basis of the reports from the visits, integrating such information through direct contacts established with the visited producer as needed. This Commission is also composed of a producer, a consumer and a technician. The oversight by a body that is different from the local Committees and the visiting groups reflects several needs: to protect an impartiality element in the evaluation; to favor the homogeneity in the judgment; to further enhance the transparency of the process. These three elements are crucial for

While a “technical” third-party system must increase the complexity of regulation in order to keep unchanged its effectiveness (cheaters are always one step ahead), a relationship-based second-party approach is progressively simplified as the circulation of skills, trust and the social network itself grow.

the qualification of the public level of guarantee (the “logo”) that the PGS aims to express.

From June to October 2012, 15 farms were visited, checking “on the field” the methodology and tools collectively developed. The visits allowed for further differentiation between third-party certification and PGS. During the visit, which is quite different from an inspection, the producers are able to exchange information, while the consumers can learn and draw attention also to the not-strictly agronomic aspects included in the protocols: the rigor of the verification, setting up a framework based on relationship and trust, is carried out as a moment of collective learning.

Building skills and trust over time, this collective learning gradually reduces the need for bureaucracy: while a “technical” third-party system must increase the complexity of regulation in order to keep unchanged its effectiveness (cheaters are always one step ahead), a relationship-based second-party approach is progressively simplified as the circulation of skills, trust and the social network itself grow.

In this sense, PGS represent a tool to tap the “relationships capital” which is the basis of the



Checking “on the field” the tools collectively developed

proposal of the DES, the GAS and the CSA, moving the emphasis away from the technical-sectorial point of view, to the relational-territorial one. In other words, an instrument that brings a social dimension into

Fair-trade introduces new product certification that combines participatory elements with external oversight

By Cornelia Kirchner, IFOAM Value Chain Assistant



A new guarantee system for product certification has been recently developed and is currently being tested in pilots by the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO). The official launch is planned for the WFTO 2013 International Conference, in May.

Unlike Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (FLO) ¹, WFTO has not yet been involved in product certification. The WFTO logo is only used to identify Fair Trade organizations, not their products. WFTO members are mainly handcrafters. The new product certification, which will be launched as a reaction to the needs of the members to improve market access, will lead to some necessary changes and adaptations in the WFTO guarantee system implemented to date².

1 Fairtrade Labeling Organization International is the other big international fair-trade organization. It is the main organization involved in certification and labeling of fair-trade products.
2 Smith, Alastair (2011): Fair and Ethical Trade: An Explanation. <http://wiego.org/sites/wiego.org/files/resources/files/Global-Trade-What-Fair-and-Ethical-Trade.pdf>

agriculture, which is also at the basis of the organic proposal.

Who is the guarantee created through our PGS directed to? For sure, not to the members of the GAS participating in the project: the GAS already have their reference producers, who they trust and “certify” through word of mouth.

A “mark” managed on a participatory basis is seen as a possibility to improve access to the local market, favoring the enlargement of the network while producers remain the main players in the process, preserving the framework of values and of relationships but acknowledging the fact that economic sustainability and change need a wider scale than that of the GAS.

For more information: www.desbri.org or www.lisolachece.org (project “Per una pedagogia della terra”)

The current system is based on self-monitoring. Each applicant has to submit a comprehensive self-evaluation, which serves as a basis for membership approval and has to be renewed every two years. Other members can review these self-evaluations and comment on them or express doubts. External inspections are carried out for five to ten percent of the members each year, mostly in the case of complaints or when there are issues with the self-evaluation³.

The monitoring intensity will be increased in the new system. An abrupt shift to a completely external assurance system however would lead to a cost explosion and alienate many members. The WFTO therefore strived to shape a system that substitutes part of the external supervision with internal and participatory mechanisms. The result is a guarantee system that combines first, second and third party certification elements.

3 Contigo (2012): WFTO <http://www.fairtrade.contigo.de/wissenswelten/contigo/index.php?title=WFTO>

The new system will build on the WFTO's former self-monitoring system. As a second element, internal monitoring among members and by stakeholders will be expanded and formalized. Peer visits by trading partners or other organizations, which are involved in the organization's economic activities will be carried out and a web-based tool (Social Accountability Watch) will set up a peer watch for members, where non-compliances can be reported confidentially.

As a membership organization of members who know each other well, and who now have a shared interest in maintaining WFTO's reputation, we can use elements of participatory guarantee systems to make our system more affordable to members."

In addition to these internal mechanisms the WFTO¹ will require each member to sign a contract with a

WFTO accredited independent auditor. These external auditors will carry out physical inspections at least once every three years for each member following a risk-based system and they will check the annual reports every year.

The WFTO argues that this system will increase credibility but is amongst the cheapest labeling systems available². We are curious about how it proves itself in practice.

It is encouraging to observe that the awareness of participatory guarantee is spreading also beyond the organic sector and to witness an increasing perception of it as a practical alternative and complementary system to third party certification. Innovative systems like this can be a fruitful source of exchange and learning that provide us with new ideas and help us improve our systems.

For more information, please contact Rudi Dalvai: communications@wfto.com.

¹ WFTO: Introduction to the new WFTO FT Guarantee System <http://bit.ly/10cY59K>

² WFTO (22. Jan. 2013): CE Briefing on WFTO Fair Trade System & WFTO 2013 Rio Conference Scholarships, 22 Jan

NOA PGS assessment is concluded with official IFOAM recognition!

By the IFOAM PGS Team

At the end of 2011, the Namibian Organic Association (NOA), member of IFOAM and leading organization promoting organic agriculture in Namibia, submitted an application for official IFOAM recognition of their PGS. The application was complete with a full Self Evaluation Questionnaire and a set of documents such as the standards adopted and examples of forms used. The assessment started straight away, but as happened with other applications, the assessment process took some time before it could be concluded and a final decision made. The process requires some time because the IFOAM PGS team goes through the documents, contacts the applicant as many times as necessary to collect more information and to better understand how their PGS functions.

When the application is received, a first analysis and collection of information is carried out in cooperation with the PGS committee, especially with the member of the committee that is from the same region of the world where the applicant PGS is based. Then, a report with the first results of the assessment goes for discussion to the entire PGS Committee. At this stage, different scenarios are possible: it could be that there is enough information for the PGS committee to make a final decision. But it could also be that the PGS committee needs to learn more about the PGS initiative, the context in which it operates and so on. If this is the case, another round of information exchange between the IFOAM PGS Team and the applicant PGS will take place, mostly via emails and Internet calls, before the information goes back to the PGS committee for a final vote. It is a very interesting process, during which all parts learn a lot about how PGS is applied to different areas of the world, sizes of groups and kinds of markets.

With NOA, the whole process was finally concluded this month, just over one year since the application. We are now happy to announce that the NOA PGS is officially recognized by IFOAM. This means that the NOA PGS is now listed in the IFOAM website among [the PGS initiatives that have achieved recognition](#)

as well (so far only 5 in total) and that the IFOAM PGS Logo can be included on their website, publications and other communications materials, but not on products.

By the way, NOA has recently updated their website, which we invite you to visit following this link (<http://www.noa.org.na/>). On the website, it is also possible to register to receive the NOA newsletter and the March issue is already published.

If you are part of a PGS initiative that would like to apply for official IFOAM recognition, be included in the specific part of the database and obtain access to the IFOAM PGS logo, please contact the IFOAM PGS team and visit this link for more detailed instructions.

Recently released IFOAM publication features Latin American PGS experiences

By Patricia Flores, IFOAM Latin American Coordinator



In the last twenty years the organic market in Latin America has undergone a process of transformation on how organic producers and consumers approach the organic guarantee for the domestic market. We can recall the decade of the 90s, when

several organizations were looking for strategies to develop and strengthen the local organic market. The idea of developing a strategy that enables stakeholders more autonomy while improving their capacities with a learning process caught the attention of eager organic smallholders and their local supporting communities and social networks. The high vulnerability of this sector within the organic sector, partly based on the same causes that are reflected in the high rate of inequity in the region, has to be addressed for a more inclusive organic sector. Nowadays, thousands of organic smallholders have the opportunity to access a market willing to support diversity, small-scale and local as main features in the food supply chain.

As a committed international partner, IFOAM has recently published new case studies focused on Latin America: "*Sistemas Participativos de Garantía. Estudios de caso en América Latina: Brasil, Colombia, México, Perú.*". The case studies were selected based on: time of implementation, outreach, innovative schemes and impact at the decision-making level in

governmental policies. All of them have an important role to play as key stakeholders in public policies dialogues, considering that not all countries allow PGS in organic regulation. The four identified experiences share common features, such as standards ownership, established and clear procedures and their own seal to distinguish their products besides the official one.

The Organic and Biodynamic PGS of the Brazilian Association of Biodynamic Agriculture (ABD), represents biodynamic farmers organizations in five local groups from Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais, Brazil. ABD PGS can carry the Demeter logo, the most well-known quality seal in the international organic market. The Agroecological Farmers Markets in Valle del Cauca, Colombia, is an initiative of organic smallholder families and represents 12 organic farmers markets in 10 municipalities in Valle del Cauca.

It includes 60 different organizational processes and a solid organic structure based on their local communities and territorial organizations. The Mexican Network of Organic Tianguis and Markets, Mexico, is a self-managed initiative comprised of 28 local groups in 12 states. The Mexican experience has been one of the most persistent in introducing improvements in the overall management of the process, and is acknowledged as a main counterpart to build national organic policies.



ABD PGS member during an inspection by the government

The National Council of PGS –Huanuco, Peru, is the oldest of all these experiences in the region and is a pioneer in their permanent struggle to be recognized by the national authority. It is a public-private partnership at the local level, supported by the municipality although the organic regulation in Peru did not accept PGS as a valid guarantee system.

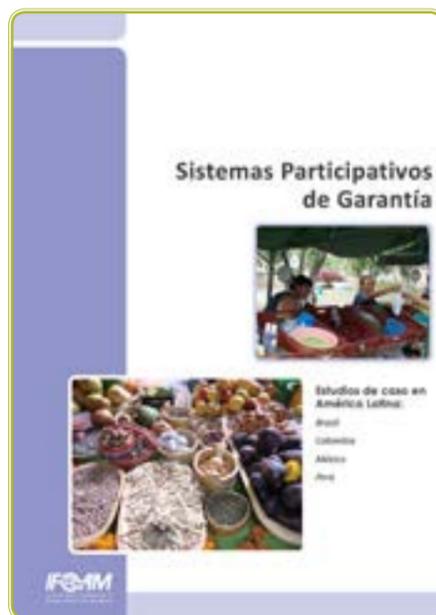
We expect with this publication to bring more light on PGS processes around the world and sensitize decision-makers to be more open and flexible for



Members of the PGS initiative in Colombia, Valle del Cauca, during a visit

alternative systems, aiming at stronger organic local markets, food security and capacity building for organic smallholders organizations.

The publication is available online on the [IFOAM PGS Portal](http://ifoam.org), for free download. Hard copies can also be requested at the cost of shipping. Please get in touch with Patricia Flores (p.flores@ifoam.org) or the IFOAM PGS Team (pgs@ifoam.org).



The new IFOAM PGS case studies focusing on Latin America

Bolivia: a country with a National PGS Official in the government

By Jannet Villanueva, member of the IFOAM PGS Committee (with contributions from AOPEB)

Bolivia is a country blessed by nature: its flora and fauna are amongst the most diverse in the world and the various climates are suitable for all types of crops. The country has great prospects of becoming a “green country”. The legal framework for organic agriculture which is now in place is the result of a continuous involvement of civil society stakeholders and a strong government support to the development of the organic sector, which is not only focused on the exports market.

Since the early 1950's, producers' organizations emerged under different legal forms (as cooperatives, associations, CORACA's - Corporaciones Agropecuarias Campesinas or Rural Agricultural Corporations) and their main objective was to improve market access for their products. From 1989 on, coffee, quinoa, cocoa and nuts producers' organizations started to export organic and Fair Trade products, complying with international standards for this effect. In 1991 six organizations joined to form the Association of Organizations of Organic Producers of Bolivia (Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos de Bolivia- AOPEB), an organization that has been growing and becoming stronger over time through their activities to promote organic agriculture. Already in 1998, AOPEB signed agreements with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Sustainable Development, which were then renewed indefinitely in 2002.

The Technical Coordination Committee (Comisión de Coordinación Técnica - CCT) was created then, as the agency responsible for developing policies and rules to promote organic production, composed of public and private organizations, including AOPEB.

In 2005, the Decree 28558 was published aimed at promoting organic production nationally and implementing a national control system for organic production. Parallel to this process, from June to November 2005, CCT workshops took place for the development and validation of a national Policy for the Development of Organic Production in Bolivia. This policy was approved by a Ministerial Resolution 017/2006, in January 2006. In November 2006, the

Bolivian president Evo Morales announced approval of the law 3525 for regulation and promotion of organic agriculture and non-timber forest production in the country.

Within the framework of law 3525, the National Organic Production Council (Consejo Nacional de Producción Ecológica - CNAPE) was created and the National Service for Agricultural Health and Food Safety (Servicio Nacional de Sanidad Agropecuaria e Inocuidad Alimentaria - SENASAG) was designated as the competent authority for controlling organic production in the country. Later on, the Ministerial Resolution 280/2006 of the Ministry of Rural Development, Agriculture and Environment approved the law on the National Technical Standard on Organic Production. Then, in December 2006, the Administrative Resolution 217/2006 of SENASAG approved the law on the National System for Organic Production Control.

The last meeting of the Latin American PGS Forum (add reference) was held in La Paz in 2011. Bolivia, as the host, was very active through AOPEB, the leading advocate for civil society involvement in this process for the development of a legal framework. But government representatives were also present and actively participated in the meeting. In 2012 the government launched the National Technical Standard for Participatory Guarantee Systems¹ for

¹ Three videos produced by CNAPE documenting the 2011 Latin American PGS Forum and the event of the launch of the PGS Regulation in Bolivia are available online, in Spanish, and can be accessed through the IFOAM PGS Video Library: <http://bit.ly/YIQhRp>

national and local trade of organic agriculture and non-timber forest products. This also led to the appointment by the government of a PGS Official at national level, who is a public official assisted by a task force, in charge of and responsible for the implementation of PGS at the municipalities' level, in coordination with other stakeholders. In this regulation, the CNAPE proposes the implementation of Participatory PGS “as the alternative guarantee system suitable to the national context, constituting an economically viable, environmentally acceptable and culturally favored option, which guarantees the quality of organic products for consumption in local and national markets of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.”

The Bolivian experience is interesting because it is a national system with various types of PGS, at different levels: municipalities, organizations and communities. The system also foresees the use of a national seal or logo that identifies the product guaranteed through PGS. Other interesting characteristics are the promotion of PGS through organic markets and fairs, the involvement of the competent authority in the system, the fact that the municipalities involved in PGS include it on their municipal agenda and work in partnership with other stakeholders. The efforts carried out in collaboration by AOPEB and the government are laying the basis for achieving sustainability for organic agriculture and PGS in the medium term.

Continental news: What's new in...



...Africa

- **Benin:** The association AMAP-Bénin is promoting organic agriculture in West Africa and has been successfully running a box scheme/CSA since 2008. Around a hundred farmers are part of the initiative that serves more than 200 families, mostly Beninese, in Cotonou. PGS is being adopted by the NGO Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation to support the producers with organic guarantee. A comprehensive article on this initiative was recently published by the website Organic Market and is available [online](#). For more information, please contact Edgar Déguénon: deguenonedgard@yahoo.fr or Quentin Testa: quentesta@aol.com.
- **East Africa:** In the context of the OSEA II project implemented by IFOAM in cooperation with the national organic agriculture movements in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, a regional brochure was designed to explain PGS to potential consumers and other supporters. The brochure can be downloaded following this [link](#). PGS stakeholders from other regions of Africa (or the world!) are encouraged to adapt the brochure concept to their own situation. IFOAM can provide the original files (in SCRIBUS format) on request. Please contact the IFOAM PGS Team (pgs@ifoam.org) for more information..



...Asia

- **India:** The PGS Organic Council has just released a new issue of their Newsletter. This issue features news from PGS initiatives and organic agriculture activities in India, as well as updated figures on groups and organic farmers guaranteed through PGS that are part of the PGS Organic Council. The newsletter will soon be available for download on their website (<http://www.pgsorganic.in/>). For more information please contact Mathew John mathew@keystone-foundation.org.
- **Thailand: Save the date! International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets Towards Food Security and Food Sovereignty taking place from 7 to 11 May 2013:** The „International Forum on Innovating Alternative Markets Towards Food Security and Food Sovereignty“ will take place in Bangkok, Thailand from 7 to 11 May. The focus of this forum will be on the growing impact of community supported agriculture (CSA) and PGS on the emergence of a new economy. This will be a five-day event, organized by Towards Organic Asia (TOA), the Green Market Network, Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise, Organic Agriculture Innovation Network and School for Wellbeing Studies and Research. The event is supported by URGENCI, the global network of CSA initiatives and by IFOAM, together with partner organizations. Also, the event will take place in association with the 6th annual Green Fair & Community Green Fair organized by Suan Nguen Mee Ma social enterprise and the annual Organic and Natural Expo 2013 and Organic Symposium of the Ministry of Commerce, Thailand. The extensive program foresees a series of workshops and panel discussions, with the participation of experts from the organic agriculture and CSA movements. The 2013 meeting of the IFOAM PGS Committee will also take place during the event, so all members will be present and ready to use this opportunity to strengthen links with supporters of alternative markets like the CSA movement. For more information, please contact Hans van Willenswaard hans@gnh-movement.org or Rita Phetphudphong rita.innovationforum@gmail.com
- **Vietnam:** At the end of 2012, PGS Vietnam held an annual general meeting with the support of IFOAM in the framework of the project “Gaining government support for PGS”, funded by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). The event received media coverage by VTV1-Vietnam National Television and Hanoi People Magazine. A video about PGS Vietnam, including interviews and scenes from the event is now available online, in Vietnamese with subtitles in English. To access it, please follow this [link](#). PGS Vietnam has also published their first quarterly newsletter for 2013, with updates on their activities. [Click here](#) to access and download it. If you would like to receive the newsletter, please contact Nhung Từ Tuyệt: nhungadda@gmail.com.

Imprint

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