

The Global PGS Newsletter

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The Global PGS Newsletter now has its blog

Following suggestion of some readers to enable interactive communication within the readership of this newsletter, IFOAM added a blog function on the page:

http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/18479.php

This page, in addition to offering all archive issues of The Global PGS Newsletter, will now also act as a kind of "Letters to the Editor" section where readers can freely post their comments, opinions, suggestions or questions for public visibility. Check out the first posting by Geoff Simmons and get the discussion going.

Joelle Katto-Andrighetto, pgs@ifoam.org

Call for PGS videos

There are now a number of publications, manuals and articles available in various languages documenting PGS experiences around the world. What does not exist yet is a nice video explaining the PGS concept and showcasing PGS initiatives. IFOAM may succeed to compile such video one day and make it available to the broad public, but in the meantime, let us collect all video files available on PGS. As an example, Eva Torremocha and her colleagues in Andalusia produced a 5 minutes video documenting their introductory workshop on PGS, with the participation of Laércio Meirelles from Ecovida, Brazil. The video is available on Youtube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/andaluciaagroecologi#p/a/u/0/Xq3WUX8RRJY>

IFOAM is now calling for all videos available on the PGS topic, no matter their length, language, and format. If you have produced such video, please send an email to pgs@ifoam.org.

The PGS Manual of Nature & Progrès now also available in Spanish



Nature & Progrès is the oldest PGS still operating today. It was created in France in 1972 and one even a founding member of IFOAM. Today, it still functions as a PGS with about 500 certified operators in France, despite the unfavorable regulatory environment. Looking at the experience and processes of Nature & Progrès can be of great value to emerging or even consolidated PGS initiatives around the world. The Nature & Progrès PGS manual was already available in French on the IFOAM PGS website. It is now also available in Spanish. Go to http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/All-PGS-Publ.html to download either version for free.



PGS in the Agroecology and Public Policy Seminar in Spain

By Eva Torremocha



Agroecology is a discipline that is inserted into the new paradigm of systemic sciences and it is starting to be consolidated at both academic and social levels. Since its beginning, Agroecology has combined its theoretical construction with hands-on implementation, defining concepts from peasants and farmers experiences and movements together with consumers in various countries, especially from Latin America. To go deep in this consolidation phase, Agroecology should embrace its foundations and strengthen its relationship with the agroecological experiences embedded in social activism, civil society in general, and academia as well as the relationships resulting from the three of them.

The seminar on Agroecology and Public Policy organized in Granada (Spain) by the Faculty of Science and SEAE (Spanish Society of Organic Agriculture), 16 and March 17, 2010, had as objective to launch the debate on the appropriateness of including agroecological strategies in public policy. This was a closed seminar that involved experts who analyzed different working areas of Agroecology with perspectives ranging from social and peasant movements to agroecological alternatives from the agribusiness sector and proposals to GMOs and agrofuels, including political ecology and public policy based on the experiences of Brazil and Andalusia.

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), having been defined and built by and for farmers organizations and peasants in collaboration with consumers, and been based on participation, shared principles and networking, represent a practical application of Agroecology within the context of certification of organic production, in this particular case.

During the seminar, the objectives that initiated the PGS were recalled:

- To reduce the bureaucracy and costs of third-party certification systems, both of them excessive for small producers.
- To search for alternatives to the 3rd party certification systems, as a mean of political positioning against the economic prevailing system
- To foster empowerment / governance of organizations of producers and consumers.

Also presented were the following results obtained through the application of PGS in different areas:

- Articulation of the social network around PGS
- Strengthening of agroecological practices in production and consumption
- Transition to more sustainable forms of production and consumption
- And at the political level, economic re-structuring as a solid proposal to resolve the challenges of the current global crisis context we're leaving.

Finally, the session analyzed the current challenges faced by PGSs, summarized as follows:

- Its regulation with a view of incorporating their produce into the certified organic markets. This implies its incorporation into public policies.
- Building partnerships with other certification labels (e.g. fair trade, local produce, etc.) whose approaches are alternatives to mitigate climate change (among them also included the PGS).

Accordingly, the PGS are originated from and are systems rooted in the principles of Agroecology. They are systems created as an alternative to a certification model that failed to answer to their social and economic demands. The regulation of organic production and the imposition of third-party certification as the unique way to guarantee the organic quality, have left

the PGS in a delicate situation as a link between the organic sector “officially” regulated and the unregulated organic sector.



If we deepen this analysis, this situation of “intermediation” reflects the global situation of the agroecological sector. Thus, by including the PGS in a seminar that calls for adequate public policies in favor of the agroecological sector is nothing more than a concrete way to move forwards on the challenges that Agroecology faces. On one hand, this attempts to incorporate strategies, tools and organization schemes rooted in Agroecology to the current economic system; this, in order to facilitate its incorporation into public policies currently governed by approaches not always receptive to the Agroecological concepts. On the other hand, to define and build tools that will allow the coexistence between these two models.

In conclusion, the Participatory Guarantee Systems follow a parallel path to, and included in - Agroecology. As determined at the seminar, Agroecology should work and focus on providing innovative solutions to the current global crisis in the broad sense of nutrition and health. The PGS are exploring a specific way of how to concretize this from the organic certification perspective.

Applying a systemic approach, this adventure to be initiated towards the construction of agroecological solutions for this transition period, should be supported by all groups and individuals wishing to build, step by step, options for the agricultural future, as IFOAM does.

Japanese research team concludes PGS Organic Bazaars in India have positive impact on farmers' livelihoods and help expand organic agriculture

By Joy Daniel



The Organic Bazaar demonstrates PGS as a tool that helps small farmers link with fair trade systems and local markets for organic produce. IIRD and small farmers initiated the Organic Bazaar in Aurangabad district of central India. This Organic Bazaar was independently evaluated last year by a Japanese team,

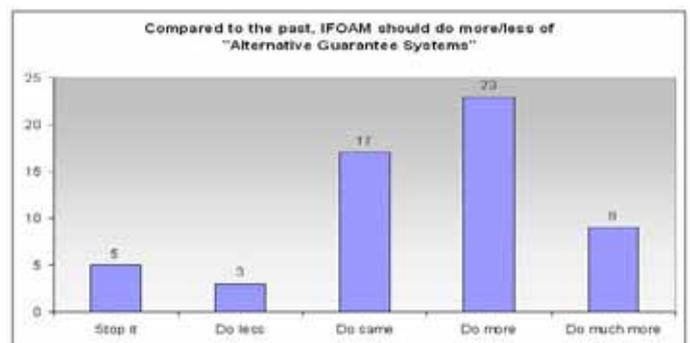
comprising of two senior professors and a senior researcher, from Kobe University. The evaluation was through sample surveys, interviews, and observations conducted for over a period of 3 months. The key findings of this detailed assessment are that:

- About 40% of the farmers own less than 2.5 acres of dry land. There are very few semi-medium or larger farmers registered in the PGS, which is consistent with the purpose of IIRD to focus on small farmers.
- The premium price for organic products for the farmers participating in the Bazaar is about 100% (average of all products).
- For consumers of the organic bazaar, the price premium is not more than 10% (controlled by IIRD).
- Participation in the organic bazaar had an effect on farmers' cropping patterns and did encourage farmers to increase their production of organic vegetables.

These findings have encouraged IIRD's efforts to bring access to organic markets for the small and marginal farmers. The full report is available on request by writing to jdaniel@iird.org.in or to pgs@ifoam.org.

Results of the IFOAM self-evaluation of its PGS activities

In 2009, IFOAM undertook an unprecedented effort to evaluate the outcome and impact of its own activities in various work areas mostly funded through its I-GO and I-GO II Programs which run on total from January 2001 to June 2009 thanks to funding from Hivos, Netherlands. One of the 4 focus areas of the evaluation was IFOAM's work to support and promote PGS. To evaluate this activity, IFOAM used data from web sources and implemented a targeted survey to selected key persons on all continents. IFOAM received 47 filled questionnaires from the PGS survey. Questionnaires were tailor-made to the type of respondent. These respondents included representatives of competent authorities (government personnel in charge of organic regulations) in 9 countries, mostly in Latin America but also in India and the Pacific, 8 representatives of certifier from all parts of the world, 17 representatives from National Organic Agriculture Movements, most of whom from Africa, and the rest from Europe and Asia. Other respondents were consultants or scholars and PGS practitioners.



Here are some of the results of this evaluation:

- The materials developed by IFOAM on PGS are widely known among the PGS community and well appreciated by their users. Most groups who have recently started a PGS initiative say that they have been inspired by the IFOAM PGS materials. However there seems to be a very big demand for information materials in Spanish, which IFOAM had only partly fulfilled. Another fact is that downloads of priced PGS materials on the IFOAM website

have not been impressive and it appears that many people have obtained these materials through other channels.

- PGS is mostly positively perceived. Literature and opinions made public on PGS are overwhelmingly positive. The attitude of organic competent authorities in Latin America is (except for very few exceptions) positive to very positive and showing a good level of understanding. The two following survey quotes are well representative of this attitude “PGS initiatives should be further supported and guided, but without creating dependency” and “PGS should be taken as a tool for community development and for encouraging small farmers to join the organic movement”.
- Perhaps one of the most surprising results of the survey was the attitude of third party certifiers. Almost all certifiers surveyed had a reasonable understanding of PGS and a positive attitude towards them. Some certifier representatives were even promoters of PGS, making statements such as “IFOAM should continue to facilitate their development and their systems, and promote their acceptance – also amongst certifiers”. One certifier declared he was even a consumer of PGS products. The director of one of the biggest organic certifiers worldwide commented: “Due to the fact that the organic certification system has turned into a nightmare of bureaucracy there is a need to look for alternatives that brings back to original intention of self-responsibility and development. PGS is an interesting model...”. Another certifier representative declared that she did not promote PGS but had “a positive respect for PGS as tool for development of local groups”. One certifier expressed the most skeptical opinion, saying he did think that PGS products could be marketed as organic, “provided that the national regulations are complied with in full”, but then added “But let’s be clear: PGS is no free ticket to Disneyland.” However, although certifier representatives showed open attitudes towards PGS initiatives, several tend to think

Perhaps one of the most surprising results of the survey was the attitude of third party certifiers.

that it is not IFOAM’s role to promote PGS.

- Almost all national organic movements in Africa have invested in learning about PGS and even promote pilot projects in many cases. National organic associations in Europe are much less aware of what PGS is, despite their IFOAM membership.
- IFOAM has had a major role in spreading knowledge and positive attitude towards PGS, in fact IFOAM has played by far THE major role outside of Latin America, including among competent authorities. This is a very recent and fast development, as most of the competent authority representatives acknowledged that they knew almost nothing of PGS 5 years ago. Representatives from certifiers and national organic movements who knew about PGS also mostly linked this knowledge to IFOAM and many respondents mention that IFOAM has very much influenced the way they think about PGS today.

Following this evaluation, IFOAM made a special offer to have all PGS-related publications for free download on the IFOAM website, increased drastically the information available in Spanish on the online PGS database and organized further translations of materials in Spanish. Also in March this year, the IFOAM EU group started educating its board members on the topic of PGS (with an introductory presentation at their board meeting in Malta), so hopefully awareness in Europe will improve.

Also of interest are the results of the general strategic consultation which was undertaken early 2010 among IFOAM members. 57 respondents commented on what they thought should be IFOAM priorities. The following graph shows their answers regarding the issue of PGS work. Worth noticing is that all persons (except one) who answered “stop it” or “do less” were certification body representatives, but also 2 certification body representatives (EU based with strong farmers base) answered “do more”. This tends to support the result of the evaluation survey which showed that certifiers, although they may be positive towards PGS initiatives, do not think that it is a priority area of work for IFOAM.

Continental news: WHAT'S NEW IN...



...ASIA AND OCEANIA

- **India:** the PGS Organic India Council published the third issue of its newsletter. Volume 2, issue 1, April 2010 of Organic News is available on the website of the PGS Organic India Council at <http://www.pgsorganic.in/>. As of March 2010, the PGS system in India counts 386 groups and 4547 members. It is 159 additional farmer groups as compared to July 2009!
- **Vietnam:** the PGS network in Vietnam has launched a monthly internal newsletter. The first issue (April 2010) gives news about: the certification approval of the first two local groups in late 2009 and early 2010, the non-approval of other groups (that happens as well!), the structure of the PGS network in Vietnam, the set-up of an annual fee for members and the possible involvement of companies. The Vietnam PGS network now also has its own website: <https://sites.google.com/site/pgsvietnam/>. The Vietnam PGS has also just been added to the IFOAM global PGS database: http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs_projects/pgs_projects/index.php



...EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

- **Belgium:** on the 26th of May, a workshop entitled “Economic, environmental and food quality assessment of low-input production schemes – Consumer standards and demands” focused on low-input livestock farming, will be held in Brussels. Jordy Van Den Akker, former IFOAM PGS Task Force will make a presentation on PGS at this event, as requested by the organizers.
- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown is offering educational workshops on natural beekeeping methods in North Carolina and Virginia. These workshops complement the apiary certification program CNG launched in January. More information and registration online at www.naturallygrown.org/natural-beekeeping-workshops. A sample workshop flyer can be downloaded here: www.naturallygrown.org/documents/CbgFlyerFullPg.pdf. CNG recently added a Featured Farm module to their home page www.naturallygrown.org. A new featured farm is automatically added every three days, replacing the oldest. (There are five featured at a time). All CNG farms in good standing are eligible to be selected as soon as they have added descriptive text to their online CNG profile and uploaded at least one photo or image.

Imprint

The Global PGS Newsletter is published monthly. All PGS-related articles are welcome. Please send your articles for submission in English, French or Spanish to pgs@ifoam.org. Deadline for submission of articles is the 30th of each month for the following month's issue.

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The Global PGS Newsletter Blog

Letters to the Editor, comments, suggestions and questions can be posted directly on the special blog of The Global PGS Newsletter at:

http://www.ifoam.org/about_ifoam/standards/pgs/18479.html

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