

## Assurance Code the first international norm to recognize PGS

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The ISEAL Alliance is an international non-profit organisation that codifies best practice for the design and implementation of social and environmental standards systems. Codes set by ISEAL are norms which can apply to a broad range of schemes such as organic, FSC, MSC, Rainforest Alliance, Fair Trade, etc. ISEAL has been working since January 2011 on a draft Assurance Code, which has just been published for consultation under the name “Code of Good Practice for Assuring Compliance with

Social and Environmental Standards”. According to ISEAL, “*The goal of the ISEAL Assurance Code is to improve the effectiveness of certification and other assurance tools in contributing to positive social and environmental impacts while delivering the level of assurance desired by the users of assurance systems.*” The draft is open for public comments until 31 December 2011.

The draft Assurance Code is of major significance for the PGS community. It is the first international norm to deliberately provide flexibility and a set of alternative requirements in order to accommodate a range of guarantee systems, including PGS. The Assurance Code is, in that sense, a very original norm that explicitly seeks to encourage innovation in guarantee systems, “recognising that there is often a number of approaches that achieve the same objectives”. As a member of the Assurance Code committee, I have been providing inputs into the code, with a particular attention to PGS needs. It is very satisfactory to already see a number of paragraphs in the draft that are clearly inspired by the PGS experiences, for example:

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PGS stakeholders should realize the potential of this code to broaden the understanding of guarantee system experts and authorities with regard to what assurance systems are credible – not only in the organic sector, but beyond.

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“It is possible to conceive of a scheme that has extra provisions in transparency (eg: public summaries of evaluations, public self-declarations, and others)

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that would allow stakeholders to fulfil the role of oversight. Similarly, a scheme may be lacking independence in one area (eg: peer review system) but gain in another area of impartiality (eg: enterprises voluntarily participate in evaluation and decision so there is no financial relationship between the auditor and the enterprise, and thus less potential conflict of interest).” (4.1.1).

“Optional criterion: Scheme owners shall involve stakeholders in the assessment process; as participants in the evaluation and review, or as observers.” (5.2.2)

“Option 1: Standards schemes that use employees (or paid contractors) in the assurance process shall comply with the requirements of section 5.4 for those employees or contractors.

Option 2: Standards schemes that use volunteers in the assurance process shall at a minimum:

Ensure volunteers have knowledge of the scope of the assessment

Ensure volunteers receive training regarding their particular duties in the assurance process” (5.4.1)

Nevertheless, the current draft still needs improvements before it fully reflects how a PGS may operate, and it is very important that ISEAL be given direct input from the PGS community during this consultation period. The issue of confidentiality in section 5.2.4 of the code is an example of a section at which you should take a critical look. The description of model D in section 7.1.4 is another example of where improvements are needed (including direct mention of the concept of PGS!).

PGS stakeholders should realize the potential of this code to broaden the understanding of guarantee system experts and authorities with regards to what assurance systems are credible – not only in the organic sector, but beyond. I strongly encourage you to review the draft code and send comments: you can direct them to me (before the 15th of December to [j.katto@ifoam.org](mailto:j.katto@ifoam.org)) for coordination and preparation of the IFOAM comment, or directly to ISEAL. Further information on the Assurance Code and how to comment is available at <http://www.isealalliance.org/assurance-code>.

## PGS discussions during the sixth ELAO, Colombia



Patricia Flores – IFOAM-GALCI ([p.flores@ifoam.org](mailto:p.flores@ifoam.org)) & Pedro Guzmán – Familia de la Tierra, Colombia ([pguzper@gmail.com](mailto:pguzper@gmail.com))

The sixth Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Ecological Agriculture (ELAO): Benefits and Perspectives of the Ecological Family Agriculture, took place from 13 to 17 October 2011 in Cali, Colombia.

As one of the main activities of the five-day conference, thirteen themed sessions were held. One of these sessions was entitled “Public Policies and Assurance Systems”, in which organizations and delegates from Bolivia, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador and Paraguay presented their work. The speakers shared experiences in the implementation and development of PGS and also discussed aspects related to public

policy development and sub-regional integration in the Andean Community Project, as well as to how organic family farming is addressed in member countries.

Presentations addressed needs, challenges and progress in developing local and national PGS initiatives. The question of whether national governments can or should support PGS implementation, presented by the Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología (CEA) and Alter Vida from Paraguay was discussed in the plenary session. Contributions also covered the activities of the food bank in Colombia and the work that the Colombian Agricultural Institute (Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario - ICA) has been carrying out on regulation and control of inputs for organic production. The suggestion that the Andean Community (CAN) consider organic family farming as an integration mechanism was received very positively. The Sub Regional Program to foster agroecological family farming which includes PGS development and recognition – the main output of the project - is waiting for official approval with a CAN decision as the four Ministries of Agriculture of the Andean

countries (Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia) have already approved the program. In the meantime, interesting initiatives relating to this program are being carried out in the different participant countries at the national level.

The discussion showed that it is necessary for farmers and consumers to understand the importance of growing clean and healthy food through organic and agroecological production practices. But cultivation and harvesting are only one aspect of this: farmers must also be linked through processes that create market access, either at fairs or local markets, in which participatory guarantee systems would allow for trust-building among consumers and producers. The role of communities or organizations facilitating such processes, however, must go beyond building a productive/commercial plan certified by a PGS. There must also be an educational process and constant feedback between producers and consumers to raise awareness about the principles of organic agriculture and the reality faced by producers in each country and in Latin America, including advocacy proposals that may or may not be supported by government bodies.

Even though progress has been achieved in every country, organizations still have significant challenges ahead, such as building sustainable financial systems, developing strategies for promotion, communication and advertisement strategies, fine-tuning functioning PGS initiatives, PGS recognition in national legal frameworks, etc. This last aspect has become even more relevant since the discussion on the definition of a regional technical regulation for organic agriculture in the Andean Community began. Such challenges were presented not in a discouraging manner, but as grounds from which to move forward and make organic farming more inclusive.

The papers presented at the session “Public Policy and Assurance Systems” were:

1. “Adding up to feed the future”, Asociación Bancos de Alimentos de Colombia ABACO, Colombia,
2. “Looking back at the 8 years of Asociación ECO FERIA” Fundación AGRECOL ANDES, Bolivia
3. “Participatory Guarantee Systems in the network of Agroecological Farmers Markets”, Red de Mercados Agroecológicos Campesinos del Valle del Cauca, Colombia
4. “Agro ecological Family Farming in the Andean Community”, ANPE Peru/ Grupo de America Latina y el Caribe de IFOAM- GALCI

5. “Progress in developing national PGS and proposed public policy agenda”, Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología, Ecuador
6. “Experience in public policy related to Organic Production and Agroecology”, AlterVida, Paraguay
7. “Regulations for the Registration and Control of bio Agricultural Use”, Instituto Colombiano Agropecuario (ICA), Ministerio de Agricultura, Colombia

## PGS Case Studies: printed copies now available for free!

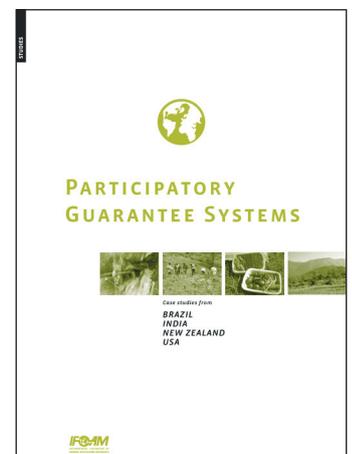
IFOAM has started offering printed copies of the publication “Participatory Guarantee Systems free of charge: Case studies from Brazil, India, New Zealand and USA” free of charge. Instead of paying the full price of 9 euros per publication, those interested in ordering will be charged only for

the shipping costs (which may vary depending on the delivery destination). This booklet presents four well-chosen examples of initiatives working with PGS in different parts of the world and with different backgrounds and contexts. Published in 2006, it is one of the outcomes of the workshop co-organized by Maela (the Latin American Organic Agriculture Movement), IFOAM and Centro Ecológico in Torres, Brazil, and serves as a source of ideas and inspiration to those who are, or are thinking of, treading a similar path.

We encourage PGS initiatives, as well as National Organic Agriculture Movements, consumer’s and producer’s associations, to order copies for distribution among their members, as a tool that will contribute to the permanent process of learning, which is one of the basic elements of PGS.

Printed copies are available in English and in French.

To place your order, please contact [pgs@ifoam.org](mailto:pgs@ifoam.org).



## IFOAM intern position opening

IFOAM is currently receiving applications for the position of PGS/OGS intern. The position will be open from January 25, 2012, and applicants should be willing to stay for a minimum of 6 months. The selected intern/volunteer will work from the IFOAM Head Office, based in Bonn, Germany, in the value chain department. Main areas of work will be on Participatory Guarantee Systems and the IFOAM Organic Guarantee System (see [www.ifoam.org/ogs](http://www.ifoam.org/ogs)). Prior exposure to organic standards and certification issues (through studies, personal interest or work experience) is desirable.

Interested applicants should send a CV and motivation letter to [t.cierpka@ifoam.org](mailto:t.cierpka@ifoam.org).

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



### ...Europe and North America

- **Italy:** A regional meeting took place on 3 November 2011 to discuss PGS in Tuscany. The local groups (Casentino, Mugello, Chianti, zona Fiorentina, zona Valdelsa) have been setting up and experiencing PGS for about one year and gathered to discuss the next steps for their project “Garanzia Partecipata”, share their vision for setting a strategy, and also to decide what kind of organizational form would be more suitable for their needs. For further information on PGS developments in Tuscany, please contact: Marzio Carletti ([lerocche.marzio@tin.it](mailto:lerocche.marzio@tin.it))
- **USA:** Certified Naturally Grown was one of four options featured on a panel called “Farm Certification Systems: Weighing Your Options” which took place on 12 November during the annual conference of the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association in Durham, North Carolina. The panel included Jim Riddle for the National Organic Program, Brian Snyder for the Food Alliance, and a geographic label Piedmont Grown. Alice Varon presented on Certified Naturally Grown and how PGS are an important complement to third-party systems.



### ...Latin America

- **Peru:** The meeting “The Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) as a tool for certification, market access and social inclusion for small organic farmers” took place this week in Lima, on November 14. The aim of the event was to provide a space for the exchange of experiences between different PGS stakeholders and to disseminate PGS, as systems that build relationships and solidarity between producers and consumers. For information, please contact IDMA: Programa de Lima – Lurín ([lima-lurin@idma-peru.org](mailto:lima-lurin@idma-peru.org)).
- **Chile:** Santiago has a new ecological farmer’s market: Ecoferia. Organic and biodynamic food is sold directly from and by the producers, which reduces the final prices for the consumers, according to the organizers. This space is also a meeting place where events such as educational workshops and live music performances are held. The Ecoferia started in November 2009, with 10 stands. Today there are 35, most of which are from Santiago’s surrounding. This initiative has started to develop a PGS for the organic producers involved, called ECOPAR (from Ecoferia Certificación Orgánica Participativa). Their current challenge, the organizers say, is to further develop their PGS. For more information (in Spanish) please visit [www.ecoferia.cl](http://www.ecoferia.cl) or contact: [contacto@ecoferia.cl](mailto:contacto@ecoferia.cl).

## 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](mailto:pgs@ifoam.org). Deadline for submission of articles is the 30<sup>th</sup> of each month for the following month's issue.

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