

## Let's talk about PGS: introducing our new brochure

By Flavia Castro, PGS Coordinator at IFOAM - Organics International



Six years ago, the first issue of the Global PGS Newsletter was launched. We started with only a few hundred subscribers for our monthly newsletter. Through the years, we have received contributions from hundreds of authors, from all over the world. We continuously receive requests from subscribers, who go on to join the over 4000 contacts currently receiving the bi-monthly updates on PGS published by IFOAM - Organics International.

Collecting and disseminating information is only one part of our strategy to contribute to the development of PGS. From the first international workshop in Torres, in 2004, to the set up of the PGS Task Force, and the adoption of the official PGS definition in 2008, we have been working on designing guidelines and communication materials to support researchers, practitioners and farmers in their efforts to identify more locally appropriate tools to promote organic agriculture and to ensure the organic quality of their produce.

With this issue, we would like to introduce to our readers the new PGS Brochure of IFOAM - Organics International. It has been designed with the support of the PGS Committee and our Communications Department. This brochure is intended as a tool to introduce to a wider audience the concept of PGS, the key elements and features, as well as the main benefits. Translations into various languages will be available soon and the English version of the brochure is currently available for download from our website, here: [http://www.ifoam.bio/sites/default/files/pgs\\_brochure\\_web.pdf](http://www.ifoam.bio/sites/default/files/pgs_brochure_web.pdf).



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# PGS: The Alternative to Third Party Certification In Nepal

By Raj Kumar Banjara, Researcher of Organic Agriculture and PhD aspirant from Mewar University, Rajasthan, India. [info@himalayanArabica.com](mailto:info@himalayanArabica.com)



With its ancient culture and the Himalayas as a backdrop, Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia neighboring China and India. About three quarters of the land is covered by mountains and it is home to Mount Everest - the world's highest mountain. Agriculture is the key economic activity and a source of livelihood for the majority of the population. Out of 28.15 million people, 67% work in the agriculture sector, accounting for 38% of the GDP. Historically, Nepalese farmers have applied agricultural practices very close to what is now called organic farming. Their subsistence production was enough and there was no question of food security.

But this is changing: to meet the demands of the growing population in terms of food and income from agro-products, the government started promoting, directly and indirectly, the intense use of agro-chemicals, focusing on single crop and high yielding varieties. On the other hand, increasing market demand for organic produce, growing awareness of the risks of toxic agro-chemicals, deteriorating ecosystems and natural resources, create the need to move towards organic and more sustainable production systems.

A review of agriculture and related policies shows that organic agriculture has never been a priority in Nepal. Organic agriculture was first mentioned in the "10th Five Years Plan for 2002-2007" (FY 2059/060-2063/064). The National Agriculture Policy (2061) states that organic produce is for the foreign export market. Subsidies were 'mentioned' for export commodities such as coffee, tea, black cardamom etc. A sustainable development plan for the domestic organic market does not exist. The current 'Fertilizer Policy' (Agriculture Policy Research and Analysis Department, Govt of Nepal, 2015), indirectly promotes the concept of improving agricultural productivity through increased use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and high yielding varieties. As a result there have been frequent reports of residues of toxic chemicals in vegetables.

Organic agriculture is still in its primary stage in Nepal. National data is not being recorded. Various independent researchers, national and international development partners have their own findings. According to "The World of Organic Agriculture" (FiBL – IFOAM, 2015) 9361 ha of land are covered by organic farming in Nepal, which accounts for 0.2% of the total agricultural land. An independent report assumes that approximately 26% of the cultivated land is covered by organic agriculture.

Third party certification is used for export trade, by farmers' groups implementing Internal Control Systems (ICS). The inherent expense and paperwork required in a multi-level system discourages most small organic producers from being certified at all. This limits domestic trade of organic products. An easily accessible, understandable and affordable method of certification for the domestic market is not available.

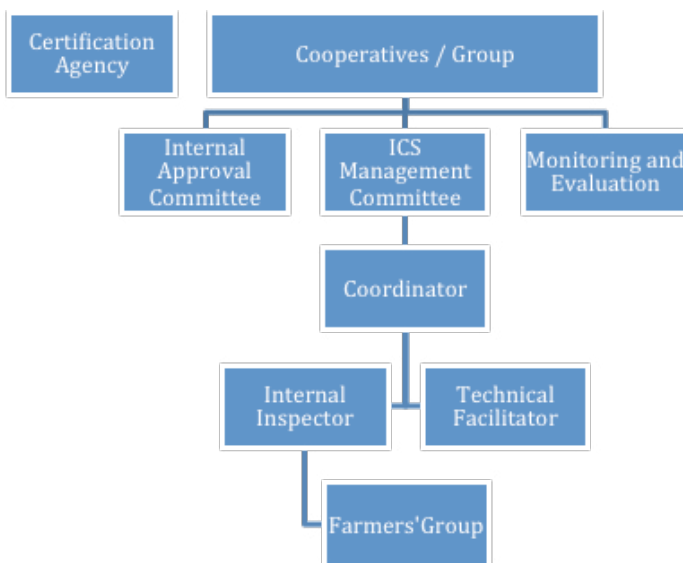


Figure 1: Organizational Structure of Organic Certifying Agency in Nepal

A recent article published by The International Journal of Humanities & Social Studies included findings of research done with the objective of identifying alternatives to third-party certification for Nepal. The study found that the majority of organic producers in Nepal were satisfied with their business, but were facing various problems while going through the certification system. A total of 35 organic farmers participated in the research, which included specific questions about the process of certification. While 8.6% said that it was easy, 54.3% said

certification was difficult and 37.1% had no idea. The field observation proved that farmers found it very difficult to certify their organic produce. Costs were high and many farmers did not understand the process of certification.

Based on the findings, it was recommended that Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) should be implemented in the country. Since PGS are locally focused quality assurance systems, shaped by the users' group and consumers, the certification process can be adopted in accordance to local culture, while keeping the consistency of the core principles of organic agriculture. Each agricultural cluster (each village) or at least each District Agriculture Office in Nepal should have one dedicated

technical resource person, with appropriate numbers of facilitators who can guide and be easily accessible for farmers.

Third party certification is not accessible, understandable and affordable to most smallholder farmers in Nepal. The study found that PGS is an appropriate alternative for organic certification for the domestic market. The study also recommended formulating a PGS Council (e.g. under the Ministry of Agriculture or as a separate entity) in Nepal. It is necessary to develop a sustainability model for organic farming, which is easy to understand, economic and practical for all the smallholder farmers in Nepal.

## PGS for Indigenous organic honey: from the heart of the Amazon Forest

*By Romeu Matos Leite (Coordinator of the Brazilian Forum for PGS) and Matheus Volkmann Biekarck (President of BrasilBio)*

The Indigenous Park of Xingu (PIX) is located in the northeastern part of the State of Mato Grosso, in the southern part of the Brazilian Amazon. It was created in 1961 to protect the indigenous populations in the region, and is one of the largest reserves of its kind. There are 16 ethnic groups, with linguistic diversity, but characterized by a high degree of similarity in their ways of life and worldview. Beekeeping was introduced there in 1988 through the Brazilian agency for indigenous peoples (FUNAI). At that time, access to the villages was difficult, only possible by boat or plane. The main concerns of the indigenous communities were related to health issues, and organic honey was produced more for their own consumption, than to generate resources to meet collective demands.

The Xingu Indigenous Land Association (ATIX) was founded in 1994 by indigenous leaders who wanted to have their own organization to legally represent the interests of communities from PIX. ATIX has been working since its foundation in the areas of transportation, health, education, surveillance of the park's boundaries, but also seeking to generate economic alternatives for the communities through sales of handicrafts, organic honey and through the forest seed network.

In 2003, ATIX received a permit from the Federal Inspection Service to process organic honey, which made it possible to distribute the produce throughout the national territory. The Director of ATIX Yaiku Suyá reported that initially, the attempt to place organic honey in cities



*Beekeepers from ATIX and Romeu Matos Leite during the visit.*

nearby the park, where intensive agribusiness dominates, failed completely: the produce was not accepted in the region because "Indian honey" was associated with low quality. With the support of the **Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA)**, ATIX began to look for other markets and finally the Xingu Organic Honey hit the shelves of the largest chain of supermarkets in Brazil. Nowadays, the demand is much higher than production. This has shifted the perception of the local markets, which are now also interested in the product.

Brazil is a major exporter of agricultural commodities and the largest consumer of pesticides in the world. The power of agribusiness in this country has consistently pushed the boundaries of the agricultural frontier, to the

detriment of the forests, as well as the traditional and indigenous peoples that depend on them to live. Policies to protect the environment and indigenous peoples have been receiving less resources and government support. Therefore, mechanisms to independently guarantee the indigenous way of life and their cultural roots are essential. Now, seventy-two years after the national society first established contacts with indigenous peoples living in Xingu, PGS has emerged as a tool for their empowerment. The Brazilian legislation requires that “PGS should use methods to generate credibility which are adequate to social, cultural, political, territorial, institutional, organizational and economic realities.” PGS, as implemented in Brazil, is allowing indigenous people to access the national market while maintaining their autonomy.

Between May and June 2015, the organization that manages the ATIX PGS received an expedition audit for national accreditation. Over eight days, the audit group visited the villages that are involved in the PGS, located on the banks of the Xingu River and its tributaries. The PGS initiative in Xingu consists of 33 villages, organized into 6 groups. The number of young people interested in working with bees in these communities is impressive. To maintain the interest of future generations of beekeepers, soccer tournaments are organized between the groups, mixing PGS management and recreational activities. Their different languages, cultures and cosmologies, represent a major general challenge for the groups to work together. PGS is a path that indigenous peoples decided to collectively adopt, to strengthen their

autonomy and self-management, proving that they are able to adapt and bring to the markets products from the forests where they live.



*ATIX Representatives with the Brazilian Competent Authority in the ceremony of accreditation*

The Brazilian competent authority for organic agriculture (COAGRE) organized a ceremony to deliver the accreditation certificate to ATIX, on 3 September 2015. The collective social control process in PGS is similar to indigenous traditions, which put community issues at the center of social organization. Therefore, PGS for conformity assessment of organic standards have been easily assimilated and the level of participation is high. The success of PGS Xingu is an example to be followed by other indigenous communities in the country, and demonstrates that this system, recognized by Brazilian organic regulation, can be adapted and implemented in different local realities.

## Organic Coffee Journeys in the Highlands

*This piece is an adaptation from the original article, which was posted on The Jet Newspaper on September 24, 2015*

A village in one of Fiji's biggest province, Nadroga, is taking steps to produce the country's first community owned organic coffee beans, to tap into international premium markets. The village in the highlands of Sigatoka recently established its PGS initiative, following training provided by the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) housed within the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). Participants are targeting the export market, such as New Zealand, Australia, New Caledonia and possibly the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

As part of the village's PGS setup, POETCom raised awareness of the organic principles of health, ecology, fairness, care and the maintenance of culture and traditions. These are the principles that underpin the

Pacific Organic Standards or the guide to organic system development for the Pacific. The community also received training on the mechanics of PGS, that includes mapping coffee growing areas and practical exercises on carrying out a peer review of each other's coffee growing areas.

POETCom Organic Systems Extension Officer, Stephen Hazelman said as villagers convert to organic principles they become active participants in the growth of green economies. Organic farming systems rely on techniques such as crop rotation, green manure, compost, and biological pest control methods. “PGS (...) actively engages the coffee community in carrying out peer reviews of harvesting processes to ensure organics principles are maintained,” he said.

Hazelman also said the certification of the villagers' coffee should be concluded by the end of 2015 ahead of the start of the 2016 coffee harvest season in February. "There are three phases of certification; the land where coffee grows to determine through testing that harmful foreign chemicals (...) have not been added; compliance of individual harvesters with organic principles and certification of Bula Coffee Company processing and packaging facilities," he said. "This will involve checking the company's equipment and processes to ensure compliance with standards protected by the Pacific Organic Standards and food safety standards."

On successfully completing the certification process, the community and the Bula Coffee Company will be allowed to use the Organic Pasifika mark, that guarantees the

organic integrity of a product that bears it. Fijian owned Bula Coffee Company as the village's sole coffee buyer is providing crucial market linkages, channeling income to the community that largely depends on root crops for their livelihoods. "Markets prefer organic coffee, indicative of the changing habits of coffee drinkers that are increasingly choosing products that are not harmful to the environment and promote fair labor principles," company director Luke Fryett said. "Bula Coffee is committed to ensuring sustainable livelihoods for grassroots communities in Fiji, through harvesting, processing and marketing of coffee that grows wild in remote places for many years. "We are not only about a great cup of coffee but also about giving communities a better shot at life."

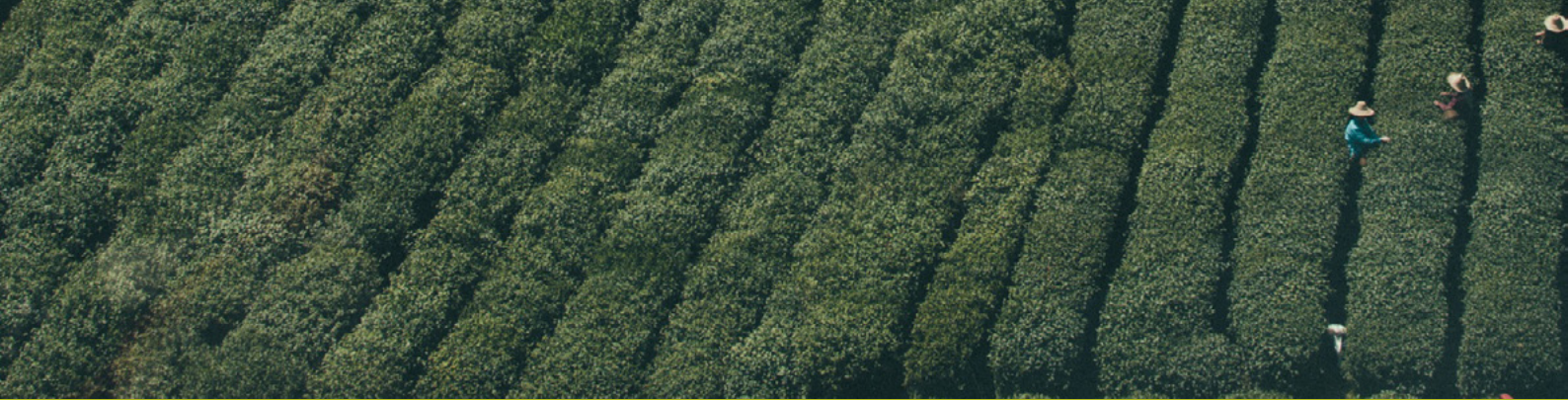
## Continental News:

### ASIA

**CAMBODIA, LAO PDR AND MYANMAR:** The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific recently started to implement the regional TCP project "Small- Scale Farmer Inclusion in Organic Agriculture Development through Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)" (TCP/RAS/3510). The aim is to assist Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar with their efforts to promote organic agriculture. IFOAM-Organics International is one of the partners supporting implementation. The expected outcome is that "Organic farmers will be better able to differentiate and sell their organic produce in the market". To achieve this, the project will conduct activities under four pillars, targeting governments, farmers, consumers and potential market channels. More specifically, activities to increase awareness among farmers of the opportunities of organic production under PGS will be carried out, including support to group formation and provision of training on PGS processes. National Inception Workshops to present and discuss work plans are planned to take place before the end of 2015, with precise dates for each country to be defined soon. For more information, please contact the Regional Project Coordinators: Mr. Vitoon Panyakul ([vitoon@greennet.or.th](mailto:vitoon@greennet.or.th)), and Mr. Michael Commons ([michael@greennet.or.th](mailto:michael@greennet.or.th)).

**CHINA:** Earlier this year CCTV World Insight reported on the organic market in China, showcasing the Beijing Farmer's Market, including a studio discussion about organic farming, PGS and food security with Dr. Shi Yan (Shared Harvest CSA), Chang Tianle (Beijing Farmer's Market) and Prof. Zhang Lanying (Southwest University). Please follow the link to watch it online. <http://bit.ly/1FXCMNR>

**PHILIPPINES:** Sibol ng Agham at Teknolohiya (SIBAT, Inc.) or Wellspring of Science and Technology is a non-governmental and non-profit organization engaged in the promotion and development of appropriate technology (AT) for village level sustainable development in Quezon, Philippines. SIBAT pushes for the PGS certification in the province and acts as the Secretariat of PGS Tarlac. It has given PGS trainings since 2014 and has come up with the operations manual and standards for vegetable production, certification process flow, roles and responsibilities of inspectors and quality control officers. SIBAT has organized the formal structure of their PGS organization and is preparing to process applications. By end of this year, PGS Tarlac will provide farmers in the province with organic certification.



**SOUTH EAST ASIA:** ALISEA (Agroecology Learning alliance in South East Asia) newsletter is a quarterly publication aiming at sharing and highlighting agroecology initiatives implemented across the Mekong region. It provides information about successful experiences, lessons learnt, recently released studies and reports but also upcoming events (conferences, workshops, trainings, etc.) related to agroecology, from grass root to policy level. If you are interested in receiving this newsletter, kindly contact directly ALISEA regional secretariat, Pierre Ferrand, [ferrand@gret.org](mailto:ferrand@gret.org).

## AFRICA

**SOUTH AFRICA:** The Ethical Co-op is a co-operative based in Cape Town, supplying ethical products online. According to their website “The Ethical Co-op exists largely to support the growth of our organic farming and manufacturing community, by supporting the growth of local farms and product manufacturers. Small organic farms and manufacturers form the very backbone of this. You will see these farmers at local markets, and they carry the real community spirit of organics.” They use standards that were developed in-house and that are specifically designed for the needs of smaller enterprises. Currently, they are starting to implement PGS and upgrading their current standard, replacing it with the “Ethical Co-op PGS Approved standard”. They rely on social media to communicate with stakeholders and invite consumers to join the farm visits. - See more at: <http://blog.ethical.org.za/?p=1461#sthash.MeGxpzlk.dpuf> or visit [www.facebook.com/www.ethical.org.za](http://www.facebook.com/www.ethical.org.za)

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

**URUGUAY:** The Participatory Certification program of the Network of Agroecology in Uruguay (Red de Agroecología de Uruguay), which is carried out through the legal entity Asociación Certificadora de la Agricultura Ecológica - ACAEU) has received authorization and recognition by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MGAP) in 2015.

ACAEU is therefore the first certification body to be registered in the National Registry of Certification Bodies of Uruguay, according to the Decree 557/008, from 2008. This authorization is granted after an audit process was conducted by the Food Safety and Food Quality Division of the Directorate General of Agricultural Services of the MGAP. In Uruguay, since 2008, a decree recognizes both PGS and third party certification as verification systems for organic agriculture (for the domestic market). For more information: Please contact: [certificacion@redagroecologia.uy](mailto:certificacion@redagroecologia.uy) or visit this link.

## OCEANIA

**FIJI:** The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Pacific Project Review Workshop took place in Nadi, Fiji, from 21 to 23 October 2015. This event was organized by the Pacific Island Farmers Organization Network (PIFON), which was founded in April 2015. IFAD has been implementing bilateral projects to support organic development in the Pacific in Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu, and will soon start in Tuvalu. POETCom has participated in the meeting and their representatives were proud to see that Vanuatu, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Fiji IFAD projects have requested PGS development in their project areas. For more information, see: [www.facebook.com/organicpasifika](http://www.facebook.com/organicpasifika)

## EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

**SPAIN:** On 27 and 28 November, 2015 a seminar will take place in Valencia to discuss the role of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) as a tool for boosting food sovereignty. The event is organized by the center for rural studies and international agriculture (Centro de Estudios Rurales y de Agricultura Internacional - CERAI), the Platform for Food Sovereignty of the Valencian Country and the magazine *Soberanía Alimentaria* (For more information please see this link or click on the illustration on the following page.



## Imprint

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