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PGSs and group certification stir up interest

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) and group certification generated great interest at the IFOAM World Congress held last month in Modena, Italy. Several of the sessions on certification were dedicated to one or another of these systems, and these sessions were filled with lively discussions and delegates who kept their hands raised even when the question time was over.

Various experiences with PGSs were presented at both the ISOFAR Scientific Conference (from Brazil, Mexico and China), and in the IFOAM Session (from India, Peru, Nepal and Spain). Examples were also given from the home countries of the current members of the IFOAM Task Force on PGS (New Zealand, Kenya, USA, France and, again, India and Brazil). The diversity of the PGS cases, which have developed according to the needs and circumstances of every group and country, produced a fruitful information exchange.

It became clear that, in general, governments from the 'North' do not accept PGSs for certifying organic production, but many Latin American, African and Asian countries do. In fact, several have recently developed, or are in the process of developing national regulations that accept the system, and others are considering doing so. Their aims are usually to support the local markets, while also regulating and promoting third party systems for exports and commodity markets. Products certified according to a PGS

can also be marketed as organic in countries that have no official organic regulation, such as New Zealand.

In this issue TOS reflects on the wide variety of experiences and approaches to the subject that were presented at Modena. This includes pieces written by several of the protagonists.

Joelle Katto from IFOAM gives the IFOAM position on the current worldwide dialogue on group certification and describes the discussions that took place at the World Congress and the decisions taken in the General Assembly in this regard. For his part, Ferko Bodnár, from Agro Eco reported on the results of the IFOAM pilot project 'Group Certification in Europe'.

Chris May, organic consultant from New Zealand and a member of the IFOAM Task Force on PGS, makes a comparison between PGSs and third party certification, including certification for smallholders with internal control systems (ICS), which is usually referred to as group certification.

What both systems have in common is the goal of providing groups of smallholders with the necessary tools to offer a credible guarantee for consumers seeking organic produce.

Future issues of TOS will continue the theme with other articles on the subject. ■

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