

Brazil's Need for a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) Assistive Body

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Organic Farming in Brazil

Organic farming is an alternative agricultural system that began in the 20th century and continues to be developed to this day. It is focussed on sustainability, improving fertility of the soil and biological diversity. The great majority of people practising organic farming do not make use of items such as synthetic pesticides and fertilisers, antibiotics, growth hormones and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Lundberg and Albaeco state that agriculture plays a fundamental role in developing countries¹. Not only for being a matter related to food security, but also because around 75 per cent of the world's poorest population is still living in the countryside and have farming as their key source of income.

Many of the farmers in Brazil are poor and depend heavily on their crops.

Organic Certification

Farmers adhering to organic farming and who want to sell their products as organic need to be certified. There are various types of certification, organisations and schemes that provide them. In Brazil, there are three popular certification methods.

Certification Method: Third Party

The first one is certification by a third-party. A technician from a certifying company is sent to the farm that desires to be certified and performs an on-site audit and physical inspection to verify if the farm is complying with the country's organic law. Based on findings, they decide whether or not to grant certification. This is a bureaucratic and

expensive way to achieve certification. It is usually done by high-scale farms that can support the costs.

Certification Method: Social Organisation of Control (SOC)

Another method of certification is through alternative options. The European Union recommends group certification for small food producers (Agricultural and Rural Convention, 2014). A type of group certification in Brazil is Social Organisation of Control (SOC). SOCs are local organisations with approximately eight to ten members. Farmers who are members can only sell directly to the consumer. The verification is done by people from the local community and the local government. A technician, an agronomist engineer and a consumer evaluate the place. It is a simpler method, with less bureaucracy. SOCs answer to the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, which makes sure that the evaluation corresponds to the current organic laws. The SOC is suggested to farmers as a first type of certification for a group to achieve before being

involved with Participatory Guarantee System. This way, the group of farmers can already be familiar with a participatory process.

Certification Method: Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)

The PGS is a locally focussed quality assurance system. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange².

The PGS is different from SOCs. PGS is a group with a minimum of five people (three farmers, one consumer and one technician). Two evaluations are carried out throughout the year; one is shorter and made in pairs and the other is longer and more in depth.

Differences Between SOC and PGS

There are a few differences between SOCs and PGSSs, but the main one is that the first is on a local level while the second is on a state level. SOCs allow farmers to be self-certified while PGSSs are certified by other PGSSs since they

have the benefit of cross-evaluation. This means that different groups from different states can evaluate and certify each other. For example, a PGS group from the state of Minas Gerais in Brazil can travel to Sao Paulo (almost 800kms away) to visit the farms of a Sao Paulo PGS group and perform the evaluation themselves without the use of a technician from a private company. This is a cheaper method to get organic certification and favours small farmers who cannot afford to pay a third-party.

Third-parties charge the technician's daily fee, transport, meals and, if needed, accommodation. Meanwhile, PGSs divide the costs among the group, no daily fee is charged, and farmers allow each other to stay at their places for free. An example of an average cost comparison between PGSs and third-party certification by Ana Zilda Coutinho, a farmer from the south of Sao Paulo, shows that a private company could charge around 1600 pounds, in contrast with the 60 pounds charged by PGS³. That means, on

average a third-party certification costs 26 times higher than a PGS certification.

This shows that PGSs are an accessible way for small farmers to get organically certified. They also assure the consumer of the credibility of the organic product through the connection of local and alternative marketing methods.

Furthermore, the biggest difference between PGS and third-party certifications is that through PGS you have the direct participation of farmers and consumers in the verification process. Considering PGSs greatly benefit small and local farms, the involvement between parties that work with the same kind of farming is a way to network and in consequence, through the sharing of organic methods, strengthen organic practices.

The first PGS in Brazil was formed in 2011, in Sao Paulo and Minas Gerais. Now there are other states that have formed PGSs to gain organic certification.

PGS in Mato Grosso, Xingu National Park Case

One of the states to gain organic certification is Mato Grosso. In the Xingu National Park, located in the northeast of Mato Grosso, there is a group of native Brazilian farmers who produce honey organically. They wanted to gain recognition for their organic product but the costs of a third-party certification (the only available at the time) made that unattainable.

When the PGS option started becoming popular and they were made aware of it, they formed a PGS in 2015 and have since been certified through it. One of the challenges in gaining certification was the fact that the people in this particular group are indigenous. They did not have access to education; they did not know how to start a PGS or how to conduct evaluations. As a result, the certification procedure was slow for them as they had to learn it from scratch while at the same time being in the process of acquiring the certification.

Therefore, it is clear to see that gaining certification, even through PGS, is not an easy task. There are a high number of small farmers who cannot access PGS because they lack knowledge, preparation and, especially, money.

Economic Disparity in Brazil

Brazilian income inequality is a serious issue in the country. In spite of the fact that it has the ninth largest economy in the world, it also has a low GDP per capita and low standards of living. According to the World Bank, Brazil's level of poverty is well above the usual for a middle-income country. Additionally, although the nation is highly urbanised, rural and urban areas are equal contributors to national poverty.

Through a public policy, like PGS, it is possible for the country to find a way to reduce economic disparity in its farming industry.

The need for public policies in Brazil is more necessary than ever, not only because of its economic issues but

especially since it was only less than two years ago that the nation was in a political dispute that led to an impeachment. With a scenario both economically and politically unstable, deciding to maintain public policies that educate and promote state community engagement would be a wise option.

Demand for an Assistive Body

Brazil is a prestigious and highly recognised name in agriculture. The PGS is a way to ensure small farmers can get credited for their organic products and compete with big farmers. According to Fonseca et al. (2008), PGSs are considered helpful for organising farmers, providing guarantees and improving the market. The growing demand for PGS certification demonstrates the need for tools to allow them access to it.

An organisation that can help small farmers in getting certified should be created. This organisation would be financed by the current government and focus solely on organic farming certification assistance. A centre of

information located in the capital of each state would provide farmers with:

- A one-week course on the types of organic certification
- A professional assigned to visit their farms and evaluate them in order to advise them on what type of certification is best for their business
- The tools and information necessary to assist them in getting the certification (e.g. directing them to contacts, helping with printing documents/forms, books to deepen knowledge on organic farming etc.)
- Group meetings to discuss the local farmers' organic farming systems and share methods and suggestions

This way, organic certification can be available to all those who produce and sell organic yield instead of only to wealthy farmers. And by making certification accessible, this organisation could potentially help in

diminishing the significant problem of economic disparity in Brazil.

References

1. Lundberg J. and Albaeco, F. (2009). Report organic farming in Brazil: Participatory Certification and Local Markets for Sustainable Agricultural Development. Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, pp.7-22.
2. IFOAM Organics International (2008). Accessed November 22, 2017 [www.ifoam.bio/pgs].
3. Zilda Coutinho, A. (2017). Organic Systems and Ecological Practices. OWC 2017.

Further reading

Agricultural and Rural Convention (2014). [Organic Participatory Guarantee Systems – a Brazilian model. Agricultural and Rural Convention](#). Accessed November 22, 2017

Fonseca, F. et al. (2008). [The institutionalization of Participatory Guarantee Systems \(PGS\) in Brazil: organic and fair-trade initiatives](#). Research Gate. Accessed November 18, 2017