

## **Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) – a policy paper**

There are more than one reason why the organic movement is gaining its importance in the modern era. The first and foremost reason could be the disillusionment created by the conventional agriculture – indiscriminate usage of chemicals causing air, water and soil pollution, health hazards, increase in pest and disease incidence, loss of crop diversity, unsustainable productivity and so on. On the other hand attraction towards organic foods started slowly by the health conscious urban community, is visible among other section of our society. In addition, more number of farmers are showing inclination towards organic farming owing to tremendous efforts being taken up by both government and non-government organizations. All these happenings during the recent years helped in opening new avenues for organic foods in the domestic as well as in international markets. General opinion among the consumers is that organic foods are nutritious, tasty, long shelf life and safe. In order to protect the demand and interests of the consumers the process of certification has become inevitable for organic consumer goods including organic foods, cosmetics, medicines, fabrics, etc. Already such initiatives are operating and there are different mechanisms, systems and agencies for certification of organic goods. PGS is one of these systems being initiated in different parts of the world, especially for small organic farmers who can produce organic foods for domestic market. In India PGS is being initiated by different organizations through OFAI and during 2011 PGS has seen launched by the Government of India, heralding its official recognition.

### **Main Features of PGS:**

There are a set of standards to be met as minimum criterion for getting eligibility to use PGS certification, decided by the OFAI on the lines of IFOAM standards.

- The group of farmers interested in organic farming takes a pledge to follow the guidelines suggested for PGS.
- A peer review committee consisting of five members from the local group will be responsible to monitor and inspect the fields of each farmer in the group. One of the members of the committee will be conveyor and after entering all the information in the proforma, the committee discusses each case for taking a decision on recommendation for eligibility.
- A facilitating centre (FC) e.g. like the Green Foundation is responsible to compile the information received from all such local groups in the region and to forward the same to PGSOIC for issuing PGS certificates to the eligible local groups.

- The farmers who are following organic farming continuously for a minimum period of three years on their total land holdings in accordance to the PGS-guidelines only are eligible to get PGS - certificates while others would be considered as 'under conversion' till they satisfy the criteria.

## **Strategy to bring more farmers under PGS:**

One of the objectives of PGS is to encourage organic movement by facilitating market linkages for organic produce. The target group is small and medium organic farmers as they are unable to afford the cost of third party certification system. However there are certain issues that need to be addressed while initiating action to bring more farmers under PGS.

- **Lack of awareness:** Through an awareness programmes on PGS it is possible to motivate farmers to switch over gradually to organic farming and also to build up confidence among those farmers who are already practicing organic farming. In order to realize the marketing advantages of organic products it is necessary to make them understand guidelines of PGS.
- It is possible that many farmers who take up organic farming may not show much interest in PGS, even after creating awareness, due to following reasons-
  1. The farmers who follow organic farming only for field crops like paddy, ragi or vegetables are hesitant to put cash crops like sugarcane, mulberry, banana, etc under organic. Usually a small portion of the land say 1/4<sup>th</sup> area is spared for field crops while the major portion (3/4<sup>th</sup>) will be under cash crops.  
Such farmers need to be educated to take up even cash crops in organic conditions in order to get the expected income. e.g. organic jaggery and silkworm cocoons from organic mulberry fetch more prices in the market in addition to reducing the cost of cultivation.
  2. The small farmers producing for subsistence may do not find PGS necessary as need for marketing does not exist. Hence, the effort may be directed to potential farmers to be brought under PGS.
- **Lack of market outlet facilities for organic products:** A market recognition of the PGS is necessary for farmers who produce organic products under organic farming as per PGS guidelines and are eligible for PGS certification.
- An effective system of regularized marketing facility needs to be evolved for a particular region, so as to help the eligible farmers to access the market. Interestingly, such an effort is being initiated in Karnataka state by the Greenlife Souharda Cooperative Ltd.,

Bangalore. This organisation is taking a lead in helping to establish one organic cooperative society in each taluk of the state by the interested organic farmers. These taluka level societies act as procurement centre for organic products while Greenlife will provide market access to the products in the metropolitan city

- **Creation of consumer awareness for organic products and PGS certification:** In order to create greater demand for organic foods and to instill confidence in PGS certification, consumer awareness and education becomes necessary.

In conclusion it could be stated that there is a tremendous scope for PGS in the country and for local groups to coordinate with the national level system and national council.