

# PGS-India Operational Manual

## CHAPTER 1

### 1.1 About PGS-India

Participatory Guarantee System of India (PGS-India) is a quality assurance initiative that is locally relevant, emphasizing the participation of stakeholders, including producers and consumers and operate outside the frame of third-party certification. As per IFOAM (2008) definition "Participatory Guarantee Systems are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange". In the case of organic agriculture, PGS is a process in which people in similar situations (in this case producers) assess, inspect and verify the production practices of each other and collectively declare the entire holding of the group as organic.

PGS-India has a number of basic elements which embrace a participatory approach, a shared vision, transparency and trust. Participation is an essential and dynamic part of PGS. Key stakeholders (producers, consumers, retailers, traders and others such as NGOs, PGS-facilitators and service providers) are helping in capacity building and making farmers aware in group formation, system operation, decision making and integrity management. In the operation of PGS, stakeholders (including producers) are involved in decision making and essential decisions about the operation of the PGS itself. PGS Groups in addition to being involved in the mechanics of the PGS, stakeholders, particularly the farm-producers are engaged in a structured ongoing learning process, which helps them improve what they do. The learning process is usually 'hands-on' and involves field days or workshops. The idea of participation embodies the principle of collective responsibility for ensuring the organic integrity of the PGS.

Although PGS-India is basically a farmer group centric organic guarantee system but to integrate all sections of producers, processors, handlers and traders, to complete the value chain from farm to fork and keep the PGS-India programme as central guiding force to the entire organic agriculture movement, it also provides for an access to individual producers, individual processing and handling facilities under PGS groups, organized processing, warehousing, handling and packaging and trading entities away from producer groups. To ensure end-to-end traceability (as per the requirements of regulatory framework under FSS [Organic Foods] Regulation 2017), PGS-India programme also provides uninterrupted chain of custody, starting from producer groups till the products are processed and finally packed into retail packs.

To integrate traditionally organic areas in to mainstream organic and harvest the benefits of traditionally organic practices for safe and healthy certified organic food for consumers, PGS-India programme also provides for a mechanism to certify large contiguous areas, involving village councils and Gram Panchayats by adopting village-wise conformity assessment on annual basis.

## **1.2 Guiding Principles for PGS-India**

In tune with the international trends and IFOAM's PGS Guidelines, PGS-India programme is also based on participatory approach, a shared vision, transparency and trust. As a unique feature PGS-India programme gives PGS movement a National recognition and institutional structure without affecting the spirit of PGS. In addition, PGS-India also addresses the concerns of individual farmers that are unable to form groups or fall short of minimum numbers and the producers located in traditional/default organic areas. Therefore to keep addressing the need for different category of stakeholders PGS-India guiding principles are divided into three categories for: (a) groups, (b) individual producers/ processors/ handlers and (c) traditional default organic areas

### **1.2.1 Guiding Principles for PGS groups**

#### **1.2.1.1 Participation**

Participation is an essential and dynamic part of PGS. Key stakeholders (producers, consumers, retailers, traders and others such as NGOs) are engaged in the initial design, and then in the operation of the PGS and decision making.

The idea of participation embodies the principle of collective responsibility for ensuring the organic integrity of the PGS. This collective responsibility is reflected through:

- Shared ownership of the PGS
- Stakeholder engagement in the development process
- Understanding of how the system works and
- Direct communication between producers and consumers and other stakeholders

Together these helps shape the integrity-based approach and a formula for trust. An important tool for promoting this trust is having operational processes that are transparent. This includes transparency in decision making, easy access to the database and where possible farms are open to participation and visits of consumers. Participation of traders/ retailers or consumers in decision making may not be possible under all situations, but their participation in any form will increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the group.

#### **1.2.1.2 Shared Vision**

Collective responsibility for implementation and decision making is driven by common shared vision. All the key stakeholders (producers, facilitating agencies,

NGOs, social organizations and even the State Governments) support the guiding principles and goals, PGS is striving to achieve. This can be achieved initially through their participation and support in the design and then by joining it. This may include commitment in writing through signing an application/ document that includes the vision.

#### **1.2.1.3 Transparency**

Transparency is created by having all stakeholders, including producers and consumers, aware of exactly how the guarantee system works to include the standards, the organic guarantee process (norms) with clearly defined and documented systems and how decisions are made. Public access will be ensured to documentation and information about the PGS groups, such as lists of certified producers and details about their farms and non-compliance actions. These will be available through PGS-India portal. NEC will define necessary guidelines from time to time on what should be visible in public domain and what not.

At the grass roots level transparency is maintained through the active participation of the producers in the organic guarantee process which can include

- Information sharing at meetings and workshops
- Participation in internal inspections (peer reviews)
- Involvement in decision making.

#### **1.2.1.4 Trust**

The integrity base upon which PGS are built is rooted in the idea that producers can be trusted and that the organic guarantee system can be an expression and verification of this trust. The foundation of this trust is built from the idea that the key stakeholders collectively develop their shared vision and then collectively continue to shape and reinforce their vision through the PGS. The ways this trust is reflected may depend entirely on factors that are culturally/ socially specific to the PGS group.

The idea of 'trust' assumes that the individual producer has a commitment to protecting nature and consumers' health and well-being through organic production systems defined under "PGS-India standards".

Mechanism for expressing trustworthiness includes:

- Declaration (a producer pledge) via a witnessed signing of a pledge document
- Written collective undertaking by the group to abide by the norms, principles, standards of PGS-India and uphold trust for their peers

In this way, the idea of collective trust is institutionalised and continuously validated by the stakeholders on the strength of transparency.

### **1.2.1.5 Horizontality**

PGS India is intended to be non-hierarchical at group level. This will reflect in the overall democratic structure and through the collective responsibility of the PGS group with sharing and rotating responsibility, by engaging producers directly in the peer review of each other's farms; and by transparency in decision making process.

## **1.2.2 Guiding principles for individual producers, On-farm and Off-farm processing and handling**

To ensure entry of individual farm producers and PGS-India certified organic farm produce into organized processing and retail sales, PGS-India provides a system of continued verification of organic integrity for farms, on-farm and off-farm processing and handling based on the following principles:

### **1.2.2.1 Individual farm producers**

To ensure reach of PGS-India organic guarantee system to individual farmers who are located in areas away from the groups and other members of the village community are not yet ready to embrace organic, PGS-India provides specific provisions to certify these farms through verification and guarantee from nearby PGS-India groups as per the guiding principles of PGS-India for groups. In exceptional cases where there is no PGS-India group nearby for such guarantee then national institutional structure through Regional Councils can assist such farmers for verification of their compliance to PGS-India guarantee process. But such farmers should make all out efforts to create groups and become part of PGS-India groups as and when possible. Individual farmers in villages where PGS-India groups are existing or are in close-by villages of such PGS-India groups, they shall be treated as part of those groups.

### **1.2.2.2 On-farm processing and handling by the group in their own or hired facilities**

On-farm processing and handling by the PGS local group shall form integral part of PGS-India groups and shall be covered as per the general guiding principles of PGS-India involving peer appraisal and decision making by group. Off-farm processing under hired facilities away from the farm shall also be carried out as per the guiding principles of PGS-India for groups, provided the entire operation is carried out under the supervision of PGS Group.

### **1.2.2.3 Off-farm processing and handling in stand-alone facilities away from PGS-groups**

In such cases PGS-India certification will be done by adopting "Conformity assessment and verification" criteria similar to third party certification systems and individual units will be approved for PGS-India organic processing and handling.

### **1.2.3 Guiding Principles for conversion of large contiguous traditional / default organic areas to organic under PGS-India**

India had been traditionally organic and many areas continue to remain organic. Due to complexities in documentation, physical verification and other requirements for standards compliance such areas could not be considered organic in spite of the fact they are traditionally organic. PGS-India provides an opportunity to mainstream these areas to organic under the overall guiding principles of PGS-India with following additional features:

- Only large contiguous areas complying to PGS-India standards for several years are considered
- Local/ State administration assures that there is effective ban on usage of synthetic inputs and GMOs and no permissions have been granted for sale/ supply of prohibited substances.
- Such areas are geographically isolated from conventional area and are separated by hills, non-agricultural land, sea, rivers, forests or any other effective barrier.
- Adoption of PGS-India organic farming policy and practices by all the farmers in the region and its corroboration by village councils or Gram Panchayats

### **1.3 National networking**

PGS India while keeping the spirit of PGS intact also aims to give the entire movement an institutional structure. This is proposed to be achieved by networking the groups under common umbrella through various facilitating agencies, Regional Councils, Zonal Councils, PGS-India secretariat at National Centre of Organic Farming and National Advisory Committee as apex implementation and controlling authority. But at every stage it will be ensured that these agencies including apex body do not interfere in the working and decision making of the group. The strength of the system shall lie in its capability of linking all the stakeholders through uniform national standards and uniform implementation strategies cross the country demonstrating end-to-end traceability, transparency and a desire to work towards constantly improving the system.

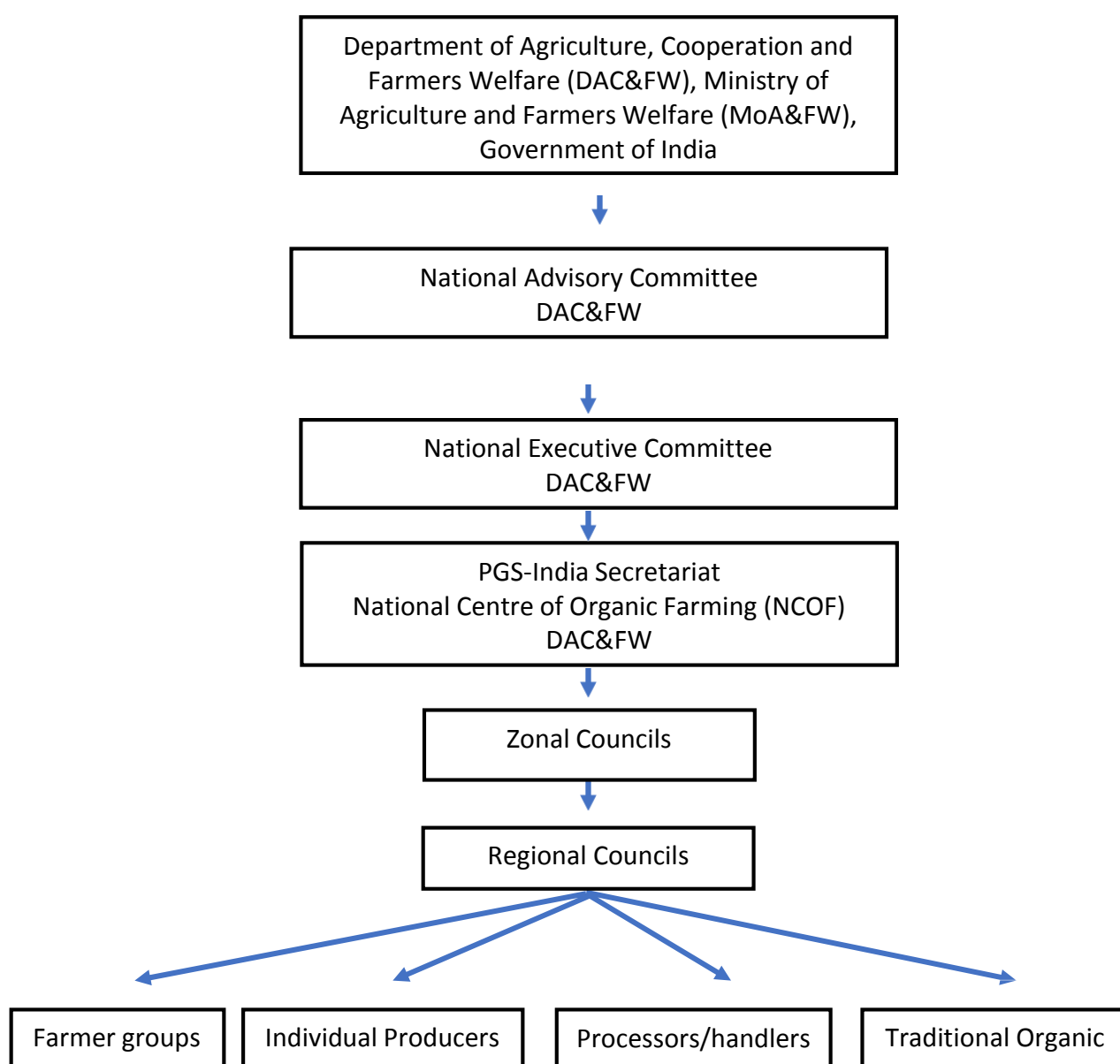
#### **1.3 PGS-India certification services and fees**

PGS-India certification services are facilitated through an institutional network comprising of National Advisory Committee, National Executive Committee, PGS Secretariat, Zonal and Regional Councils and Local groups. Although majority of the institutional services are facilitated by the PGS secretariat free of cost, authorization of RCs, physical inspection of LGs by RCs, certification endorsement of LGs by RCs, physical inspection and grant of certification of individual farmers, processing units or large area certification are paid services and necessary fee shall be paid by the users as per the decision of NEC as revised from time to time and/ or as agreed between RCs and LGs and other operators.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2.1 Operational Structure

The PGS-India programme shall be operated under the overall direction and guidance of the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Government of India with Secretary, Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare as the apex decision making and appellate authority. Schematic operational structure of the PGS India is given below:



## **2.2 Structure, Role and Responsibilities**

### **2.2.1 Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Government of India**

The PGS-India programme shall be operated under the overall guidance, directions and authority of the Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW), Government of India. The Secretary, DAC&FW shall be the overall controlling authority.

### **2.2.2 National Advisory Committee (PGS-NAC)**

Secretary DAC&FW shall constitute an apex policy formulation and programme steering and supervision committee called PGS-India National Advisory Committee (herein referred to as PGS-NAC) with following composition:

#### **2.2.2.1 Structure**

The NAC shall be headed by the Additional Secretary, DAC and FW and members shall be drawn from Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Food safety and Standards Authority of India, Department of Commerce, ICAR, PGS Secretariat and other Government or private organizations having experience in organic farming and organic agriculture quality assurance systems. All members of the Government Departments and organizations shall be Ex-officio members. Chairperson of the PGS-India NEC shall be the Member Secretary of NAC. NAC shall be serviced by the INM Division of the DAC&FW. NAC shall meet at least once a year or as and when required.

#### **2.2.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities**

1. Defining operational and policy guidelines and PGS India Standards.
2. Make changes, improvements and amendments to the programme and national coordination structure as a whole.
3. Constitution of National Executive Committee
4. Steering and supervision of implementation of PGS-India programme at national level.
5. Delegation of authority and responsibilities to NEC and PGS-India secretariat
6. Policy coordination, convergence and coherence with other certification systems and regulatory bodies.

### **2.2.3 National Executive Committee**

National Executive Committee shall be the programme implementation, monitoring, evaluation and decision making body for PGS India Programme with following composition:

- |                                  |                     |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Joint Secretary (INM), DAC&FW | Chairperson         |
| 2. Additional Commissioner (INM) | Member              |
| 3. Director, NCOF                | Executive Secretary |

4. Head, Zonal Council (RCOFs) 2Nos	Member
5. Head Zonal Council (Non-Govt)	Member
6. Representative APEDA	Member
7. Representative FSSAI	Member
8. RCs Representative 4 No	Member (one from each region)
9. Farmers representative 4 No	Member (one from each region)

First four members of the committee will be permanent members, as they are represented by their position. Representative of Regional Councils will be nominated to the committee for a fixed tenure of two years on rotation basis. Representatives of farmers will be selected and co-opted by other members of the committee on the recommendations of ZCs for a fixed tenure of two years. The farmer representative is required to be the member of PGS-India Local Group with outstanding repute.

### **2.2.3.1 Role and Responsibility**

PGS-NEC being apex implementation, monitoring and evaluation and decision making body shall be responsible for:

- a. Overall monitoring and supervision of programme implementation
- b. Drafting policies, suggest modifications and amendments to PGS-India operational structure, standards for approval of NAC.
- c. Coordinate and monitor national level capacity building, education, outreach and supervision activities.
- d. Delegation of authority and duties to PGS-India Secretariat
- e. Selection and Authorization of Zonal and Regional Councils
- f. Supervision and monitoring on the functioning of Zonal and Regional Councils
- g. Sanction/ withdrawal of authorization to Zonal/ Regional councils on being found not functioning or not functioning according to the guidelines.
- h. Constitute technical and evaluation/ surveillance committees and assign responsibilities

### **2.2.3.2 Meeting of PGS-NEC**

PGS-NEC will meet at least twice a year to review the implementation process and progress of PGS programme implementation and its monitoring and for authorization of new councils. PGS-NEC meetings can also be convened at the discretion of the Chairman and/ or on the request of Executive Secretary or at least 25% members to take up important matter. Minimum quorum for a meeting will be 30% of the total strength. If it is not possible to convene a meeting, urgent issues can be decided by circulation. In all such cases at least 30% of responding members within 30 days should endorse the decision.

Travel expenses of members of Ministries or Government Departments shall be borne by their respective departments. TA/DA of non-officials (members of non-Govt ZC, Farmer representatives and technical and evaluation committees) shall be borne by PGS Secretariat.



#### **2.2.4 PGS Secretariat**

National Centre for Organic Farming under Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare (MoA&FW) shall be the PGS-India National Secretariat with Director NCOF as Executive Authority. Key role and responsibilities of the Secretariat will be as follows:

- a. All executive and secretarial responsibilities related to execution of the programme, NAC and NEC meetings, implementation of the decisions of NAC and NEC, matters to be put up to NEC and coordination with NEC members
- b. Advise NEC on all technical and implementation issues
- c. Coordinate and facilitate evaluation and surveillance visits of duly constituted evaluation and surveillance committees, assessment of reports and submission of reports/ recommendations to NEC for necessary action
- d. Capacity building, education, training and outreach activities for Zonal and Regional councils.
- e. Monitoring and supervision on the activities of Zonal Councils and Regional Councils
- f. Undertake remedial/ immediate actions to address urgent issues, but all such actions shall be required for endorsement/ vetting by the NEC. Alternatively PGS Secretariat can seek approval of NEC Chairman for immediate and urgent issues.
- g. Annual supervision report to be prepared and submitted to NEC
- h. Recommendations of sanctions and penalties to NEC in cases where severe breach of programme implementation is noticed
- i. Custodian of entire PGS India database, PGS-India portal and its operationalization
- j. Receipt and processing of applications for Zonal Councils and Regional Councils for authorization by NEC
- k. Coordinate and liaise with different State Governments for promotion and popularization of PGS programme.
- l. Supervision of PGS products through residue testing including collection of PGS samples, getting those samples tested for residue analysis.
- m. Appellate authority for local groups against the actions and decisions of Zonal councils and for Regional Councils against the action of Zonal council.
- n. Literature development, publicity, technology dissemination and awareness creation through print and electronic media.

##### **2.2.4.1 PGS-India Cell**

To effectively implement and monitor the functioning of PGS-India programme, a dedicated PGS-India cell will be created at PGS Secretariat comprising of IT experts for PGS-India website management and operation and technical experts for report analysis and timely implementation of actions and operations including capacity

building, coordination and support. Necessary manpower can be hired on contract basis with the approval of Chairman, NEC, DAC&FW.

#### **2.2.4.2 PGS-India Operational Budget**

MoA&FW shall grant adequate budget to PGS Secretariat for operationalization of PGS-India programme, website management, TA/DA of non-official NEC members and TA/DA and honorarium for non-official evaluation and surveillance committee members. Such budget can be integrated into the budget of National Centre of Organic Farming.

#### **2.2.5. Zonal Council**

Nine Regional Centre of Organic Farming (RCOFs) under National Centre of Organic Farming shall act as Zonal Councils. NAC at its discretion to meet the growing demand and to handle increasing numbers of RCs can also nominate any other competent organization as Zonal Council after necessary competence assessment. Major role and responsibilities of Zonal council shall include:

- a. Monitoring on the functioning of Regional Councils.
- b. Preparing annual/quarterly monitoring reports on all the RCs under their jurisdiction and submission of report to PGS Secretariat
- c. Provide up-dated documents, policies, literature and other technical input to RCs for further information of local groups.
- d. Capacity building, training and outreach activities for Regional Councils/LGs
- e. Coordinate zonal level education and outreach activities in collaboration with PGS Secretariat.
- f. Complaint redressal of farmers and local groups against the functioning and actions of Regional councils
- g. Appellate authority on complaints of certificate denial by RC or sanctions imposed by RC on local groups
- h. Appellate authority on complaints of traders/ retailers/ consumers on the quality/ organic integrity of PGS products of particular group and action taken by RC or inaction of RC and submission of quarterly report to PGS secretariat.
- i. Monitoring of PGS products through residue testing.
- j. Any other activity assigned by NEC and PGS-India Secretariat.

#### **2.2.6 Regional Council (RC)**

Regional Council (RC) shall be legally registered agency under relevant acts (Societies act, the companies act, cooperatives act, trust act or any other state or central Government act in force from time to time). Government Departments/ agencies shall be deemed legal entities. Applicant Regional Councils and its personals shall have no conflict of interest which can hinder or affect the organic guarantee programme and/ or its credibility.

### **2.2.7 Local Group (LG)**

Local group is the main functional and decision-making body under Participatory Guarantee System. It is a local group of farmers that live in the same village or close by villages and interact regularly with each other. Participation of consumers or representatives of traders or retailers in the group and its functioning should be encouraged as it strengthens the integrity and trust

## CHAPTER 3

### Eligibility Criteria and Functional Requirements for Regional Councils (RC)

#### 3.1 Eligibility criteria for appointment of Regional Council

- a. Applicant agency shall be legally registered agency under relevant acts of state or central Government in force from time to time. Government Departments/ agencies shall be deemed legal entities.
- b. Applicant agency and its personals shall not have any conflict of interest which can hinder or affect the organic guarantee programme, inter alia project management under Government schemes for organic / natural farming, production and marketing of agricultural inputs or farm produces. However, not for Profit civil society organizations which are mobilizing and handholding organic farmers shall be exempted from this clause provided such organizations are not doing organic project management under any Government schemes.
- c. Agencies or its promoters/ directors undertaking any other forms of business which can have potential conflict of interest with the organic guarantee system shall not be considered
- d. Applicant agency or majority of its personals shall have proven record on organic management practices and certification systems for not less than two years.
- e. Personals shall have documented knowledge and experience on organic guarantee/ certification systems and/ or previous experience in supporting Third party certification/ICS management/ Participatory Guarantee Systems for a period of not less than 2 years.
- f. Applicant agency shall have office and working personals.
- g. Have adequate infrastructure and digital support systems
- h. At least one member is well informed and conversant with local language of that area (reading, writing and speaking)
- i. Minimum manpower requirement, to start with shall be, one experienced PGS system facilitator and one PGS auditor-cum-data entry operator. This should increase proportionately with the increase in number of groups under certification.
- j. Applicant RC shall have documented procedures and policies in the form of quality and operational manuals including formats and checklists for uniform functioning, evaluation and decision making.
- k. Have financial resources to operate as Regional Council.

Additional eligibility requirements for RCs undertaking off-farm processing and handling certification

- l. Third party certification bodies accredited under National Programme for Organic Production duly accredited for “Food Processing and handling” on application to PGS Secretariat and have developed policy, procedures and checklists for such operations may be considered for authorization without the requirement of competence assessment
- m. Regional Councils having proven competence and experience in organic certification procedures for food processing and handling and have trained manpower and developed policy, procedures and checklists for such operations after necessary competence assessment by the PGS Secretariat.

### **3.2 Application for Authorization as RC**

Applicant agencies shall submit application form in prescribed format, available on PGS-India portal along with following documents:

- a. Copy of registration certificate indicating its legal status. Government agencies need to submit necessary orders from competent authority for authorization application as RC.
- b. Copy of Quality manual and operating manual
- c. Copy of standard operating procedures for operation of PGS-India guarantee programme along with necessary checklists and formats
- d. Experience certificates indicating its competence
- e. List of staff members along with their biodata and necessary experience certificates and training records
- f. Declaration for No-conflict of interest, independence and impartiality by the agency and by individual personals
- g. Financial balance sheet indicating financial strength
- h. Prescribed application fee as demand draft as determined by the NEC from time to time. The application fee is non-refundable.
- i. Submit application on-line on PGS-India portal and send hard copy to PGS-India Secretariat
- j. Separate applications shall be submitted for (a) farm certification (groups and individuals), (b) food processing and handling and (c) for large traditional/default organic area certification

### **3.3 Authorization of Regional Council**

- a. PGS-India secretariat shall screen the application within 60 days for completeness and if any deficiency is detected ask for additional information.
- b. Incomplete applications shall be rejected and intimation will be given in writing with reasons for rejection.
- c. In case, if any additional information is sought, applicant agency shall furnish the documents within a period of 30 days. Failing, the application will be rejected and application fee forfeited.

- d. In cases where application is found complete in all respects and agency meets all the eligibility requirements, the agency shall be subjected to competence assessment by an evaluation team duly constituted by the PGS Secretariat.
- e. Competence assessment includes, physical inspection of the premises of applicant agency, document audit, minimum infrastructure and staff requirement and witness audit for competence assessment.
- f. Non-compliances, if any shall be communicated and the agency need to comply the requirements within 30 days.
- g. On the recommendations of PGS Secretariat, the matter will be decided by NEC on authorization
- h. RCs shall be authorized for a period of three years.
- i. RCs shall be subject to supervision and audits (unannounced or announced), at least once a year by the Evaluation and Assessment Committee/ ZC and/or PGS secretariat
- j. After authorization, RCs shall have to register at least 10 PGS groups comprising not less than 100 farmers within a period of six months from the date of authorization and shall perform regular certification activities through PGS-India website.
- k. Failure in registration of required number of groups/ farmers/ operators and inaction on PGS-India website for 6 months shall result in suspension of authorization and inaction for 12 months will result in cancellation of authorization.
- l. Renewal of authorization for further term of three years will be subject to renewal application by RC at least 90 days in advance of validity end date. PGS Secretariat after necessary assessment shall recommend NEC along with supervision reports of past 3 years, overall performance of functioning and sanctions/ penalties imposed by NEC, for renewal of authorization.
- m. Three separate authorizations will be granted on separate applications for (a) registration and certification of local groups and individual producers and (b) registration and certification for processing and handling entities, away from local groups and (c) for large traditional/ default organic area certification.

### **3.4 Role and responsibility of Regional Council**

- a. Provide copy of standards, operational documents and literature etc to LGs and to members of public on demand in local language
- b. Grant registration to local groups on-line on submission of documents.
- c. Capacity building of local groups in data uploading on PGS website. If local groups do not have access to a computer and internet or do not know the English language, RCs can help in data uploading. But such services to be agreed upon between LG and RC.
- d. Training and support to existing and new local groups in procedures and documentation.
- e. Screening of Local group applications, check for completeness, indicate if there is any deficiency

- f. Approval of the local groups
- g. On-line monitoring on the functioning of Local Groups to ensure continuous operation of PGS-India programme by the Local Group
- h. Physical inspection/ evaluation of the local groups registered with it within next one year. Each group shall be subject to at least one physical inspection/ evaluation in two years subsequently and at least 50% of the Local groups shall be physically evaluated every year.
- i. Assessment of summary peer appraisal summary sheets of LGs/ inspection report uploaded by the operators on PGS website, grant necessary approval and issue scope certificates from PGS-India portal based on assessment and inspection if required.
- j. In case of individual producers (not linked with any PGS-India group) and stand-alone processing and handling units, RCs shall undertake annual inspection/supervision and issue scope certificate only after physical inspection is done and no non-compliances are pending.
- k. To address complaints, comments or feedback it receives from the public about functioning of the LGs and also respond to communication from statutory bodies such as FSSAI regarding any consumer complaints.
- l. Any other roles that may be advised by PGS-Secretariat from time to time.

## CHAPTER 4

### Eligibility Criteria and Functional Requirements for Local Groups (LG), individual Producers and Processors/ handlers

#### 4.1 Requirement and eligibility criteria for Local Groups

- a. A Local group should comprise of minimum 5 members belonging to the same village or close by villages with continuous territory. Regional Councils can decide on maximum number of farmers per group keeping local situations in mind.
- b. Adequate participation of women farmers shall be ensured.
- c. At least a few (25%) members of the group shall be well versed with the PGS organic guarantee systems or certification system and National Standards of Organic Production (NPOP) or have undergone training on PGS guarantee system organized by Regional Councils, Zonal Council or PGS Secretariat or have been part of the core team of other functional PGS group.
- d. All the members in the group have signed the PGS pledge and group agreement to adhere to the group's specific vision, participatory approach and collective responsibility.
- e. Although, there is no restriction on the size of holding of any individual farmer but in any case, the holding of one single member should not exceed 50% of the total land under the group.
- f. Under PGS organic guarantee system normally parallel production and part conversion is not allowed, therefore it is necessary that all group members need to bring their entire farm with livestock under organic management as per the PGS standards. However, Regional Councils in some cases may give exception and may also allow conversion in phases.
- g. Have access to PGS documents and preferably have access to computer and internet (optional)
- h. Registered with the concerned Regional Council and have obtained necessary user ID and password to upload data on PGS website.
- i. In case if farmer group is unable to operate on-line system of data up loading then the services can be availed from Regional Council or of any other facilitating agency or local NGO or service providers etc.
- j. In case an individual farmer or a group of farmers with less than 5 members is/are proposed to join existing LG, as advised by the RC, then to accept those farmers as members of the LG.
- k. LG need to register only once, as there is no concept of renewal in PGS-India, till the LG keeps on doing certification activities, uploading peer appraisal summary sheets on season to season basis on PGS-India website. Non-submission of Peer Appraisal summary sheet continuously for two seasons or 12 months shall result in suspension of the group. Revival of certification



process for such groups will restart from the date of submission of fresh peer appraisal and fresh certification process will start with PGS-Green-1 status.

#### **4.2 Role and Responsibility of Local Group**

- a. Organize farmers in the group and each member individually sign PGS organic pledge and group agreement.
- b. Provide copies of PGS standards, operational manual and appraisal forms to all the members in the local language. If farmers are illiterate then they need to be explained details and standards orally and through pictorial representations.
- c. Prepare necessary field documents with farm history. Each group shall maintain such documents in a group file comprising of application form, signed pledge, signed agreement, farm maps showing locations with GPS coordinates in respect of each member and last one year history on input usage and management practices.
- d. Elect Group leader and core team of peer reviewers (minimum 3 in 5 members group). There is no upper limit. It will be an optimal situation if all members of the group can participate in peer reviews, as this contributes to capacity building and information exchange between farmers, and reduces conflicts of interests.
- e. Participate in the activities of any other registered PGS group to understand the functioning of the PGS Group.
- f. Implement standard requirements on the farms of all the group members and obtain endorsement from the other registered group. This endorsement is needed only once at the time of registration.
- g. Register group on PGS-India website and obtain registration approval from the Regional Council.
- h. Contact nearby PGS group for endorsement
- i. In case no PGS registered group is there in the vicinity for endorsement then State Agencies (State Agriculture Department District Officer) may be requested to verify the requirement and submit necessary verification report to RC. Else request RC to do verification and grant registration approval. RCOFs can also be requested for verification and endorsements of Local Groups for their recognition by Regional Council. RCs can endorse the groups only after physical verification/ inspection.
- j. In case of Groups constituted under some Government Programme (such as PKVY) endorsement of the group shall be done by the authorised District officer/scheme in-charge of the implementing state Government Department.
- k. Organize time to time meetings and maintain attendance register. Participation of members in these meetings is a mandatory activity and is an indication of dedication of the member to the cause of group's guarantee scheme. There should be at least 2-4 times a year (2 for perennial crop group and 4 times a year for annual crop group) compulsory meetings at key times of the year depending on the season, the crops, etc. One/two for peer appraisal planning and one/two for decision making.

- l. Every member needs to attend at least 50% of the meetings in a year and sign in attendance register.
- m. Advise each other and share information to improve the capacity of the group as a whole.
- n. Organize regular training courses by inviting practicing organic farmers from other groups, RC members or experts of other State Govt and Non-Govt agencies.
- o. Chalk out peer appraisal strategy and ensure timely appraisal of each farm at least twice a year. Peer reviewers will ensure to complete Peer review appraisal form, sign and submit to the group leader. Each farmer is to be appraised by at least a two member team. Inclusion of consumer's representative increases the credibility and trust.
- p. Inspection of peer reviewer's farms to be done by another peer reviewer group. To increase credibility and trust the group may have any number of peer reviewers.
- q. All peer appraisal sheets in respect of each group member needs to be maintained in hard copy or digitally by the local group for future supervision activity. These are to be made available in the public domain and provided to RC or statutory authority upon demand during physical supervision
- r. At appropriate times the group decides which farmers are to be certified. Separate out farmers which are yet to comply with the certification requirements. List out defaulters and impose sanctions.
- s. Organize final decision meeting, explain the peer appraisal results to all the members. Collectively declare the group as conforming to PGS standards (in case of small groups, up to 10 members). If the group is large then elect a sub-group or certification committee, comprising of 5 or more members, which may review the results and decide upon the certification. Approval of majority group members is required only in the cases of negative decision (denial of certification or decertification). Full member body can also serve as an appeal body against the decision of the certification committee.
- t. At appropriate time prepare peer appraisal summary sheet with list of farmers declared certified with details of crops and expected quantity of produce.
- u. Upload peer appraisal summary sheet for the entire group on the PGS-India website along with necessary group decision and send signed hard copy to RC through post.
- v. On being approved by RC on-line, RC shall issue the certificate.

### **4.3 Role and Responsibility of Individual Producer**

In cases where an individual farmer (or a group of farmers less than 5) is interested in PGS-India certification and there is no group in the vicinity and no additional community members are ready to form a group, the individual producers can directly apply to the Regional Council for registration.

- a. Make an application to available Regional Council with signed application form, pledge and a signed declaration stating their current inability to form a local group
- b. Invite other PGS-India group members to endorse the application after physical visit to farm. In case if no PGS-India group is accessible then request the Regional Council to physically verify the farm
- c. Obtain PGS-India operational guidelines and standards from near by group or from RC
- d. Request the RC to approve the registration and obtain user ID and password for PGS-India website.
- e. Request the Peer appraisers of nearby group to physically inspect the farm and fill peer appraisal form. Filled peer appraisal form to be submitted to Regional Council. In case if no group is close by then request RC to do physical inspection and grant certification.
- f. Individual producer registration is an interim arrangement and the producer must initiate efforts to bring in other members from the village community to form the group in due course (maximum 2 years) and transform individual status to group status. In case if an individual farmer is unable to form a group even after 2 years, then Regional Council will attach the farmers with the nearest group.

#### **4.4 Off-farm processing and handling units/facilities away from PGS-groups**

To ensure collection, aggregation, processing and handling of PGS certified organic produce from one or more PGS groups for collective processing and trading, PGS-India programme provides for specific provisions for approval of stand-alone facilities away from the PGS groups. As such activities are not participatory, the approval system shall be based on conformity assessment system.

- a. Only the Regional Councils authorized for “Off-farm processing and handling Approval” can register such units and approve their facilities for organic processing after necessary conformity assessment.
- b. Applicant processing and trading unit shall be legally registered body with necessary licenses and approval from FSSAI and/ or such other licensing authorities as required by law of the land
- c. Have necessary infrastructure for intended processing and handling
- d. Fully aware and conversant with PGS-India standards and certification requirements and have developed operational manual, formats and checklists for entire operation, flow of material through the process and capable of maintaining uninterrupted audit trail starting from receipt of raw material(s), processing and handling operation, packing and finally up to sale to non-PGS operator or consumer.
- e. Processing and handling agencies shall have to grant full access to documentation, recipes, raw material and processed products inventory and sale and purchase records to Regional Council. Withholding of information,

documentation and physical access to facilities may result in denial of certification.

- f. PGS Secretariat will monitor such units on periodic basis

#### **4.5 Role and responsibilities of states and local Government authorities for conversion of large contiguous traditional/ default organic area to PGS-India Organic**

In India there are large and contiguous areas that are traditionally/ default organic with no history of prohibited input usage. Due to geographic isolation or lack of connectivity such areas remained away from conventional agriculture. This disadvantage now can be taken as advantage by transforming such areas to certified organic under PGS-India to harvest the growing demand for safe and healthy organic food. States, concerned State Departments and/ or Zonal Council will have to ensure following responsibilities:

- a. Verify that there is no history of synthetic input and GMO use at least during the last 3 years
- b. Administrative ban on use, sale and supply of GMO seeds, synthetic agro-inputs in the defined area
- c. Documentation of the entire area, including geo-tagged maps with defined boundaries with villages and landmarks. Documentation will be done village-wise with details of farming practices. To maintain uniformity it should be ensured that all farmers follow similar farming practices. In case if few farmers are adopting different practices then they need to be documented separately. This will be an one-time activity.
- d. One village comprising of all the farmers will be treated as one group. To qualify for large area certification all the farming members of the village and the large area must comply to PGS-India organic standards.
- e. Gram Panchayat/ Village council will ensure that all the growers undertake PGS pledge and sign the pledge.
- f. Once all the farmers sign the pledge, it need to be endorsed by the Gram Panchayat and Gram Panchayat may pass a resolution for adopting and allowing only organic farming within their geographical limits.
- g. Register the area with individual village wise documents to authorized RC. RCs authorized for large area certification shall be authorised to register such area and undertake certification process.
- h. Create peer appraisal committees from among the farmers from the village. At least one peer appraisal committee will be constituted in each village for annual peer appraisals. Complete first peer appraisal and submit peer appraisal summary sheet to RC.
- i. Facilitating PGS-NEC appointed verification committee visit for ensuring that the defined area is organic since last 3 years.
- j. ZC/ RC on verification of documents, peer appraisal submitted by village peer appraisers and report of verification committee on reduction of conversion period can recommend declaration of the area as organic to PGS-NEC.

- k. PGS-NEC after thorough assessment can declare the entire area as organic. In all such cases the decision on declaration of entire/ large contiguous area as certified rests with PGS-NEC and ZC/ RCs are only the recommending agencies. On such approval RC shall issue village-wise certificates giving full list of farmers, area and crops. In large area certification certificates and TCs shall be issued to the entire village group and not to individual farmers.
- l. For continuation of organic status each and every village in the region needs to undertake at least one peer appraisal annually. The annual peer appraisal report will be submitted to the concerned ZC/ Regional Council for extension/ renewal of certification.
- m. Under this certification programme all the farmers and their farming operations (including livestock) must be complying to PGS-India organic standards. Even a single default by one farmer can result into cancellation of organic status of the entire village. Repeated defaults in a village or in many villages may result in cancellation of certification of the entire geographic boundary (such as whole block).
- n. Individual farmers and processing and handling units under group or stand alone units away from the groups shall not be eligible for certification under this category, even though they may be located within the same geographical area.

# CHAPTER 5

## Certification Process

### 5.1 Certification Process by Local Group (LG)

#### Step 1

- a. Form a group comprising of minimum 5 farmers (preferably belonging to one village or close by villages with contiguous territory).
- b. To avoid loss of group status in the event of few farmers are sanctioned or leave the group, it is advisable to have group of about 7-10 farmers

As a result of sanctioning of few farmers or leaving of some farmers, if number of members fall below 5 then groups' status will change from group to individual. In all such cases certification will be subject to inspection by the RC or they have to manage the peer inspection by another nearby group or such farmers need to become part of another close by group. Certification as individual farmer may entail additional cost of inspection by RC

- c. Collect registration and farm history sheet from all the members.
- d. Obtain copies of PGS-India Standards and PGS-India operational documents from nearest RC and distribute to all the members. These documents can also be downloaded from PGS-India website.
- e. Convene a meeting of all the members to sign the pledge.
- f. All members need to amend/ modify their practices to comply with the requirement of PGS-India standards and ensure continued compliance.
- g. Prepare Local Group operational manual detailing requirement of documents to be maintained by farmers, peer appraisal methodology and checkpoints to be assessed, based on the broad guidelines of PGS-India norms (available on PGS-India website)
- h. Ensure that members those who have not brought their entire land holding/ operations under PGS-India programme (split production) maintain clear and distinct separation of organic units with non-organic units including farms separated by buffer zones, separate handling and thrashing facilities, separate storages etc. Such farmers also need to demonstrate their contamination control abilities to ensure the integrity of organic operations.
- i. Register the group on-line on PGS Website and generate user ID and password.
- j. Request RC to grant registration.

#### Step 2

- a. Follow the PGS guidelines on group meetings, key field trainings and knowledge sharing.

- b. Ensure that all members abide by the standards in their production process
- c. Keep vigil on other members' farms and if some non-compliances are noticed then inform group members during group meetings
- d. Organize group meetings from time to time and maintain necessary records.
- e. Ensure timely organization of training programmes in collaboration with RC.
- f. Invite practicing organic farmers and other local experts for problem solving in management issues such as in nutrient management, pest management etc during key trainings and group meetings.
- g. If member farmers are using or propose to use off-farm inputs then verify their organic status, discuss in group meetings and endorse or prohibit their use. Use of such inputs without group's approval shall be treated as non-compliance.
- h. LG need to maintain following documents for verification by RC/ ZC or PGS Secretariat:
  - i. Application form of each member with last one year's farm history
  - ii. Copy of PGS-India pledge of each member
  - iii. Copy of agreement with RC
  - iv. Copy of individual peer appraisal sheets for last four seasons (24 months) till the physical inspection by RC
  - v. Attendance and proceeding register for group meetings
  - vi. Attendance register for trainings
  - vii. Copy of peer appraisal summary sheet (season-wise as submitted to RC)

### **Step 3**

- a. Chalk out peer appraisal schedule and constitute peer appraisal groups. Each group should have minimum 3 peer appraisers. Depending upon the number of farmers there can be any number of appraisal teams comprising of three or more members. At least one member in the appraisal team must be literate and well versed in filling the appraisal forms.
- b. Reciprocal review between two member group farms is not allowed (i.e. A reviews the B and B reviews A).
- c. Invite other group peer reviewers or representatives of consumers/ traders or local State Agriculture Department officer as invited member of the peer group (but their participation is not mandatory). This may increase the trust and credibility of the group Guarantee and uphold transparency.
- d. Complete peer review of all the farms at least once in each season. Ensure that all farms have been reviewed objectively.
- e. Discuss review reports in the meetings and decide upon the organic status of each farm one by one.
- f. Segregate farmers who have fulfilled all the requirements and consider them for grant of certificate
- g. Discuss about the non-complying farmers and depending upon the nature and gravity of non-compliances issue sanctions.

- h. Denial of certification or exclusion of member from the group to be endorsed by the whole group and should be informed to the defaulting member

#### **Step 4**

- a. Appraisal paperwork is checked for completeness and a local Group Summary Worksheet is prepared.
- b. Group or certification committee decides on certification and declares certification status of each group member.
- c. Enter all details on-line in PGS-India website and send signed copy of the appraisal summary worksheet to the RC. Alternatively send all details in hard copy along with signed copy of summary sheet to RC for uploading the data into PGS-India website.
- d. On receipt of approval from RC, scope certificate can be generated by group leader on-line and distributed to group members after his signature.

Only the farmers which have completed full conversion period without any major or serious non-compliance be declared as “PGS-Organic”. Farmers which have one or more major non-compliance or are under conversion period will be declared as “PGS-Green”. No member can avail PGS-Green status for more than 3 years in case of annual crops and more than 4 years in case of plantation/ permanent crops. In cases where after the completion of 3 or 4 years period a member is unable to qualify as PGS-Organic the same member will be sanctioned and excluded from the group.

In case of major non-compliance, except on use of prohibited substances, the status of PGS-Organic can be downgraded to PGS-Green for one or two seasons. On continued default the member can be excluded from group. All cases of prohibited substance use such as chemical fertilizers, pesticides, hormones etc will be treated as serious non-compliance and such members’ certification status be downgraded to ZERO hour and they need to be either excluded or to registered as new member and shall have to undergo full conversion period.

Only the crops sown after Registration approval of the group by RC shall qualify for “PGS-Green”.

Considering previous crops seasons data prior to date of registration approval by RC will be treated as major non-compliance and in all such cases the certification status of the group will be downgraded to registration.

- e. Scope certificates are issued with estimated yields as approved during peer appraisals.
- f. On harvest of crops, group needs to upload actual yields. Uploading of actual yields is necessary to obtain Transaction Certificates (TC).



- g. On approval of yields by RC, group can sell its produce as PGS certified produce and can generate Transaction Certificate on-line. TCs can be issued for each and every farmer member separately.
- h. PGS certified products can be sold with PGS-India logo as per prescribed terms and conditions for use of logo.

### **Step 5**

- a. In case if RC returns the decision with reasons of return, the LG need to undertake corrective actions and resubmit the revised decision in 15 days.
- b. In case of certificate denial by RC, if not satisfied LG can appeal to their respective Zonal Council with intimation of PGS Secretariat for decision review.

## **5.2 Certification Process by Regional Council**

### **Step 1**

- a. Receive registration applications (on-line or off-line or in hard copy) of Local Groups (LG). Check details of individual farmer including geo-tagging of farms and mobile nos. Check for other group recommendation or endorsement by Central/State Govt authorities.
- b. On being found adequate approve registration on-line.
- c. If data and application have been provided on-line then approve registration on-line and provide user ID and password on PGS-India website.
- d. If application is in hard copy or off-line then upload the information on website and grant registration with user ID and password.
- e. Provide copy of PGS standards and LG operational manual guidelines in local language.

### **Step 2**

- a. Time to time keep interacting the group and help them in understanding the certification process. If possible participate in some of the group meetings or key field trainings of group.
- b. Encourage and build the capacity of the group for on-line data management (may be through internet café)
- c. Undertake random supervision on groups for assessment of standards implementation and capacity of the Local Group
- d. At least 50% of the groups registered under it, must be verified suitably every year. Every group must be physically verified at least once in two years
- e. Receipt and redressal of complaints against the LGs and their functioning

### **Step 3**

- a. On receipt of entire data set and Local Group Peer Appraisal Summary Sheet, screen the details for completeness, ensure that PGS standards and processes has been complied.

- b. Compare the peer appraisal summary findings with RCs own physical evaluation report, take into consideration previous non-compliances, complaints and investigation findings if any;
- c. On being found compliant to PGS standards and norms, approve grant of certification and issue certificate.
- d. RC needs to endorse the certification decision of the LG, if requirements have been met and there are no adverse findings into RCs physical verification, complaints, adverse residue testing report or adverse supervision report etc. Following check points suggested for decision endorsement:
  - i. Required LG meetings done and members present
  - ii. Key trainings organized and members present
  - iii. Summary sheet is complete and gives full reflection of certification process
  - iv. Complaints, if any received during the period
  - v. Physical verification report of RC
  - vi. Past record of non-compliances and advisory implementation and
  - vii. Result of residue testing (if any)
- e. In case of Non-approval, reasons must be communicated in writing or electronically with justification.
- f. RCs can not pick and choose individual farmers. They can approve or not approve or reject the decision of the group.
- g. RC at its discretion can also return the decision of the LG for reconsideration in case of procedural non-compliance and ask the LG to resubmit the summary sheet after addressing and closing the non-compliances.
- h. The RC needs to decide on certification request within 30 days from the date of uploading the LG-summary sheet or submitting the hard copy of the group decision to RC. If RC fails to endorse the decision of the LG or otherwise within 30 days then groups decision will be auto approved on PGS-India website and a non-compliance is credited against RC.
- i. Scope certificate is issued to the group with crop name and area details of the peer appraised season for each farmer separately in annexure. Scope certificates are issued season-wise with details of crops and area for that particular season.
- j. After the harvest Local group uploads the actual yields. RC can verify the uploaded actual yields on-line and if satisfied approve the yields minus self-consumption with lot no and packaging/ bulk etc. for sale and issue of TCs.
- k. On yield approval by RC, TCs can be generated on-line for each and every farmer member separately. TCs can be issued in one go for entire produce of the individual member or in small lots on number of occasions.
- l. RCs need to ensure that certified organic products are sold with UID code provided on the Transaction Certificate.
- m. In case if sales are happening between two PGS-India registered operators then there is no need for paper TC, online TC will facilitate transfer of stock from seller operator to buyer operator.

Note that the Regional Council does *not* make a decision to include or not include specific farmers based on the information provided. They can only approve or not approve the certification of the Local Group as a whole.

One example where this might apply would be if the Regional Council has a concern about Farmer X (for example because of a random pesticide residue test result) but the Local Group continues to list that farmer as Certified Organic with no sanctions and no explanation, the Regional Council may rightly be concerned and withhold certification approval of all farmers in the Local Group.

Another example could be that the Regional Council feels that some individual farmers' Peer Appraisals were faked or handled in a sloppy fashion. While the Regional Council cannot hold-up the certification status of those specific farms, they can and SHOULD withhold certification approval from the Local Group as a whole.

- n. In case if the group has no access to internet and computer The Regional Council enters summary information for every local group into a PGS website database and sends a paper certificate certifying the *individual farm*.
- o. All issued certificates bear unique ID (UID) code for traceability and access to the entire information on production system, peer appraisal and decisionsystem of the group.

#### **Step 4**

- a. Zonal Council and PGS-India Secretariat also undertake independent supervision and communicate results to RC through website.
- b. A small percentage of farms/ products are randomly selected for random pesticide residue testing each year and the results are placed on the website. Adverse results on both counts may impact the Certification status of the Local Group as a whole.
- c. Pesticide Residue testing norms to be finalized by NEC and shall be coordinated by PGS-India Secretariat. It is the Regional Council and the Local Group that has to decide what to do about a positive result. RCs need to communicate the residue result to group and ask it to undertake corrective action and sanction non-complying farmers. In case if group fails to undertake corrective action and fails to sanction non-complying farmers RC can suspend/ cancel the certification and delete all yields/ produce from their stock on PGS-India website.

### **5.3 Certification of Individual Producer by Regional Council**

#### **Step 1**

- a. Regional Council receives registration applications (on-line or off-line or in hard copy). Check details of individual farmer.

- b. Finalize working modalities and if required enter into an agreement including payment of fee for services provided. If data uploading work is to be done by RC then finalize necessary modalities for the same.
- c. On being found adequate and finalization of working modalities/ agreement etc approve registration on-line.
- d. Provide user ID and password on PGS website.
- e. Provide copy of PGS standards and operational manual guidelines.

### **Step 2**

- f. On receipt of request if possible arrange for peer appraisal by nominating peer appraisers from nearby group.
- g. In case if no group is nearby, then physically inspect the farm on an annual basis and complete the peer appraisal sheet. All stages of production shall be inspected and producer need to provide full access to the RC inspector.
- h. Submit appraisal form duly signed by the inspector/ peer appraisers and producer to the Regional Council. Upload report on the website.
- i. Regional Council checks for compliance and identify non-compliances (if any) and ask the operator to file compliance report.

### **Step 3**

- j. Take into consideration previous non-compliances, complaints and investigation findings if any;
- k. On being found compliant to PGS-India standards and norms, approve grant of certification and issue certificate.
- l. Scope certificate is issued with name and crop details including estimated production.
- m. After the harvest, producer uploads the actual yields. RC can verify the uploaded actual yields on-line and if satisfied approve the yields minus self-consumption with lot no and packaging/ bulk etc. for sale and issue of TCs, if applicable.
- n. On yield approval by RC, TCs can be generated on-line. TCs can be issued in one go for entire produce of the individual member or for small lots number of times.
- o. RCs need to guide the operators so that certified organic products are sold with compliance to the Food Safety norms as regulated by FSSAI, suitable information and training can be provided by RC as capacity building for LGs.
- p. In case if sales are happening between two PGS-India registered operators then there is no need for paper TC, online TC will facilitate transfer of stock from seller operator to buyer operator.

## **5.4 Certification Process by Off-farm Processing Units**

- a. All off-farm processing units including primary and secondary processing, handling, storage/ warehousing, packaging and trading shall apply in prescribed format to Regional Council authorized for off-farm processing and

- handling, giving full details of raw materials to be used, sources, certification status of each raw material, process flow sheet, recipes, ratio of input to output, details of machines, procedures for their maintenance, contamination control measures and documentation pattern to ensure audit trail.
- b. Regional council shall evaluate the application, and on being found appropriate agrees to registration
  - c. Regional Council and operator enter into an agreement to maintain confidentiality of the manufacturing process of operator by Regional Council and commitment of operator to adhere to PGS-India standards.
  - d. Regional Council and operator agrees on the fee structure, inspection cost of the RC and payment modalities.
  - e. Regional Council after getting the payment approves registration, registration is granted for one year and needs to be renewed annually.
  - f. Each registered processing/ handling units shall be physically inspected at least once a year by the RC preferably at a time when processing is in operation;
  - g. On being satisfied Regional Council grants approval to operator for the processes applied and approved by the RC along with production estimates based upon annual system plan uploaded.
  - h. A processing unit approved by the authorized Regional Council can undertake processing of PGS certified material belonging to PGS-groups.
  - i. Approved processing unit shall receive all raw material with PGS transaction certificate. In case of non-availability of PGS certified raw material, NPOP certified raw material can also be used along with the transaction certificate. But in any case, the final processed product will be PGS certified.
  - j. All steps shall be taken to ensure that organic products do not come in contact with non-organic material or prohibited materials
  - k. Entire processing shall adhere to the PGS-India food processing standards.
  - l. All additives, processing aids and preservatives shall be used as per the approved list provided in National Standards for Organic Production (NSOP) under NPOP
  - m. Process flow documentation is maintained and at all times there must be a balance between input and output ratio as approved by the Regional Council.
  - n. Entire processing information to be uploaded on the PGS-India website.
  - o. Finished products will be uploaded on the PGS-India website along with the Lot no/ batch no and packaging details. In the absence of this information no TCs will be issued
  - p. Finally, processed and packed material shall be sold along with the transaction certificate.
  - q. Distributors and retailers, not registered under PGS-India programme shall keep the copy of transaction certificate along with their purchase records for verification by Food Safety Officers (if required).
  - r. Transaction certificate shall be generated on-line from PGS-India website.

## **5.5 Certification Process by Regional Council for off-farm processing units**

- a. On receipt of application RC shall verify sources of raw materials to be used, certification status of each raw material, process flow sheet, recipes, ratio of input to output, details of machines, procedures for their maintenance, contamination control measures and documentation pattern to ensure audit trail.
- b. Regional council if required, seek more details to fully understand the process and on being satisfied grant registration
- c. Regional Council undertake physical inspection of the unit and all its facilities. Operator is bound to provide full access to the representative of Regional Council for compliance assessment.
- d. Physical inspections shall be based on predetermined format to maintain uniformity and inspector shall ensure inspection of each and every step of processing including raw material inventories, process flow, machines used, contamination control measures, storages, ratio of input to output. Inspector shall also run an audit trail from receipt of raw material to finished product;
- e. Each registered processing/ handling units shall be physically inspected at least once a year by the RC preferably at a time when processing is in operation;
- f. On being satisfied Regional Council grants approval to the operator for the processes applied and approved by the RC and issues scope certificate with name of products approved along with estimated yields.
- g. Entire processing information to be uploaded on the PGS-India website shall be monitored by the RC from time to time.
- h. RCs shall be approving products on being uploaded by the operators and on receipt of requests
- i. Actual production needs to be uploaded by the operator from time to time and RC need to verify the actual production stock at repeated intervals.
- j. On approval of stock by RC, TC can be generated on-line from PGS-India website
- k. Finally, processed and packed material shall be sold along with the transaction certificate.
- l. Distributors and retailers, not registered under PGS-India programme shall keep the copy of transaction certificate along with their purchase records for verification by Food Safety Officers (if required).

## **5.6 Certification process for large contiguous Traditional/ Default organic area**

### **5.6.1 Certification process by Village Council/ Gram Panchayat**

- a. Define the area to be brought under certification and prepare maps.
- b. Prepare farmer-wise documentation, i.e. Name and family details of farmer, land details, livestock details, individual farmers land location in the map. All farmers will be taken into account and the entire defined area to be covered.
- c. Create village-wise group keeping one village one group concept
- d. Obtain PGS-India application form and PGS pledge from all the farmers

- e. Ensure that there is no synthetic input use history in the entire defined area at least for last 3 years and also that no licenses have been issued for sale of synthetic inputs.
- f. Request the State Government to issue necessary documents of the area being synthetic input usage free from last 3 years
- g. Make an application to the Regional Council with copy of all the above papers for registration. Applications to be made village-wise/ Gram Panchayat-wise
- h. Submit applications from all Gram Panchayats and villages from the defined area. Only one RC to be selected for one area.
- i. Undertake first peer appraisal through local farmers peer committee in each village and fill consolidated peer appraisal form.
- j. Submit all details to the concerned Regional Council and Zonal Council
- k. Upload required data into PGS-India portal
- l. Facilitate PGS-NEC appointed committee for inspection and verification of the traditional organic status and for recommendation on conversion status.
- m. On receipt of organic certification the village can undertake marketing of certified organic produce under one umbrella and under one brand name.
- n. Transaction certificates for sale can be generated from PGS portal under the common village name. Certificates and TCs in large area certification will be issued village group-wise. Individual farmers and processing units shall not qualify under large area certification.
- o. For renewal of certification every year at least one peer appraisal is done involving all the farmers and consolidated peer appraisal sheet, village-wise is prepared and submitted to the Regional Council

#### **5.6.2 Certification process by Regional Council**

- a. RC receives the application from all the Gram Panchayats/ villages.
- b. Verifies the authenticity and completeness of the documents
- c. Participate in some village's peer appraisal (at least 20% of one particular area)
- d. Participate in PGS-NEC committee verification programme and be part of the decision making process.
- e. On receipt of recommendation of the committee and on completion of first peer appraisal decide on the certification status of the area and recommend for the approval of PGS-NEC.
- f. On receipt of PGS-NEC approval, grant certification to the entire area with list of villages, their area, livestock and number of farmers/ producers.
- g. Subsequent renewal of certification is granted on receipt of annual peer appraisal and random physical verification by RC. RC need to ensure that each and every village is physically inspected at least once in two years for standard compliance assessment.

#### **5.7 Verification of certification by consumers**

National PGS-India website will be the database for the entire programme. To make the system transparent, entire operational database will be kept in public domain. With

access to Local group Code, unique ID code of a particular product, consumers will be able to access the information of the producer, processor or trader. As the UID code provided on the label will be issued by the last end operator details of certification will be visible only for that operator in public domain. In case if consumer or buyer would like to have full traceability record then consumers can approach the RC for Traceability. Name and address of RC is given on the Transaction certificate.

RCs are duty bound to provide traceability record to consumers on request.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Time Lines, Complaints and Appeals**

#### **6.1 Time lines**

##### **6.1.1 For Local Group**

- a. Four group meetings, at least two in each season.
- b. One training, any time during the year. First training within 6 months of registration
- c. Peer appraisal to be done during crop growth period starting from 15 days of sowing till 15 days before harvest.
- d. In case of plantation crops also two peer appraisals to be done one during flowering season and another after six months.
- e. Uploading of peer appraisal summary sheet till 7 days before harvest date
- f. Uploading of actual yields within 60 days of harvest
- g. Time limits for holding stocks – Within the validity period of scope certificate
- h. If no TCs are issued and stock remains unsold the PGS-India website will delete the stock in auto mode after 12 months from the date of harvest
- i. Perishable commodities such as livestock products, vegetables and fruits etc can be traded on daily or weekly basis as per the discretion of the group and yields uploaded on PGS-India website on weekly or fortnightly basis and TCs are also issued in batch mode on weekly or fortnightly basis.

##### **6.1.2 For Regional Councils**

- a. Acceptance of LG/ individual farmer/ processor application by Regional Council within 30 days of date of submission
- b. If LG request for endorsement then complete first inspection and endorsement within 60 days and grant registration
- c. Approval of certification decision, within 30 days of submission of peer appraisal summary sheet or within 15 days on resubmission of certification decision after return by RC
- d. Grant of certification in case of individual farmers/ processor and handler within 30 days of physical inspection
- e. Approval of actual yields – within 15 days of uploading actual yields by LG
- f. Physical inspection of LGs – Within 12 months for the first time and subsequently at least once in 24 months.
- g. Physical inspection of individual farmers/ processors and handling units – At least once a year
- h. Approval of annual system plan in case of processors and handlers – within 15 days of submission

### **6.1.3 For Zonal Councils**

- a. Monitoring and physical evaluation of RCs – at least once in 12 months
- b. Submission of annual report on RCs and their certification management – Once a year (during January-February) for the period from January to December every year
- c. Sample collection and residue analysis – as per directions of PGS Secretariat and PGS-NEC
- d. Disposal of appeal of LGs against certification denial by RC – with in 30 days of appeal submission
- e. Investigation on complaints and submission of reports to PGS Secretariat – within 60 days of receipt of complaint

## **6.2 Complaints and Appeals**

### **6.2.1 Complaints by public**

In case of any complaint by any person/ agency of public, consumers, trade body, retailer or trader etc against the actions of LG or RC on issues related to certification under PGS-India programme they can lodge their complaint as follows:

- a. To concerned RC against the functioning of Local group, individual producer or processor/ handler
- b. To concerned Zonal Council and PGS Secretariat against the functioning of RCs
- c. To ZC/ RC in cases of misuse of PGS-India logo
- d. To ZC/RC in cases of adverse residue testing report

### **6.2.2 Complaints and Appeal by Local groups**

- a. To full group body by the individual farmer member in cases of certification denial by certification committee or against adverse peer appraisers report
- b. To concerned Regional Council and/or Zonal Council against arbitrary decisions of LG members or against functioning of LG against PGS-India norms
- c. To Zonal Council against certification denial by RC or against practices adopted by RC falling under the ambit of conflict of interest, impartiality and independence
- d. To PGS Secretariat if appeals are not addressed by Zonal Council in time

### **6.2.3 Complaints and Appeals by RCs**

- a. To PGS Secretariat against Zonal Councils, monitoring and review process
- b. To PGS-NEC against disciplinary actions taken by PGS Secretariat

### **6.2.4 Disposal of appeals**

All appeals to be disposed-off within a period of 30 days from the date of receipt. In cases if any complaint or appeal necessitates investigation, then appeals to be disposed-off within 90 days of receipt of such complaint.

## CHAPTER 7

### Grant of Logo and Labelling

#### 6.1 Grant of Logo and unique certificate ID code

On getting approved from Regional Council, Local Group can use scope certificate for publicity, trade enquiry or for putting into trade literature and also can use the granted PGS logo. Scope certificate will have a unique number, identifying the RC and Local Group along with the farmers. Each certificate will also list out the area, crops and products certified during the year as Annexure. The packets or containers of PGS certified products along can be printed with PGS logo with UID code.

Logo on the product is required to be printed with the unique ID code. Consumers can access the authenticity of the certificate and name and address of the last end handler by entering the UID code in consumer verification window on PGS-India website. For traceability of the entire value chain consumers need to contact Regional Council along with UID code.

The right of use of Logo rests with the registered group, farmer, processing and handling operator. This right is not transferable unless the last point of value chain before the consumer is covered as part of the process of traceability and approved by the PGS-NEC along the structure of PGS-India.

#### 6.2 Validity of Scope Certificate

The validity of scope certificate shall be 12 months from the date of decision approval by the RC. Scope certificate shall be issued as per seasons (kharif, rabi and Zaid) subject to submission of timely peer appraisal summary sheets and other requirements such as group meetings and trainings.

#### 6.3 Separate logo for PGS organic and PGS under conversion status

Two separate logos shall be granted for PGS organic and PGS under conversion as follows:

**PGS**  
**Organic**



# PGS

## Green



### 6.4 Conditions for use of logo

PGS certified products can be labelled with PGS logo along with unique ID code provided on the scope certificate, only when they are packed under the supervision of registered PGS operator (farmer group, certified farmers and off-farm processor).

Logo is to be used only on quantity certified as per the details provided in the scope certificate and yield/ production duly approved by the RC.

Use of logo without unique ID code is not allowed

Separate logos need to be used for organic and in-conversion products

### 6.5 Labelling

- i. Single ingredient products may be labelled as "PGS-India Organic" when all standard requirements have been and certified.
- ii. Multi ingredient products where 100% of all ingredients are of organic origin, products may be labelled as "Organic" when all standard requirements have been met in respect of all ingredients and certified.
- iii. Multi ingredient products where not all ingredients, including additives, are of organic origin may be labelled in the following way :
  - Where a minimum of 95% by weight of its ingredients of agricultural origin are organic including allowed additives, processing aids and preservatives (as allowed under Appendix 5 of NPOP), products may be labelled as "organic".
  - Where less than 95% but not less than 70% by weight of its ingredients of agricultural origin are organic, products may not be called "organic" and can only be labelled as "made with organic ingredients".
- iv. Labelling shall convey clear and accurate information on the organic status of the product.
- v. Products granted with PGS-Organic certification shall use PGS-India organic logo.
- vi. Products under in-conversion to organic and granted with PGS-Green certification shall use PGS-Green logo. Such products shall not be claimed as organic and only the indication "Under Conversion to Organic" can be used.
- vii. The name and address of the company legally responsible for processing and packing shall be mentioned on the label.

- viii. Logo of the Government programme (such as PKVY of MOVCNDR etc) may also be indicated on the label.
- ix. Logo of the Regional Council, certifying the product shall also be affixed on the product.
- x. In addition labelling shall comply all general and product specific requirements as prescribed under Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulation 2011 and Food Safety and Standard (Organic Produce) Regulation 2017.
- xi. All PGS-India certified products needs to comply the general requirements of the FSS Act 2006 as notified from time to time by FSSAI.

## CHAPTER 8

### Non-Compliance Guidelines

#### “Catalogue of Sanctions”

##### 7.1 Sanction Catalogue for Farmers/ Producers by Local Group

Sanctions are given to farmers by the Local Group as a whole OR by the Local Group’s certification committee (if one was created).

Situations	Type of sanction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Missing Attendance at a required Field Day</li> <li>● Unsatisfactory production system</li> </ul>	Verbal warning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Minor violations of the standards or regulations</li> <li>● Repeated written warning for similar problem</li> <li>● Not responding to approval conditions</li> </ul>	<i>Short Suspension of Certification</i> Period determined by the length of time it takes for the Grower to get a new peer inspection/ consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Repeated minor violations</li> <li>● Clear violation of the standards not threatening the organic integrity of the product</li> </ul>	<i>Suspension</i> for a fixed period after until farmer(s) take corrective actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear violation of the standards threatening the organic integrity of the product eg: use of prohibited pesticides or synthetic fertilisers.</li> </ul>	<i>Longer term suspension for 1 year</i> <i>Farmer may be moved back into “In Conversion” status</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Repeated violations leading to penalties, suspension or withdrawal of approval.</li> <li>● Obvious fraud</li> <li>● Intentional obstruction of the inspection e.g. denying peer appraisers, statutory authority, and Regional Council access.</li> <li>● Refusal to respond to written requests for additional information</li> </ul>	<i>Termination of participation</i> Farmer(s) banned from PGS membership either permanently or for a set period of time.

##### ***The Right of Appeal***

The farmer's can make an appeal to the Regional Council within 2 weeks of the date of notification of the sanction by the Local Group OR to the Local Group as a whole if there is an certification committee that implemented the sanction.

## 7.2 Sanction Catalogue for Local Group by Regional Council

Sanction given to Local Group as a whole by the Regional Council for repeated non-compliances or violations of standards.

Situations	Type of sanction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incomplete documentation</li> <li>● Not completing the quota of quarterly meetings and training</li> <li>● Untimely peer appraisal, delay in submission of summary sheets</li> <li>● Failing in timely uploading of the data on website</li> </ul>	Minor - Warning and advice for future compliance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Violations of procedures or regulations detected and LG not taking corrective measures</li> <li>● Repeated non-compliances and casual approach for compliance</li> <li>● Not responding to approval conditions/ advisories</li> </ul>	Major - Withholding of decision approval, return of decision till compliances are done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Repeated minor violations</li> <li>● Clear violation of the standards but not threatening the organic integrity of the product</li> </ul>	Major - Denial of certification endorsement or suspension of certification for short period, withholding issue of TCs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear violation of the standards by the members and LG not taking any action and forwarding the decision with incomplete peer appraisals</li> <li>● LG decisions are grossly incorrect</li> </ul>	Major - Return the decision, deny certification endorsement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Repeated violations leading to suspension or withdrawal of approval.</li> <li>● Obvious fraud by the group</li> <li>● Refusal to respond to written requests for additional information</li> <li>● Pesticide residue testing becoming positive for pesticides</li> <li>● Non-continuation and reporting of peer appraisal for more than 12 months</li> </ul>	<p>Certification denial Downgrading the status of the group Deleting the entire produce from PGS-India website for blocking the sale Termination of group either permanently or for a set period of time.</p> <p>Downgrading of certification status to start of conversion period and review with physical inspection within 6 months of [eer appraisal submission</p>

### ***The Right of Appeal***

The Local Group can make an appeal to the Zonal Council on the actions of Regional Council within 2 weeks of the date of notification of the sanction by the Regional Council. In case if no response is received from ZC in 15 days' time then LG can approach PGS Secretariat.

### 7.3 Sanction Catalogue for Regional Council

Sanctions are imposed on the Regional Councils by the PGS Secretariat

Situations	Type of Non-compliance and sanction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not adhering time lines in acceptance of registration,</li> <li>● Refusing for endorsement on LG's request</li> <li>● Not providing documents, guidelines</li> <li>● Not providing any capacity building support and not participating in any peer appraisal of LGs</li> </ul>	Minor – Warning. Multiple warnings may affect renewal adversely
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Failure in timely certification endorsement</li> <li>● Wrong/ casual certification decision</li> <li>● Detection of faults in certification endorsement/ service during monitoring</li> <li>● Not completing the quota of annual Monitoring</li> </ul>	Major – Warning, followed by defined timeline for compliance Repeated non-compliance may result in suspension for a limited period of time Ban on registering new groups and or transfer of groups to other RC.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Repeated casual/ wrong certification process with time delays</li> <li>● Complaints from LGs and trade partners</li> <li>● Detection of conflict of interest or failure in demonstrating independence and impartiality</li> </ul>	Major – Temporary suspension of authorisation by PGS Secretariat followed by investigation with report to NEC for final decision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Not registration of required no of groups for 12 months and no certification activity for 12 months</li> </ul>	Blocking of access to PGS website by PGS Secretariat and decision on cancellation of authorization by NEC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Major violation of PGS procedures against the spirit of the programme, activities leading to disrepute to the programme, colluding LGs and operators for gross violation of PGS-India rules and threatening the integrity</li> </ul>	Temporary suspension of authorisation by PGS Secretariat followed by investigation with report to NEC for final decision on termination.

#### ***The Right of Appeal***

The RCs can make an appeal to the PGS-NEC within 2 weeks of the date of notification of the sanction. In case of non-satisfaction RCs can appeal to the PGS-NAC.



## **Approved Guideline for Empanelment of Facilitating Agencies/Service providers.**

“Facilitating Agencies are organizations “that may be helping the PGS-India farmers in handholding, cluster formation, capacity building, marketing, implementation of PKVY/other organic farming schemes/programmes etc.”

### **Eligibility Criteria for Facilitating Agencies’/Service providers’ Empanelment:**

1. Legally registered agency
2. Experience Requirement:
  - Essential: (Any two of the followings)**
    - (i) Minimum 03 years’ experience of Applicant Agency or its personals in– Organic Farming Management, Value addition, knowledge of Certification Systems, Marketing.
    - (ii) Minimum 01-year experience in FPO/FPC/Organic Cluster formation.
    - (iii) In house competence in Capacity Building of stake holders in various aspects of organic farming.
  - Desirable:**
    - (i) Experience in GIS and Remote Sensing.
3. Functional office situated in the area of operation.
4. Adequate infrastructure & digital support system.
5. Sufficient working personals with proven competence in earlier mentioned fields.
6. *Exclusion:* Any start up doing innovative work in Agriculture, with at least 01 year experience having bearing with organic farming promotion.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Facilitating Agencies/Service providers *inter alia* may include-**

- Deployment of man power as Lead Resource Persons (LRPs) for effective implementation of programme.
- Formation of Group /Cluster through mobilization of interested farmers.
- Collection of basic data of farmers (such as identity card, land details, bank account detail for DBT, farm history etc. as per requirement of PGS-India).
- Help in online registration of Local groups on PGS-India portal.
- Facilitate local group in Data Uploading and Management on PGS-India portal/State ICT network (like farmers’ detail, farm history, group summary sheet, peer appraisal etc.).
- Capacity building of Farmers/ Local Groups through *Trainings*, group *Meetings* and *Exposure Visits* on –
  - Organic farming activities
  - PGS-India Standards,

- PGS Group Operations, Documentation, Peer appraisal, Certification decision
  - Institutional development/FPO/FPC making and their professional management.
- 
- Assist the farmers in preparation of –
    - annual plan of action
    - packing, marketing, logo preparation etc.
    - suitable *on-farm strategies* for nutrient and pest management
  - Circulation of PGS-India literature in local/regional language.
  - Preparation and submission of periodic reports.
  - Facilitating market linkage, Introducing local marketing initiatives to ensure that PGS-India certified produce finds market as premium produce in local and city markets.
  - Helping States in *Brand building* activities and projecting States potential in national and International trade fairs within the country.
  - Participation in meetings and Peer inspections with Local Groups, facilitating other Satke holders to take active participation in PGS-India system.
  - Periodic monitoring of functioning of Local groups and time to time issuing of advisory to farmers.
  - Facilitating the Local Groups/Farmers for –
    - Transportation arrangements for Marketing of organic produce.
    - Data entry and marketing transactions on jaivikkheti web portal.
    - Food processing and handling.
  - Ensure access of portal data to public to build trust and credibility in the system.
  - Preparation of geo referenced maps in case of contiguous area certification.