

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) On Participatory Guarantee Systems for India (PGS-India)

General questions about PGS-India guarantee system

1. What is PGS?

Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) is a quality assurance initiative that is locally relevant, emphasize 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".

2. How PGS differs from third party certification?

As the name indicates the PGS is a participatory approach, wherein farmers living in similar geographical area (in the same of close-by villages) inspect and verify each other's process and confirms the adoption of standards, while third party certification (TPC) system is based on verification of process by an independent third party. PGS being participatory does not require any third party and is low cost, while third party certification is cost intensive and is generally unaffordable by small and marginal farmers.

PGS guarantee system are locally focused and are ideal for local and domestic markets, while TPC systems are meant for taking the produce in international markets.

3. How PGS-India standards are different from National Standards of Organic Production (NSOP) of NPOP?

PGS-India standards are the same as that of NSOP under NPOP. Any amendment or modification in NSOP is deemed to have been incorporated in PGS-India standards. For interpretation of any part or section of PGS-India standards NSOP must be referred.

4. What are advantages of PGS over third party certification?

Important advantages of PGS-India over third party certification system are as follows:

- a. The procedures are simple; documents are basic and use the local language understandable to farmers.

- b. All the members are local and known to each other. Being themselves practicing organic farmers have high degree of understanding on day-to-day knowledge or acquaintance of the farm.
- c. Peer appraisers are among the group and live in the same village, therefore have better access to surveillance
- d. Peer appraisal instead of third party inspections reduces cost
- e. Mutual recognition and support between Regional PGS groups ensures better networking for processing and marketing.
- f. Empowers farmers with increased capacity building
- g. Bring consumers to the farm without the need of middleman
- h. Unlike grower group certification system, PGS offer every farmer with individual certificate and each farmer is free to market its own produce independent of group.
- i. Consumers and buyers are often involved in production and verification process
- j. Random residue testing at regular intervals ensures the integrity and increases the trust.

5. What are limitations of PGS?

PGS certification is only for farmers or communities that can organize and perform as a group within the village or in close-by villages with continuous territory and is applicable on, on-farm activities comprising of crop production, processing and livestock rearing (including bee keeping) and off-farm processing of their direct products under their supervision.

Individual farmers or group of farmers having less than 5 members are not covered under PGS. They either have to opt for third party certification or join the existing PGS local group.

6. Does PGS-India programme is a Government approved certification system?

Yes PGS-India program is a Government program being operated by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation under National Project on Organic Farming.

7. How PGS-India program is different from other PGS programs being operated in other countries?

Although PGS-India program is also based on the IFOAM's fundamental guiding principles of participation, shared vision, trust, transparency and horizontality but it differs from all other forms in respect of its institutional structure and national networking. Institutional surveillance and random residue testing by the Government is an added component which further strengthens the trust of consumers in its reliability.

8. How PGS-India program is different from an NGO based PGS of PGSOIC?

PGS program run by PGSOIC is a similar guarantee system, but is operated by a group of NGOs. It is not Government approved guarantee system and can be best referred as private labeling initiative.

9. Can PGS-India certified products be exported to other countries?

PGS-India certification program is applicable for local and domestic market. PGS certified products cannot be exported to other countries as organic.

10. Can an individual farmer get PGS certification?

No, individual farmer cannot be certified under PGS-India program. PGS-India is a group certification program. Individual farmers either need to become member of the existing PGS-India group or create their own group with minimum of 5 members or need to opt for third party certification.

11. Does farmer groups can be trusted for their self declared process

Yes. In PGS-India system it is a group of producers which collectively certify their produce based on each others' verification. This assessment system is further endorsed by an institutional system (RC) supported by nationwide Government system.

12. Whether consumers, traders or other members away from the PGS local group can participate in certification process?

Yes they can participate in peer appraisal and decision making, (not mandatory). PGS-India provides for their participation to increase the trust.