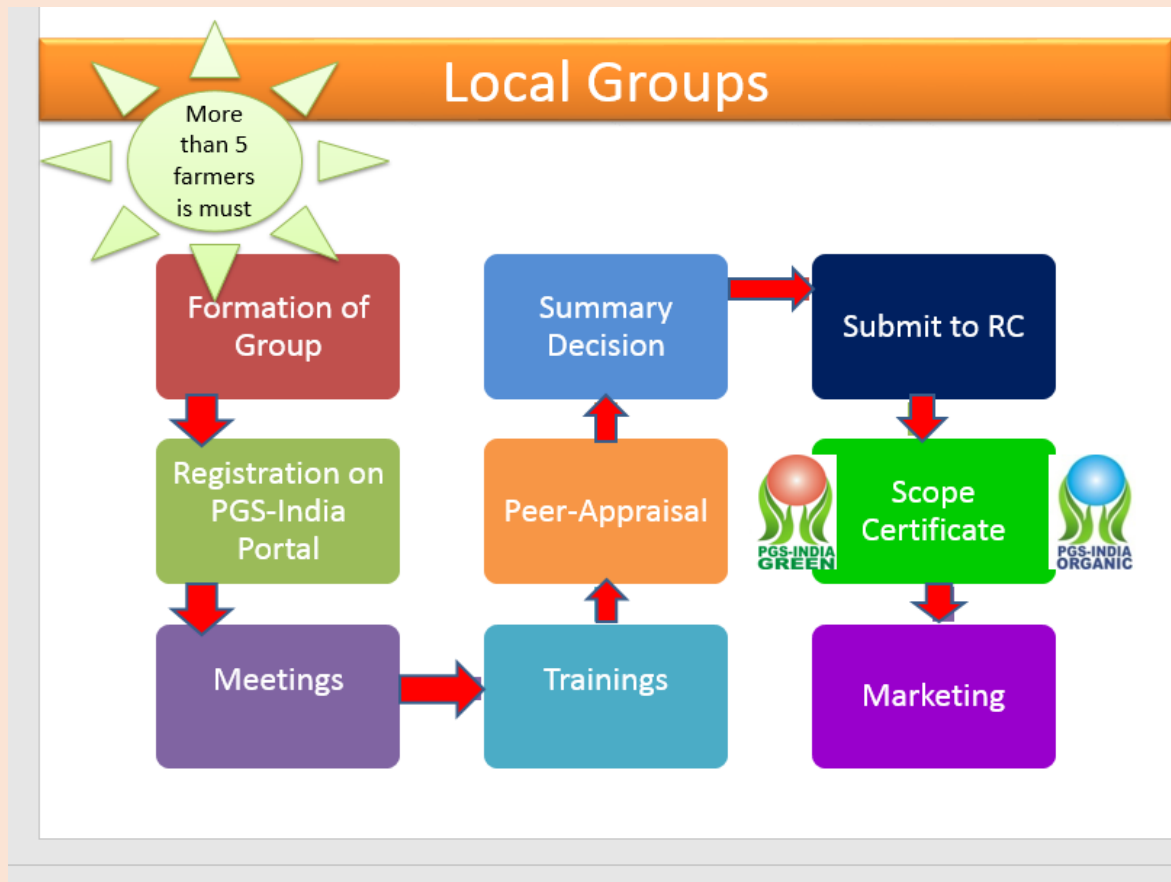


Introduction to revised Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) – INDIA Organic certification Programme

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Introduction to revised Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) – INDIA Organic certification Programme

Dr. Gagnesh Sharma and Dr. Srinivasamurthy R

Introduction:

At present in India the growing demand for organic produce is gradually increasing and consumers are looking for the certified products for trusting quality of organic produce. At present in India two types of certification system exists namely 1. Third Party certification (NPOP) system which is governed by APEDA, Ministry of Commerce which is mainly focused for export purpose and 2. PGS-INDIA



certification system which is governed by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare mainly focused for local / domestic market purpose. The third party certification bears high fees and more documentation as a result small and marginal farmers are not able to offer for certification. To make it more easy, affordable and simplest system of certification which can be accessible by more number of small and marginal farmers to adopt certification and further sale in domestic market, Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)-INDIA organic certification system was launched in 2011 by Department of Agriculture and Cooperation & Farmers Welfare, Government of India, it is an alternative to Third party (NPOP) certification system. The programme is implemented mainly through National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF), Ghaziabad and its nine Regional Centres (Ghaziabad (HQ), Bangalore, Nagpur, Jabalpur, Panchkula, Bhubaneswar, Imphal, Bihar & Gujarat) as Zonal Councils. NCOF is a PGS-INDIA Secretariat of the PGS-INDIA System, and Director, NCOF as the Executive Secretary and has to play an important role in implementation of all activities of PGS- INDIA programme as per the PGS guidelines.

About PGS

PGS are quality assurance initiatives that are locally relevant, emphasize the participation of stakeholders, including producers and consumers and operate outside the frame of third party certification. PGS is a process whereby people in similar situations (in this case small holder producers) in some way assess the production practices of their peers. This process can be formal or informal.

PGS-India Guiding Principles

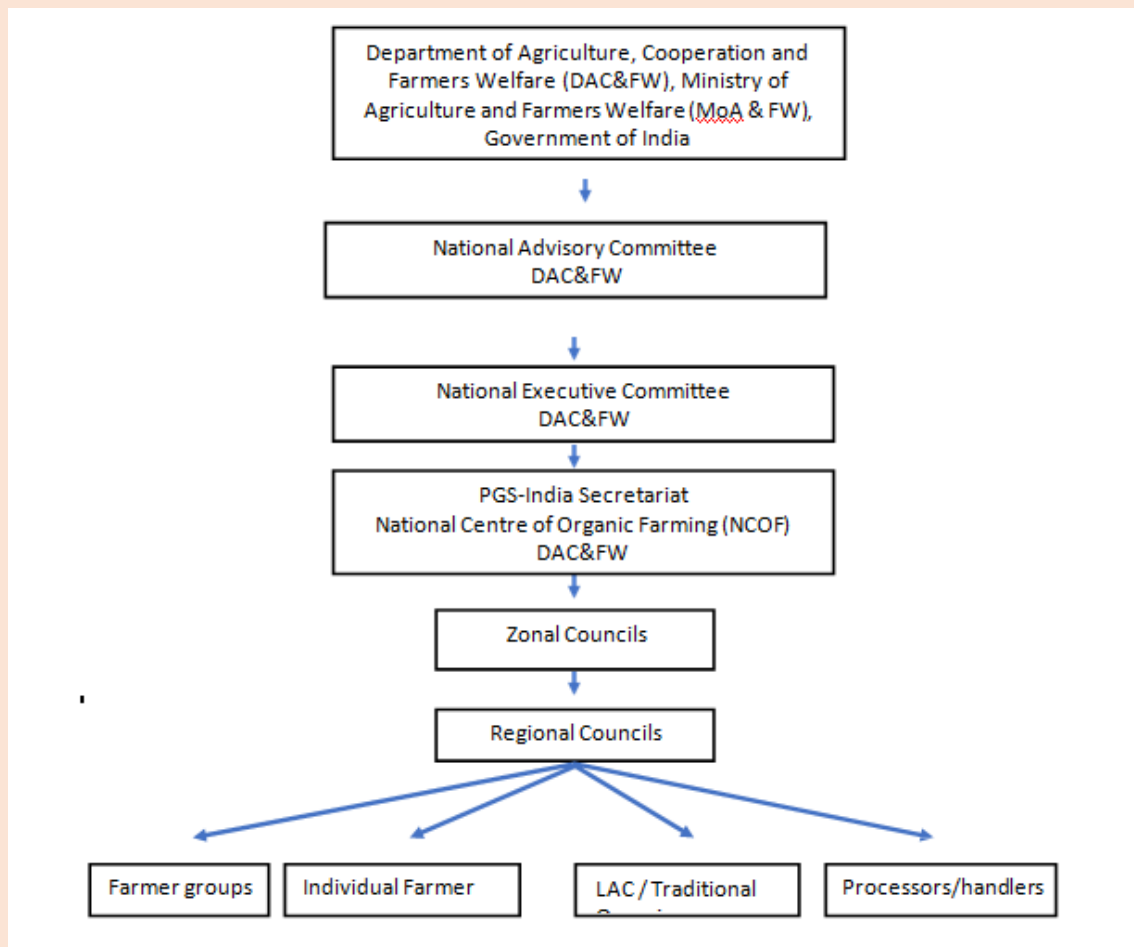
In tune with the international trends and IFOAM's PGS Guidelines, PGS India system is also based on participatory approach, a shared vision, transparency, trust, Horizontality and networking. In addition, it gives PGS movement a National recognition and institutional structure without affecting the spirit of PGS. Participation is an essential and dynamic part of PGS. Key stakeholders (producers, consumers, retailers and traders and others such as NGOs) are engaged in the initial design, and then in the operation of the PGS. In the operation of a PGS, stakeholders (including producers) are involved in decision making and take essential decisions about the operation of the PGS itself. In addition, the producers are engaged in a structured ongoing learning process, which helps them to improve what they do. The learning process is usually 'hands-on' and might involve field days or workshops.

PGS-India Philosophy

The philosophy of NPOF sponsored PGS-India programme stipulates that it is:

- A farmer empowering approach
- Based on Farmer group declaration and consumer's trust
- No intermediaries
- Group will be supreme, with inspections on each other.
- Entire information to be in public domain
- Scope for product testing for chemical residue provides additional trust
- Individual farmer gets certificate with PGS number and farmer sub-code
- Whole group / Village get one certificate with PGS scope certification number
- Processer and handlers also get certificate with PGS scope certification number
- End to end traceable and transparent enabled system

Institution Structure of PGS-India Programme



Scopes of PGS-INDIA organic certification system

To ensure entry of individual farm/Group/large area 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 and online marketing and traceability system. There are three types of module developed at present as given below

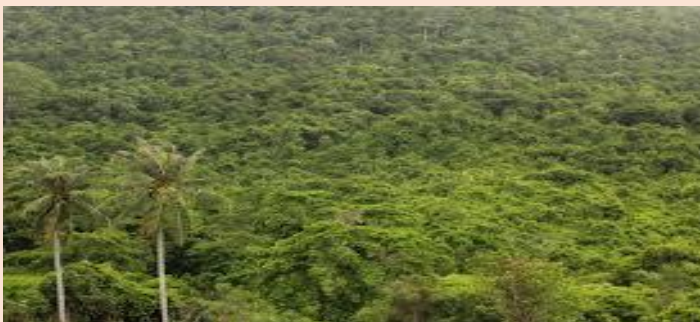
1. Crop Production Module
2. Processing and Handling Module
3. Live Stock Module and others

1. **Crop Production module:** The complete certification operation under PGS-INDIA web portal has been made functional at present. under crop production modules and there are three categories for which certificates will be issued by RC and the details as follows;

- A. Large Area Certification (LAC)
- B. Individual Group certification
- C. Local Group certification:

A. LAC certification

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 that** 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

B. Individual certification:

Who can register for Individual certification?

At the beginning where farmer is interested to undertake organic farming in a place in which other farmers are not ready to join group or no local groups nearby villages present or isolated farmer away from other farmers, in that case, any individual farmer have a scope to register under Individual certification system.



What is condition for Individual registered farmer?

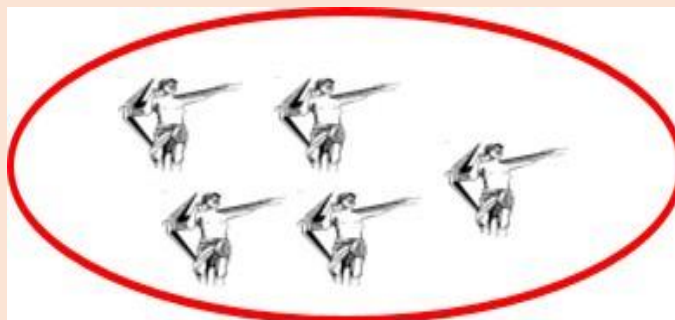
Farmer should make all out efforts to create groups and become part of PGS-India groups as and when possible within two years. Failure which results him mandatory to join with other already existed PGS local groups nearest to him or his area / Village.

Who will endorse and Monitor Individual farmer?

Regional Councils can assist to perform individual farmer for registration, documentation, verification, endorsement, monitoring and over all other certification standards and compliance requirements as per PGS-India guidelines.

C. Local Group certification:

A Local/farmer Group formation is done comprising of minimum of 5 Members and maximum is any number as per group choice. People in similar situations (farmers) located in the same village or close by villages or adjacent land holding who can interact regularly with each other are facilitated to form a local group. Participation of women farmers shall be ensured and



also ensured that at least a few (25%) members are well versed with the PGS/NPOP Standards or have undergone training on PGS guarantee Certification by RCOFS / NCOF / RC or part of the core team of other functional PGS group. It is compulsory that each farmer signed the PGS pledge and LG made agreement with RC on stamp paper. No restriction on the size of holding, one single member should not exceed 50% of the total land under the group. Parallel production and part conversion is not allowed, Entire farm with livestock should bring under organic management within 24 months, otherwise shall continue to remain under conversion

Steps involved in PGS-INDIA Organic certification:

- a) **Formation of local group (LG):** A farmer group will be formed with Minimum 5 members and there is no maximum number limit. But an ideal group may be consisting of 20-25 farmer members which support for easy operation, understanding and effective in functioning.
- b) **Selection of Group leader /Lead Resource Person:** One well educated farmer among the members of group will be selected upon all consent of members of whole group itself. The group leader should be keep rotating as and when required in Local Groups, and maintain harmony and promote growth of leadership.

- c) **Documents collection:** Documents in a prescribed format (as per PGS Guidelines) are required to be collected for registration and approval from regional council. The documents collection is one-time exercise for life time certification process/registration process. All the documents collected will be uploaded in PGS webportal online and RC will approve online and activate thereby each local groups get Unique ID.
- d) **Selection of Regional Council:** The RC authorized by NEC-PGS India with whom local groups are interested / familiar / near to them can be chosen by the choice of farmers itself. Submit all the relevance document and get registered and activated by RC. Prior to registration, local groups must interact with RC and undergo proper training to understand PGS system and its operational requirements. LG can shift to an any RC at any time during certification process. Only if the RC is found non-functional or not performing their duties as per PGS guideline, and not guiding LGs for certification process and delaying issue of certificates. LG has to intimate to RC with reason for not continuing to with them before joining with other RC.
- e) **Registration with Regional Council:** Each Individual farmers has to submit prescribed registration formats namely Application Form, Organic Pledge, Farm History Sheet, Identity proof, Identity card, Bank A/C details (Only if required) and land records/details (Pani/Patta/Naksha/GPS). Group leader on behalf of group members has to submit prescribed formats namely application Form, Agreement copy, Terms of Reference for Operation, Endorsement (LG/RC/State can endorse) of group to RC.
- f) **Endorsement:** The authenticity of farmers belongs to village and their active engagement in agriculture activities will be endorsed by other Local Groups already registered under PGS/Regional Council / State Government officers. Under any government scheme if farmers registered/covered will be endorsed by State / District nodal officer.
- g) **Training:** Its responsibility of each farmer registered under Local group have to compulsorily undergo training to understand organic farming package and practices adopted in organic farming and PGS-India certification procedures, standards and documentation. Farmers should undergo training time to time organized by Regional Council /



Service provider / State Government or other institute. Each local group should make sure atleast 50% of its farmer members attend training/ demonstrations programmes without fail. Atleast two such programs are to be compulsorily attended by each member of groups in a year.

- h) **Meeting:** Each group should 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 meeting to decide for peer appraisal planning and one/two for certification decision making. Every member needs to attend at least 50% of the meetings conducted in a year and sign in attendance register.



- i) **Peer inspection and decision submission:** Each and every season after 15 days of sowing crop and one month before harvest of crop a peer inspection of each individual farmer in a group has to be completed by each group /Individual/LAC as per parameters set in PGS Standards. To perform peer inspection. A peer inspection team among the members of group will be constituted. It should have at least minimum 3 peer appraisers or more members, at least one member in the appraisal team must be literate and well versed in filling the appraisal forms. The peer inspection team formulated among the members of group will perform evaluation of organic farming practices adopted by farmers based on ten-point standards of each farmer as given below. The peer appraisal team submit their decision to Local group leader which will be discussed in meeting with all LG members. A compliance and noncompliance of farmers will be prepared



and final decision will be submitted to RC for issue of certificate. Noncompliance or sanctions on the farmers who violated rules/standards will be decided by farmers itself as per PGS guidelines. Standard peer appraisal points on which certification will be decided are as follows

1. Habitat management
2. Diversity
3. Integration of Livestock
4. Soil and water conservation
5. Contamination control*
6. Seed and planting material*
7. Fertilization*
8. Pest management*
9. Cleaning of equipment's / tools*
10. Storage and transport

Reciprocal review between two-member group farms is not allowed (i.e. A reviews the B and B reviews A). LG may invite other stakeholders to participate in peer appraisal team. Other stakeholders may include representatives of consumers/ traders or local State Agriculture Department officers / ZC / RCOFs etc., but their participation is not mandatory. This is promoted to increase the trust and credibility of the group guarantee and uphold transparency in PGS certification system. 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. These are to be made available in the public domain and provided to RC or statutory authority upon demand during physical supervision at any time.

j) Approval Group decision and certificate issue:

completely filled peer appraisal form to be submitted to Regional Council and the same will be uploaded online by LG/RC in PGS-INDIA webportal. Regional Council verify and generate certificate and issue certificates to farmers.



PG-India Green Certificate issued under conversion period (upto two years for seasonal crops and three years for perineal crops). PGS-India Organic certificate decision will be taken if farmers issued continuously PGS-India Green certificate and adopted all standards of organic farming as PGS guidelines. Its indicate complete organic status.

k) **Updating Actual yield yield:** After harvest of crop keeping 5% variation the actual yield per area of each farmer will be updated in the online PGS-INDIA webportal by LG/RC/FA/SP. Without updating actual yield farmers

cannot perform the activity of online marketing through jaivikkheti web portal.

l) **Online registration in Jaivikkheti webportal (<https://www.jaivikkheti.in/>) and Transactions/online marketing:** Each registered and active farmer under

PGS should also register online under Jaivikkheti webportal to perform online marketing. Farmers have freedom to decide their price for their product and sale to consumers. Farmers are provided an option to choose to sale product at their farm or deliver products through corrier to consumer.



Factors for success of PGS in India

In spite of tremendous investment and efforts in promotion of third party certification system, due to its prohibitively high cost, it is still beyond the reach of small farmers and is also unaffordable to even large farmers, if high premiums are not assured. In market there is growing awareness and consumers are inclined to accept organic foods, but high premiums deter them to buy organic products on regular basis. In such a scenario, it is essential that a farmer empowering system with consumer's participation based on mutual trust is developed and put in place with some credibility support from Government and institutions. Following are the determining factors for success of PGS in India

- Low cost
- Minimum Paperwork
- Regionally Appropriate
- Peer appraisals/inspection by team of farmers itself instead of Professional Third Party Inspections
- Farmers, Regional Groups, NGO's and other Support Organizations are in a Horizontal Network without hierarchies
- Building organic movement in the country
- Credible Organic Guarantee system based on complete trust
- Mutual Recognition and Support between Regional and PGS Groups
- Subtext of training and support built into the system
- Empowers the farmer with increased capacity building
- Empowers the farmer through increased marketing opportunities

2. Processing and Handling Module:

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, Individual farmer, Local Group or any other individual away from certification system all are allowed to register their processing unit under PGS-India certification and all are approved and monitored by Regional Councils authorized for its purpose.

3. Live Stock and other Module: The live stock production is integral part of organic production system and there is large scope for certification of organic live stock production and certification. The process of development of certification operation is under progress and it will be soon made provision under PGS system. Apart from live stock other modules like bee keeping, wild harvest, Aqua culture will also be developed and covered under in PGS system in future.

Regional Council:

What is Regional Council?

The legally registered organization which are authorized by NEC-PGS under PGS-INDIA certification system to play role in registration of farmers, training, online documentation, inspection, residual analysis, soil sample analysis and certification as per PGS-INDIA guidelines.

Who can Become Regional Council

Any legally registered organization which is having minimum two years of experience in PGS certification / Third party certification and Organic farming activity, having enough infrastructure and manpower and do not take up marketing activity are able to become Regional council provided they full fill other conditions as per PGS guidelines

The Major Role of Regional Council

1. Formation of farmers groups, selection of leaders, documentation, endorsement and registration under online PGS webportal
2. Preparation of literature in local language and distribute to PGS groups / farmers
3. Training of farmers about organic farming and PGS documentation process
4. Active participation in meeting, training and field inspections and verification of crop production practices and proper documentation

5. Timely issue of scope certificate and sanctions upon found not following PGS standards by PGS farmers.
6. Time to time collect the samples and perform pesticide residue testing for ensuring quality of products produced by organic farming
7. Facilitating PGS farmers to upload online data in Jaivik kheti webportal
8. Time to time reporting their activities to Zonal council / PGS-India Secretariat.

Facilitating Agency / Service Providers to hand hold PGS certification:

Who are Facilitating Agency / Service Providers?

“Facilitating Agencies are organizations “that meant for helping the PGS-India farmers in handholding, cluster formation, capacity building, marketing, implementation of PKVY/other organic farming schemes / programmer etc.” FA/SP will help the PGS farmers in documentation, collection of data with GPS coordinates, uploading online data, marketing and branding of organic produce and facilitating formation of FPOs .

Who can become Facilitating Agency / Service Providers?

Any legally registered agency who are having Minimum 03 years' experience in Organic Farming Management, Value addition, knowledge of Certification Systems, Marketing, Minimum 01-year experience in FPO/FPC/Organic Cluster formation and In house competence in capacity building of stake holders in various aspects of organic farming. The desirable experience in GIS and remote sensing are given more preference. Any start up doing innovative work in agriculture; with at least 01-year experience in organic farming promotion activities are also eligible.

Major Role of Facilitating Agency / Service Providers

- A. Formation of Group /Cluster, Deployment of man power as Lead Resource Persons (LRPs) through mobilization of interested farmers to take up organic farming and certification.
- B. Capacity building of Farmers/ Local Groups through Trainings, group Meetings, workshops and seminars
- C. 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).
- D. Participation in group operations, documentation, Peer appraisal, Certification process and online registration, data Uploading of Local groups on PGS-India and Jaivikkheti web portal
- E. Institutional development / FPO / FPC formation and development and

management

- F. Assist the farmers in preparation of annual plan of action, packing, marketing, branding, logo preparation, provide market linkage, transportation, Food processing and handling etc.,

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

PGS-India Logo

PGS-INDIA Green logo: Farmers under conversion (2 years for seasonal crops and 3 years for perineal crops) will be issued for PGS-INDIA green and after completion of conversion period farmers will be issued for PGS-INDIA Organic only if they adopted organic standards completely. Products under in-conversion to organic are 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



Online PGS-INDIA webportal (<http://pgsindia-ncof.gov.in>)

: Even though there are large numbers of farmers involved in organic farming under PGS-INDIA certification, their information properly not documented and information about farmers and agencies working are visible on public domain which is a limiting factor for the expansion of organic marketing. In order to establish information access to all domain of people Government of India launched PGS-INDIA online webportal (<http://pgsindia-ncof.gov.in>) on 15th July , 2015. All the details of



farmer's / regional councils are available in this website, and all information is accessible to public domain and the revised web portal was launched on 3rd May 2021. The new features like transactions at LG level and Processor and handlers modules incorporated with many checks and balances for making more accurate and robust system. The consumer product verification was also enabled in this webportal. Any public can track their products from where it has obtained and also details of producer/farmers who has grown the products on PGS-INDIA webportal.

Scope of PGS-INDIA

PGS programs are expected to bring much greater numbers of farmers into certified organic status. Under PGS-India system at present more than 11 lakh farmers are registered covering an area of about 7.5 lakh ha. PGS-India is the largest PGS initiative in the world. PGS-India certification is recognized under Food Safety and Standards (Organic Foods) Regulations, 2017 on par with NPOP and all the Organic Food Business Operator shall comply with all the provisions of these Regulations by 1st July, 2018. PGS-India guidelines has been revised in the year 2020 and 3rd May 2021 a revised PGS- India webportal launched in accordance with revised guidelines. The webportal operation is made very easy and approachable for all stake holders. The PGS-India programme aimed for providing uninterrupted chain of custody, starting from producer groups till the products are processed and finally packed into retail packs. The PGS certified products gaining more acceptances among the consumers, more numbers of farmer's community adopting PGS certification and also many stake holder's participations will lead the system to grow more robustly in India. PGS-India certification system may play leading role in promotion of sustainable quality organic agriculture production system with large scope for employment generation in future.



❖ RCOF, HQ- GHAZIABAD Delhi, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan & Uttar Pradesh
❖ RCOF, BENGALURU Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu, Pondicherry and Lakshdweep
❖ RCOF, BHUBANESWAR Orissa, Sikkim and Andman & Nicobar
❖ RCOF, PANCHKULA Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir
❖ RCOF, IMPHAL Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura
❖ RCOF, JABALPUR Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand
❖ RCOF, NAGPUR Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh,
❖ RCOF, PATNA Bihar, West Bengal and Eastern U.P
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