



## So how do you begin with establishing your PGS?

First... ask these questions...

Do you have organic farmers in your community with surplus to sell?

Do you have customers in your community looking for assurance that the food they buy is grown to organic principles?



If yes... then the next step is to start.

1. Identify all the organic farmers in your area and speak to your customers and local markets. Find out if there are any other specialists in your community with skills or knowledge in organic agriculture.
2. Invite all to a meeting and find out if the farmers are willing to let farmers and consumers visit all the farmers in the group, so that everyone can see how the food is being grown. (Ask all of the participants to bring some food and drink to share - this is the beginning of understanding that all members in a PGS group contribute to the success of the group.)
3. Read through the Basic Productions Principles to see how close the farmers in the group are to complying with organic production standards. (if not all farmers are quite ready don't worry – push on – be inclusive - it takes time.)

4. Ask the following questions:

- a. Do we all have a **shared vision** of why we believe in organic agriculture is important to our health and the health of the planet? (You can use the pledge, which you can find at the end of the Standard Operating Procedures or you can write your own.... or choose another activity that reflects your commitment – a song, a dance or a poem. This is your PGS – this is your community! )
- b. Do we all agree to **participate** in all aspects of the work of the group? In developing the structure of the group, completing the required documents, joining farm visits, sharing knowledge, promoting the products and supporting each other?
- c. Are farmers willing to be **transparent** about their production processes, willing to have an “open gate” policy and let other farmers and consumers visit their farms and view their records of what they buy for their farm and what they sell?
- d. Does everyone agree to work on the basis of **trust**? If a member breaks, trust what are the consequences? It’s always a good idea to describe the consequences up front. Read through the Standard Operating Procedures and get agreement on what actions the group would take for any transgressions of the group’s rules or the Basic Production Principles.
- e. Working with nature is a continual learning process and every farmer has knowledge to share. The **learning process** is central to the success of a PGS group. It builds trust between farmers as they give advice to each other and between farmers and customers, as farmers explain how they manage their organic farm. Identify where the group may need additional guidance and approach sector specialists to talk at your meetings. Raise money in your community to hold workshops on, for example, compost making. Ask questions all the time and if you cannot find the answer in your community, contact SAOSO or PGSSA and we will assist where we can.
- f. In a world governed by rules and regulations that serve big business, here is a system based on self-determination that serves smallholder farmers and consumers wanting to take back their rights to the production of their food. PGS is successful because its structure is **horizontal**. There is no one person telling everybody else what to do. All members are involved in the decisions of the group – all are responsible – all are accountable.

5. Schedule your first farm visit and learn from the experience.

6. Review your documentation every year. Be open to new ideas. For example, some PGS groups are developing participatory farm maps instead of using the PGS questionnaire on farm visits. Some groups are looking at cell phone technology to help with their record keeping.