



The Organic farmer journey in the South African context

This document depicts the step-wise approach which the South African organic sector has devised to support farmers with embarking on the organic journey. It begins with a foundation phase in which farmers inclined to farm organically are encouraged to form an Organic Farmer Organisation (OFO) as a first organisation step to establish a community of practice. The next step would consist of assisting this group with consolidating its production, with a focus on alignment with the organic production standards. Through ongoing stakeholder mapping and engagement, this group goes on to consolidating its production and seeks to access resources and markets. Once it is ready to supply excess production to a receptive organic market, the OFO can then be established as a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), with the support of PGS SA. A PGS is a local organic assurance system that can serve as an alternative to third party certification. The process through which PGS groups become formal members of PGS SA and through which their farmers get to use nationally endorsed seals and logos is described in the South Africa organic certification landscape.

Steps

Step 1 - Foundation phase

Background: Farmers farming commonage or individual pieces of land “traditionally” or “agroecologically”/ “poison free” or farming conventionally with a intention to convert to organic production. Ideally the farmers are supported in some way by another organisation or practitioners.

Process: On boarding process with INOFO/Pollinator backed by PGS-SA/SAOSO, Extension or local training centre/ NGO

- Nurturing a community of practice
- Will to grow organic produce with surplus for market

- Onboarding organic production
- Learning about the SAOSO standards
- Land access
- Facilitating knowledge exchanges
- Permaculture design

Organisational form: Informal at this stage – INOFO support to set the group into a cohesive Organic Farmer Organisation (OFO)

Step 2 Consolidating production

Background: Farmers have taken the steps to organise themselves into an OFO – the focus is now on consolidating production.

Process: The farmer drives production with the guidance of the EOA/PGS pollinator (SAOSO mentoring/expert support)

- Farm layout planning
- Farmers' production planning
- Planting schedule
- Rotation & succession
- Fertility plan
- Insect pest and disease plan
- Input/output understanding

Organizational form : group set up as an OFO i.e. a voluntary association (VA)/cooperative – an internal or external funding mechanism is identified

Step 3 – Organizational consolidation / stakeholder engagement

Background: Farmers have consolidated production – they need support to access more production means/resources and markets.

Process: Extensive stakeholder engagement with the guidance of the EOA/PGS pollinator – embarking on the MAGIC (engaging the unemployed youth/ leveraging municipal resources) process where possible.

- Initiation to PGS – what is PGS?/when are you ready for PGS
- Mapping/stakeholder engagement: identify group needs and common ground that will hold the group together
- Establish the need for the farmer organisation to link with other organisations
- Find out whether there are other farmer organisations in the area and how to link to them

- Engagement with the LED municipal officer – inspiring the EPWP- MAGIC MoU with the municipality

Organizational form: VA/cooperative

Step 4 – Establishment of the PGS

Background: Farmers have consolidated production, they have aggregation surplus potential, they have identified a trading space (local market/independent retailer).

Process: Holding of AGM to establish the PGS groups with its SOPs.

- Join/Form a PGS Group
- Adopt an organic production standard
- Development SOPs
- Develop a distribution system on own or join/develop an aggregation hub
- Lobby support
- Find a market to connect into

Organizational form: VA/cooperative sets up a PGS (as a “plub onto” the OFO) – selling to direct markets

Step 5 - (Re) creating localised food systems: setting up food hubs supplied by PGS groups (from this stage, the market drives production – the pollinators are now linked to food hub entrepreneurs)

- Record keeping
- Production planning for aggregation
- Market demands seals and logos in order to buy product (QR coding)
- Farmers set the price
- Engage into the Certification Road map
- (later on): Hub starts considering PGS-to - PGS trade

Organizational form: organic food hub linked to PGS linked to VA)/cooperative