

## **PGS: "Life Agreements" in Colombia.**

Suarez, Gustavo

*Gustavo Suarez is a sociologist, producer and president of the Network of Organic Farmers Markets of Valley of Cauca. He has been a promoter of the Network since its inception.*

### **Summary**

Network of Organic Farmers Markets of Valley of Cauca " Food of Life" was created in 2009 as a voluntary agreement of families belonging to different organizations that share agroecology as an option that is manifested in a commitment to life, health and care of the planet.

### **Background**

In 2009, born Network of Organic Farmers Markets of Valley of Cauca as a nonprofit organization articulating twelve organic local markets in ten municipalities of Valle del Cauca in which there are 60 forms of association linked as producer associations, groups women, rural schools of agroecology and family groups of 23 municipalities of Valle and Cauca.

The Network has been the initiative of producers gathered in a meeting departmental visualizes the importance of joining efforts and capabilities to strengthen autonomy. One of the first tasks was to implement a participatory guarantee system as a tool to differentiate products and processes and agro-ecological family farming, in turn, develop a social and economic net between producers and consumers.

### **Main Chapter**

The Network has a General Assembly composed of 288 families actively participate in the different markets. The General Assembly elects a Board of Directors and representatives of each market to the daily operation of the Network

The network functions as body representing public and private entities before concluding proposals and / or joining them to other organizations.

The principles of the Network are:

- Membership of the Network involves the practice of agroecology as a way of life
- The production systems of the Network must be supported by principles and ecological practices
- The work generated by the Network team must be coordinated and under ethical and caring
- Network Decisions are taken by majority and must be attached to the work plan approved by the Assembly
- The members of the network must be members of communities of producers and consumers that make Organic Farmers Markets

- Organic products are handled with the concept of fair price to the producer and the consumer

In the organic local market is possible to find products such as fruits, vegetables, grains, roots, tubers, chicken meat, rabbits meat , eggs , milk , brown sugar, bread, hand made cosmetics, coffee, among others. All of these using the logo of the Network

The PGS, to our Network, not are rigid rules or laws that meet or approving the third-party certification process. The PGS is a proposal that is based on the awareness of the producer, consumer confidence and mutual understanding. Therefore, farm visits by consumers and exchange of experiences among the producers themselves have been part of efforts to consolidate the PGS' Network

The PGS Network includes the following levels:

- The starting point of the PGS are farming families who share a territory, are part of an organizational form have ecological production systems and lifestyles
- A second level is determined by the local organization that is a set of families that share a territory and are part of any form of association. This space is created a Dialogue Committee composed of three families who are responsible for making visits to other producers.
- A third level is in the local market made up of different forms of association. This also creates a Dialogue Committee but people coming from local Dialogue Committee and consumer representatives. This Committee reviews the results of the visits.
- A fourth level is the Network where two families meet for each market who are responsible to give declaration of trust.

This process is supported by a document called " Life Agreement " which sets out the principles, criteria and procedures of the PGS's Network. There are other documents such as Letter of Commitment, Farm Diagnosis, Visit Report and Declaration of Trust.

Economically, so far, the network and its PGS has been funded with resources from the producers.

### **Core Message and Conclusions**

- The PGS is an experience that visualizes hundreds of agroecological farming families who spend their produce to local markets.
- The PGS is a high-level mechanism of self-monitoring by the same producers because it develops from the family to reach the level of the Network.
- Build collectively the "Life Agreement" helped resolve concerns and unifying conceptual basis within the Network
- The PGS has been one of the main driving forces of the work of the Network