THE REGULATION OF PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEMS IN BRAZIL: EMPOWERMENT AND CHALLENGES

Maria Alice F. C. Mendonça, Ph.D. student in Rural Development at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul/Brazil and Wageningen University/The Netherlands niccorrea@yahoo.com.br
Flavia Charão Marques, Professor at Rural Development Graduation Program, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul flavia.marques@ufrgs.br

Types of certification
Currently, Brazilian farmers have three options to legally ensure the ecologically-based production: 1) Third-party certification; 2) Participatory Assessment Bodies; and 3) Social Control Organizations. These last two are systems operate at a local level and rely on the active participation of stakeholders. The Participatory Assessment Bodies are considered as Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in the legal sense, and authorized for the use of the national organic label, which is required for non-direct sales of organic products. In contrast, the Social Control system does not grant the right to use the national label and allows only the direct sale from small-scale family farmers to the final consumers. The regulated PGS apply to agroecological farmers who want their produce certified as organic.

Recognition and identity
The Brazilian case shows that the regulation of PGS can have a positive effect in promoting the interaction between the government and civil organizations with respect to the marketing of organic and agroecological products. reveal that the regulation of PGS can also contribute to build an identity of the farmer members as agroecological farmers. The formal recognition has increased the visibility and acknowledgment of their work. Besides it has also contributed to the creation of new markets and resulted in better market access for the farmers.

Localizing the experiences
This study was based on two Participatory Assessment Bodies experiences in Southern of Brazil, between 2012 and 2013. The data collection was made from open interviews with, and participant observation among, members of the The Participatory Assessment Body from the North Coast of the Rio Grande do Sul; and the Participatory Assessment Body from the Agroecological Farmers of the Metropolitan Area of Porto Alegre. At the moment there are about 90 registered Social Control Body and 13 Participatory Assessment Body and legalized by Ministry of Agriculture throughout the country, and several others in the process of registration (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014).

Challenges
The resistance expressed by some actors of the ecologically-based production movements, therefore stresses the importance that the organic production certification must not constrain the expansion of endogenous practices (BYÉ and SCHMIDT, 2013). For instance by creating too many rules that might discourage farmers to be creative and innovative. In that sense, this study brings reflections on the importance of having multiple schemes of ecologically-based production assessment. Also, that among the participatory types of assessment, the “labelled” products should not always be considered as better or trust worther than the “non-labelled” ones.

To conclude, the Brazilian example shows that the adoption of PGS and its recognition by governments can contribute to the development of the ecologically-based production committed to the re-localization of agri-food systems. At the same time, experiences from the Brazilian case also show that the regulation of PGS should be connected with multiple governmental and non-governmental actions in order to assure the autonomy and the innovation capability of ecologically-based systems.

References: