



# **Bhutan Organic Guarantee System (BOGS)**

*Version 2019*



**National Organic Programme (NOP)  
Agriculture Research and Development Centre (ARDC- Yusipang)  
Department of Agriculture  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Royal Government of Bhutan**



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Research and Development Centre  
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Department of Agriculture  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Yusipang, Thimphu, Bhutan.



## Foreword

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forests is pleased to introduce and publish the Bhutan Organic Guarantee System (BOGS) document, 2019, which describes the overall concept of organic guarantee system in the country. This document is first edition and is published by the National Organic Programme, Agriculture Research and Development Centre–Yusipang under the Department of Agriculture. The document was developed in consultation with various relevant stakeholders and agencies and it was endorsed by 97<sup>th</sup> RNR-GNH Committee.

The BOGS refers to the whole set of options, both on the organic standard and on the conformity assessment that enables a producer to access the Bhutan Organic Mark. The document will guide any conformity body existing in the country to implement the organic certification process. In addition, this document will serve as the guiding reference for the organic operators to select the type of conformity assessment they qualify for and are interested to apply.

Yeshe Penjor  
MINISTER



## Section 1: Overview and definitions

The use of the term “organic” is not regulated in Bhutan. The distinction between trustworthy organic products and other products will therefore be based on the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark on products that are guaranteed organic in accordance with the official Bhutan Organic Guarantee System (BOGS) decided by the Royal Government of Bhutan.

The Government of Bhutan however regulates the activities of foreign organic certification bodies on its territory of Bhutan.

The **Bhutan Organic Mark** is the following mark, corresponding to the Bhutan Organic Guarantee System:



**The Bhutan Organic Mark** is a certification mark which is the property of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and is a legally protected logo. The Bhutan Organic Mark is useable for promotion and education activities related to organic agriculture in Bhutan, as well as for marketing of organic products verified in accordance with the Bhutan Organic Guarantee System.

**The Bhutan Organic Guarantee System (BOGS)** refers to the whole set of options, both on the standard side, and on the conformity assessment side, that enables a producer/product to access the Bhutan Organic Mark.

**Conformity assessment** is a generic term encompassing all accepted verification systems under the BOGS, including 1) the Local Organic Assurance System, 2) PGS, 3) Third party certification. A conformity assessment body is an organization responsible for conformity assessment in any of the above systems: it can be the NOP itself (case 1), a PGS (case 2), and a third-party certification body (case 3).

**The Local Organic Assurance System** is the system of registration with the National Organic Programme and an on-going monitoring of organic farmers implemented by Line departments under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. See more details in section 3.

**PGS** means Participatory Guarantee Systems, which are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange (IFOAM, 2008).

**Third party certification** refers to the certification conducted by independent certification bodies in line with international organic certification practices. This includes certification conducted by private certification bodies and certification conducted by BAFRA/BSB.

The National Organic Programme refers to the unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests which is tasked to manage organic activities of the Government of Bhutan and oversee the Bhutan Organic Guarantee System. This unit acts as the competent authority for organic agriculture in Bhutan. The National Organic Programme acts as the Scheme Manager of the Bhutan Organic Mark and as the standard owner of the Bhutan Organic Standard. The National Organic Programme is responsible for the development and maintenance of the procedures described in this document and for other relevant procedures mentioned in this document (in blue italics).

**BAFRA** is the Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority under the Ministry of Agriculture & Forests. Currently, the BAFRA implements one of the conformity assessment options under the Bhutan Organic Guarantee System, namely the third party certification.

**BSB** is the Bhutan Standard Bureau, which operates some certification schemes in accordance with ISO17065. To this day, BSB does not conduct organic certification, but it is possible that BSB might offer certification to the Bhutan Organic Standard in the future. If that is the case, BSB will have to register with and be approved by the NOP for this purpose, as per the same rules as for other potential third party certification bodies.



**The Bhutan Organic Standard (BOS)** is the basis for domestic verification in Bhutan, including verification through the Local Organic Assurance System, PGS, and certification by third party certification body for the domestic market. The BOS is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and is updated under the lead of the National Organic Programme, in accordance with the *Procedure to update and approve the Bhutan Organic Standard*. The National Organic Programme seeks to obtain and maintain the approval of the Bhutan Organic Standard into the IFOAM Family of Standards.

## **Section 2: Criteria for access to the Bhutan Organic Mark**

The Bhutan Organic Mark can be accessed through any of the following scenarios:

The product is produced in Bhutan in compliance with the Bhutan Organic Standard and is verified through the Local Organic Assurance System. This option is available for products of farmer groups/cooperatives and individual farmers. It is only available for products that are unprocessed or have only undergone simple on-farm processing<sup>1</sup> and are sold in the domestic market.

The product is produced in Bhutan in compliance with the Bhutan Organic Standard and is verified through a PGS approved by the National Organic Programme. This option is available to groups of farmers, possibly including an integrated processing and sold in the domestic market.

The product is produced in Bhutan in compliance with the Bhutan Organic Standard and is verified through organic third-party certification and sold in the domestic market. This option is available to farmers and farmer groups/cooperatives and processors.

The product is produced in Bhutan in compliance with a standard approved in the IFOAM Family of Standards, and verified through third party certification by a certification body registered with and approved by the National Organic Programme. This option is available for farmers and processors of all sizes, selling domestically or for export.

Any product bearing the Bhutan Organic Mark must also display the Unique Identification Number of the certified operator responsible for the product. This number shall be given by the NOP to all registered organic operators (including farmers and processors) in the country. NOP shall establish a numbering system that enables quick identification of:

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<sup>1</sup> Simple on-farm processing means for example drying, shelling, cutting, etc., but no processing that involves mixing of ingredients or addition of any additive.

- The conformity assessment system under which the operator is certified,
- The *dzongkhags* in which the producer is located,
- The specific geog/group to which the producer belongs.
- A number unique to the registered operator.

### Section 3: Description of the Local Organic Assurance System (LOAS)

The Local Organic Assurance System (LOAS) makes use of the existing network of extension supervisors under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests. The extension agents are in close regular contact with the farmers in the various localities of Bhutan, and as they are the ones controlling the access to chemical inputs by farmers, they are well positioned to know and control which farmers are effectively producing organically and which are not. This LOAS is only serving the assurance needs of the domestic market in Bhutan, and therefore does not need to comply with international norms or principles of third party certification such as those laid down in ISO17065. The objective of this assurance system is to provide a low-cost (free of charge) and effective mechanism of assurance for small farmers in Bhutan, so as to encourage mass conversion to organic farming, a goal established in Bhutan's vision to become an organic country.

Verification of farmers through the Local Organic Assurance System (LOAS) is based on the following steps:

- Farmers and/or farmer groups wanting to convert to organic and access the Bhutan Organic Mark must apply through the Extension Supervisor (Agriculture/Livestock/Forestry). Individual applicant farmers must fill the *Individual/ Farm Registration Form*. Applicant farmer groups/cooperatives must fill the *Group/ Registration Form*.
- The Extension supervisor will forward the application to the Dzongkhag Agriculture Officer who will check and forward the files to the National Organic Programme to organize the registration of the farmer(s).
- The National Organic Programme will organize for the applicant farmer(s) to receive organic technical advice and input support. They will also provided with a copy of *Summarized Bhutan Organic Standard*. The applicant must have at least participated in one sensitization or organic training Programme before signing the pledge.

- Each farmer must sign a pledge committing to follow the Bhutan Organic Standard.
- NOP shall issue a letter of confirmation of registration to the farmer/farmer group.
- After completion of the conversion period as specified in the Bhutan Organic Standard, the Extension supervisor in the relevant location conducts at least one first farm visit to the applicant farm/group and transmits a report to the NOP following the *Field Monitoring Report Template*. This report shall contain a recommendation of decision regarding the approval or non-approval of the organic status of the farmer.
- The report and recommendation shall be reviewed and validated by an appointed NOP staff member, and in case of any doubts/issues, shall be transferred to a 3-persons committee within the NOP staff for final decision. In case of positive decision, NOP issues an *individual/farm or group/cooperative certificate* to the applicant, confirming the right to use the Bhutan Organic Mark.
- The certificate shall be valid for 1 year for individual farmers and 2 years for groups. Before the expiry date of the certificate, the extension supervisor shall conduct at least 1 farm visit of each farmer and submit a report (individual or group report) to the NOP, following the same *Field Monitoring Report Template*. Subsequent decision making follows the same procedure as for the initial approval.

With this verification option, operators may only use the Bhutan Organic Mark, with a reference to the Local Organic Assurance System (LOAS) but no reference to the term “certification”, unless they are also verified through one of the other options below.

The cost of this assurance option is fully borne by government.

## Section 4: Approval of PGS under the National Organic Programme

“Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.” (IFOAM)

The benefits of having PGS in Bhutan are as follows:

- i. It is an internationally recognized organic certification system.
- ii. It is the cheaper means of certification to the small farm holders and alternative to the third party certification.
- iii. It will be easier for the Bhutanese farmers to export through PGS certification.

Operators (farmers organized in a PGS, possibly including an integrated processing) may choose to be verified through a Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) for the purpose of the domestic market. Operators verified through a PGS may use the Bhutan Organic Mark only if the PGS is approved by the National Organic Programme.

The National Organic Programme will review and approved PGS based on the requirements laid out in Appendix 1 and following the approval procedure laid down in Appendix 2.

The use of this verification option grants the right to the operator to use, in addition to the Bhutan Organic Mark, the logo of the PGS they belong to. The use of the Bhutan Organic Mark should be accompanied by the term “PGS-verified”.

Approved PGS shall transmit the list of all their organically-certified operators to the NOP, at the minimum annually. Additionally, they shall inform the NOP, in a timely manner, of:

- all de-certification cases (and the reasons associated to it)
- established cases of fraud amongst the PGS members or any case of suspected fraud amongst other Bhutanese operators.

## Section 5: Description of the Bhutan Organic certification Programme

Any third party certification bodies which have organic accreditation can provide organic third-party certification. Domestic farmers, processors, importers, and traders can apply to third party certification bodies to obtain an organic certificate and the right to use the Bhutan Organic Mark. Third party certification is available to individual operators or groups of operators with an Internal Control System. The third party certification is only accessible to farmers or farmer groups who have already undergone organic assurance, obtained approval for the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark through the Local Organic Assurance System. Processors doing more than simple on-farm processing shall apply directly to third party certification bodies.

Third party certification body conducts organic inspection and certification in accordance with procedures laid down in the *Bhutan Organic Certification Guidelines*. Those guidelines are a living document and may be revised at any time by NOP in accordance with third party certification body. Third party certification bodies strive to conduct organic inspection and certification in accordance with international organic certification practices, as laid out in the IRCOB (International Requirements for Organic Certification Bodies). As a way to demonstrate this, third party certification body will seek to achieve IFOAM Accreditation in the coming years. The third party certification bodies is foreseen as the conformity assessment system for the organic operators which are not eligible to the above options (Local Organic Assurance System or/ and PGS). Organic operators certified by third party certification body may also export their product as organic and with the Bhutan Organic Mark, as long as the importing country accepts such products as organic.

The use of this verification option grants the right to the operator to use the word “certified” or “Third party certified” under the Bhutan Organic Mark. Third party certification bodies shall control that its organic certified operators are using the Bhutan Organic Mark in accordance with the guidelines for the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark as published by the National Organic Programme. Third party certification bodies is also responsible to conduct market surveillance in order to ensure that

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no use of the Bhutan Organic Mark in association with terms like “name of the third party CB certified” is done outside of the third party certification.

When receiving an organic certification application, third party certification bodies shall first check with NOP whether the operator has indeed registered or obtained approval through the Local Organic Assurance System.

Third party certification bodies shall transmit the list of all its organically-certified operators to the NOP, at the minimum annually. Additionally, it shall inform the NOP, in a timely manner, of:

- all de-certification cases (and the reasons associated to it)
- established cases of fraud amongst the third party certified clients or any case of suspected fraud amongst other Bhutanese operators.



## **Section 6: Registration and approval of third party certification bodies (CB) by the National Organic Programme**

There is no local private third party organic certification body based in Bhutan. The only Bhutanese third party certification body currently approved by the NOP is the national CB, BAFRA. Foreign certification bodies are however allowed to come and conduct organic certification in Bhutan. Usually, this will have an export purposes, but operators certified through this option can also sell part of their production on the domestic market and use the Bhutan Organic Mark.

Foreign certifications bodies wanting to conduct organic certification in Bhutan must first register and be approved by the National Organic Programme. The criteria for approval are the following:

- a. The foreign certification body must provide company profile documents as well as a list of the relevant organic accreditation/ approval it has, and which standards it certifies against. That accreditation/approval must be verified as valid, by the NOP staff.
- b. Negotiations may be carried out with foreign certification bodies and local certification bodies to establish partnership for joint certification or inspection in Bhutan.
- c. In case the certification bodies conducts laboratory tests, a copy of all laboratory results shall be provided to NOP for information and data management.
- d. Upon completion of the organic certification process, a copy of the certificate issued by the CB should be submitted to NOP, or else an official letter explaining the reason for denial of certification.

Approved certification bodies shall transmit the list of all their organically-certified operators to the NOP, at the minimum annually. Additionally, they shall inform the NOP, in a timely manner, of:

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- all de-certification cases (and the reasons associated to it)
- established cases of fraud amongst their clients or any case of suspected fraud amongst other Bhutanese operators.

The use of this verification option grants the right to the operator to use, in addition to the Bhutan Organic Mark, the certification mark (logo) of the private certification body or any certification body existing in the country.

## **Section 7: Market surveillance, complaints handling, and other functions of the NOP**

The National Organic Programme (NOP) is responsible for maintaining updated lists of all operators verified under all the aforementioned verification systems, and to monitor their use of the Bhutan Organic Mark. No individual producer/farmers group/cooperatives/private entrepreneur, etc. shall be allowed to use the Bhutan Organic Mark on its products unless it is registered with and approved to do so by the National Organic Programme (NOP).

The National Organic Programme also manages the central database of Unique Identification Numbers and allocates numbers to each certified operator (this is applicable for LOAS and PGS). The third party certification bodies will be responsible to provide its own unique identification number for the certified organic operators under its Programme.

The NOP compiles production and market data on the national organic sector.

The NOP is also responsible for the promotion of the Bhutan Organic Mark towards consumers and public relation activities related to the Bhutan Organic Mark.

The National Organic Programme and third party certification body will conduct market surveillance activities in order to verify proper use of the Bhutan Organic Mark in the territory of Bhutan and on export products.

Any complaints related to the use or misuse of the Bhutan Organic Mark may be addressed to the verification body (Third party certification bodies/NOP), for verified operators, instance, the lowest level in the verification chain should tackle the issue, and if not resolved or not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, the case should be handled, investigated and resolved by the National Organic Programme.

Operators that are proven to have misused the Bhutan Organic Mark shall be penalized according to the Law and Order of Kingdom of Bhutan.

In addition to these functions, NOP or any other competent authority (Groups/cooperatives, Youth )may provide capacity building to farmer groups for setting-up Internal Control Systems in preparation of their application to third party certification body or to foreign certification bodies for organic certification.

### **Section 8: Rules for the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark**

The Bhutan Organic Mark may only be used on products or in relation to products that comply with the criteria for the mark as laid down in section 2 of this document.

In addition, the Bhutan Organic Mark, when used directly on products, must always be accompanied by the following information:

1. Name of the operator / company legally responsible for the product.
2. Identification of the conformity assessment board

## **APPENDIX 1: Requirements for the approval of Participatory Guarantee Systems**

- a. The PGS certifies its producers to the Bhutan Organic Standard.
- b. The PGS is a participatory organization or structure, whereby producers (at minimum) and other stakeholders (desirable) participate, voluntarily and transparently, in the choice of the standard (which may be the Bhutan Organic Standard or a standard compliant with it), the procedures for verification and sanctions, and the choice of people with particular responsibility in the PGS.
- c. PGS implementation mechanisms are locally and culturally adapted and relevant, and efforts are made to minimize paperwork needed for certification.
- d. Participating producers take a public pledge to follow the standard and are subsequently receiving on-site reviews/inspections at minimum once a year to demonstrate and verify their continued compliance with the standard.
- e. The PGS ensures compliance of its certified producers with the standard and implements a system for managing non-compliances, with specific consequences that are implemented, including suspending producers in the case of serious non-compliances.
- f. The PGS allows for site visits by consumers and other interested persons and it provides a list of approved producers and other group members, as well as other PGS documentation on request (some PGS may carry this information on their website). The PGS grants consumers and other stakeholders the possibility to become active members of the PGS.
- g. Farm/site review/inspection involves a team, including experienced persons and peer producers. Experience in facilitating peer reviews and in on-site “inspection” may have been acquired

through training or learning-by-doing. Reciprocal<sup>2</sup> inspection is not considered a valid procedure except if it is additional to a non-reciprocal inspection by a team fulfilling the above minimum criteria.

- h. The PGS has a mechanism to accept, objectively assess and feed into the verification process any information identifying potential non-compliances acquired outside of the farm/site visits (e.g. continued “social control”, external observations, consumer complaints, etc.).
- i. Decisions to endorse each producer’s certification status are taken by a group (sub-committee) with the appropriate technical experience and includes at least 1 producer representative. The PGS does not delegate the decision of certification to an external body or organization, but may request advice from external bodies. The PGS has mechanisms to minimize conflicts of interest, and to ensure consistency on the level of the certification decision.
- j. Information about compliance is generated, maintained and updated (minimum annually) for each producer. This information includes data on production, details of compliance and non-compliance with the standard, etc.
- k. The PGS provides specific recognition or market access (in the form of the Bhutan Organic Mark) to its endorsed producers only.
- l. The PGS promotes on-going capacity building of producers as well as knowledge and advice sharing among group members.

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<sup>2</sup> Reciprocal means that producer A inspects producer B, and B inspects A, which can create conflicts of interest.

## APPENDIX 2: Procedure for approval of Participatory Guarantee Systems by the National Organic Programme

This document outlines the procedure to be used for approval of PGS initiatives by the National Organic Programme for use of the Bhutan Organic Mark. It should be read and used together with the Requirements for Approval of Participatory Guarantee Systems (Appendix 1).

### 1 General Policy

- a. Approved PGS are those that have received approval by the National Organic Programme.
- b. The approval process shall include persons or organizations other than those engaged in supporting the PGS<sup>3</sup>.
- c. Approval shall be based on the submission of a complete file prepared by the applicant PGS (see 2.2 Application, below) and the documented verification through file review and on-site visit by the National Organic Programme (or a person or a committee appointed by the National Organic Programme for this purpose) of the compliance of the applicant PGS with the Requirements for the Approval of PGS and the Bhutan Organic Standard.
- d. Approvals may be conditional, i.e. that the PGS shall implement specific improvements before or after the decision has become effective.
- e. The initial approval of PGS initiatives is valid for a period of 12 months unless otherwise decided by the National Organic Programme.

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<sup>3</sup> This means that if the National Organic Programme is engaged in assistance to PGS initiatives (group formation, training, etc.), at least one other person who is not engaged in assistance to the PGS shall also be included in the decision-making for the approval. This is to reduce the risk of conflict of interest.

- f. Subsequent approvals are valid for a period of 36 months unless otherwise decided by the National Organic Programme.
- g. The approval may be suspended or cancelled, with the latter as the last resort option, by the National Organic Programme if serious non-compliances with the criteria are observed, following a fair and transparent process.
- h. Before the expiry of the approval, the approved PGS initiative shall re-submit a new and updated file and be subject to a new file review and on-site visit by the National Organic Programme (or a person or a committee appointed by the National Organic Programme for this purpose) in order to renew its approval.

## **2 Procedures**

### **2.1 Inquiry**

Any PGS interested in applying for approval will receive from the National Organic Programme:

- a. This procedure (or a simplified version of it)
- b. The Requirements for the Approval of PGS
- c. The Bhutan Organic Standard
- d. Rules for the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark

### **2.2 Application**

The PGS initiative applying for approval will submit to the National Organic Programme their file containing the following up-to-date information:

- a. Its PGS Manual explaining the PGS structure and the certification procedure in such a way that allows verification of the existence of procedures or processes that ensure compliance with the Requirements for the Approval of PGS.
- b. A completed PGS application form



- c. The current list of its endorsed producers and their registered categories of production.

### **2.3 Application review**

A person or committee appointed by the National Organic Programme will review the application file and

- a. seek clarification on any unresolved matters directly with the authorized person from the applicant PGS initiative;
- b. determine, based on the criteria set out in Appendix 1 (see above) if the PGS has reached a sufficient stage of development to proceed with the application process;
- c. assign one or more persons to make an on-site assessment visit.

### **2.4 On site assessment visit(s)**

An individual or group, with working knowledge of PGS, appointed by the National Organic Programme, will carry out on-site assessment visit(s) or visits will be made by an individual or group appointed by the National Organic Programme. The visit(s) can include:

- a. a review of the relevant documentation;
- b. a review of the files of a sample number of members of the PGS initiative;
- c. on-site visits of a sample of members for which the files have been reviewed, interviews with PGS members and other stakeholders having knowledge of the PGS, to determine their depth of knowledge of the PGS standards and operating procedures, as well as confidence in the system.
- d. interview with other local stakeholders having knowledge of the PGS, if appropriate (e.g. the buyers, some local technicians or NGOs, etc.)

- e. an exit discussion with the PGS members where the findings are presented

The visit(s) shall be recorded in a *PGS Assessment Form*.

### **2.5 Decision**

A committee appointed by the National Organic Programme will review the file and the result of the on-site assessment visit and shall:

- a. seek clarification on any unresolved matters
- b. determine if the PGS can be approved
- c. determine any conditions that have to be fulfilled before or after approving the PGS and granting access to the Bhutan Organic Mark. Any such condition shall have a clearly spelled out time line.

The decision and any applicable conditions shall be recorded on the *PGS Assessment Form*.

### **2.6 Registration and granting of the right to use the Bhutan Organic Mark**

Once a PGS has been approved,

- a. the decision will be communicated to the PGS by means of a standard letter.
- b. an agreement on the use of the Bhutan Organic Mark will be signed,
- c. a certificate will be issued
- d. the relevant data will be included in the national registry of organic producers maintained by the National Organic Programme.

## **2.7 Monitoring and complaints**

There may be on-site visits by the National Organic Programme within the approval period to verify continued compliance if judged necessary.

The National Organic Programme shall provide information to the public about where formal complaints related to the functioning of PGS initiatives may be submitted.

The National Organic Programme shall investigate in a timely manner any formal complaints received against an approved PGS initiative. Such an investigation shall include at least:

- a. Evaluation of the nature of the complaint and if an investigation should take place,
- b. Investigation of the actual situation,
- c. Asking the PGS initiative for any comments or corrections,
- d. Informing the complainant about the outcome.

In a complaints process, the identity of the complainant shall not be disclosed to the PGS initiative. The National Organic Programme shall keep a record of complaints received and their resolutions.

## **2.8 Transparency**

The process of each approval and the basic data about the PGS initiatives shall be accessible for any interested parties, including members of the public.

## **2.9 Training**

The persons involved in file reviews, on site visits and decision-making regarding the approval of the PGS shall be trained to perform their functions including, but not limited to:

- Working knowledge of PGS (i.e. familiarity with PGS key elements and features, practical experience with PGS implementation, etc.)
- Knowledge about the Bhutan Organic Standard or an equivalent organic standard

- The Requirements for the Approval of PGS (see Appendix 1).
- This procedure
- The relevant forms and templates provided by the National Organic Programme in the context of the PGS approval procedure.

### ***2.10 Managing the process***

The National Organic Programme (or a person or a committee appointed by the National Organic Programme for this purpose) shall be responsible for the management of the whole process and each step. A file shall be kept for each PGS with all the relevant documents.