



GRET

Professionals for  
Fair Development



ALiSEA  
Agro-ecology Learning alliance in South East Asia

# Overview of the Organic Certification in the Mekong Region

# I/ Overview of OA in the Mekong region

## Definition

« *Organic agriculture should be understood in a much broader sense. It should not be confined to not using chemicals or fertilisers. Organic agriculture means humans need to get close and friendly with nature, so that wild organisms can live on their own instincts. Our production system should be based on natural cycles of the eco-system and soil conditions of each locality in such a manner that its biological diversity is not lost.* - **Từ Thị Tuyết Nhung**



# I/ Overview of OA in the Mekong region

## Mekong Region Potential

- Traditional agriculture as “organic by default”
- Modern organic agriculture emerged in the Mekong Region in the 2000s

- International cooperation support :
  - **Towards Organic Asia (TOA), 2011**  
To strengthen organic agriculture in the region beyond certification as the heart of social transformation.
  - **IFOAM Organic Asia, 2013**  
To coordinate activities regarding organic agriculture in the sub-region

# I/ Overview of OA in the Mekong region

## Mekong Region Potential

- OA quite recent in Mekong Region
- Laos and Myanmar: infancy
- Except for Thailand and China: more advanced
- Volumes and areas of production still marginal but expanding rapidly, especially in China
- Higher number of organic producers in Asia with a total of 0.9 million producers, mostly concentrated in India

Status of organic agriculture in Mekong countries in 2015

	YEAR	AREA, ALL [HA]	AREA, SHARE OF TOTAL [%]	OPERATORS, PRODUCERS
CAMBODIA	2015	12058,46	0,22	6753,00
CHINA	2015	1609928,40	0,31	9990,00
LAOS	2015	1445,03	0,06	1342,00
MYANMAR	2015	562618,00	0,04	10,00
THAILAND	2015	4558695,00	0,21	13154,00
VIET NAM	2015	76666,00	0,71	3816,00

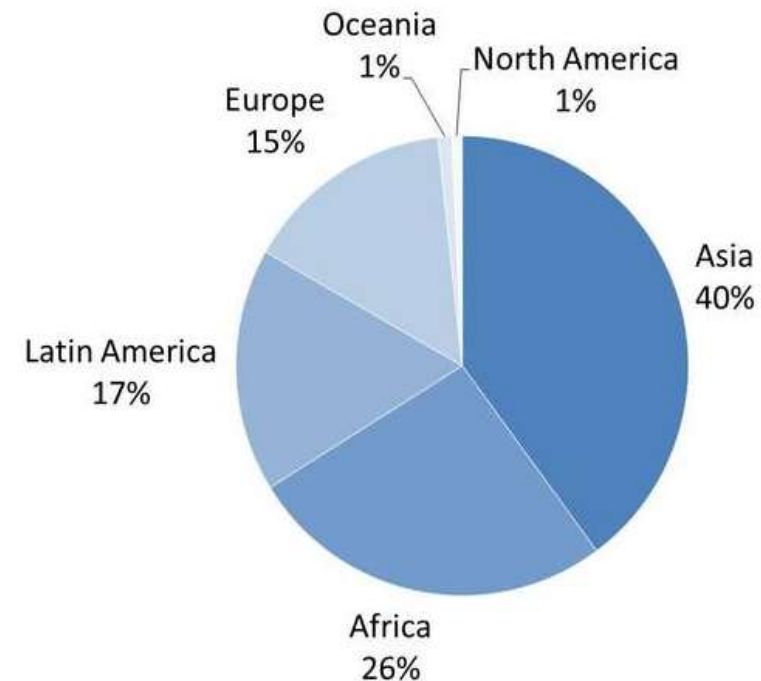
Source: FiBL-IFOAM survey, based on national sources and data from certifiers

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## Mekong Region Potential

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Organic producers by region in 2014

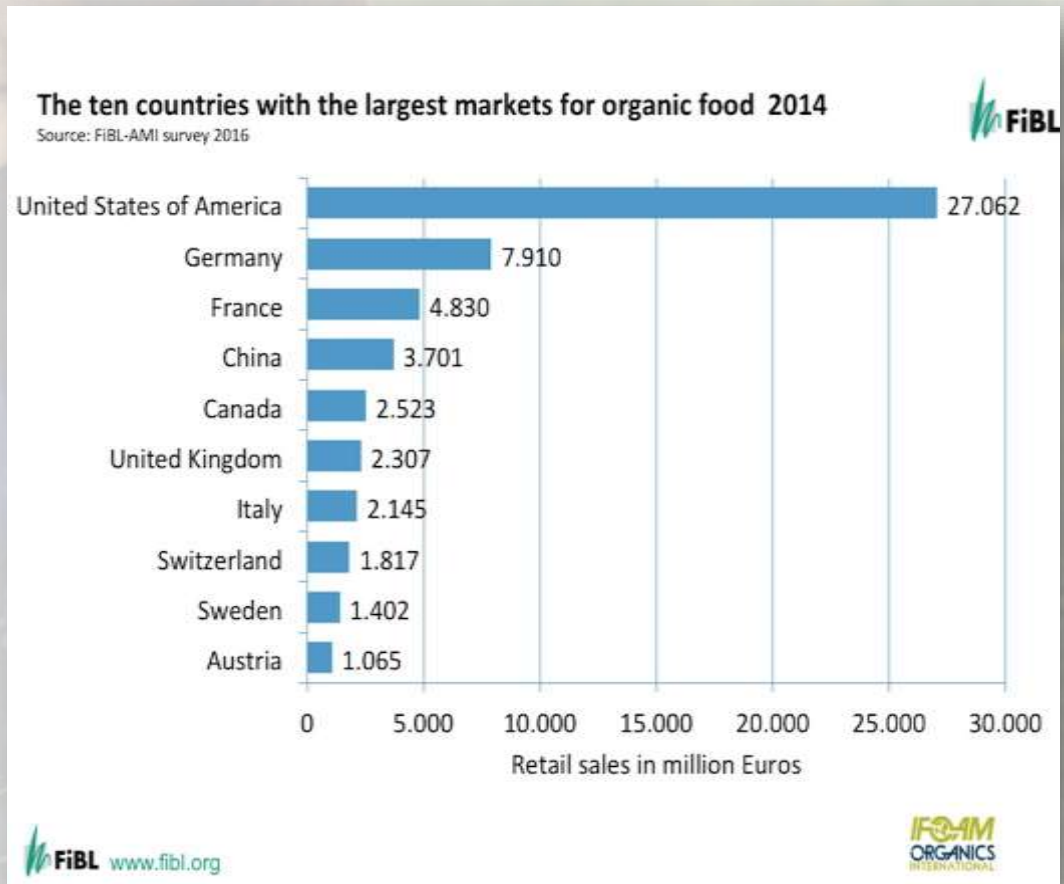


Source: FIBL Survey 2016

## II/ Organic Agriculture and certification

### Certification worldwide

- Organic market concentrated in rich western countries
- Global organic market is moving away from producers and towards a regulated market where standards are set in a top-down process by western governments



## II/ Organic Agriculture and certification

### Third Party Certification

- Third-party certification = a system where an independent body provides assurances that install or replace the trust between the two parties.
- 2 options for Third-Party certification:

Exports: the most common system is the third-party certification under international standards.

**Organic Agriculture Certification Thailand (ACT)**



- ✓ the International Organic Accreditation Service (IOAS),
- ✓ the Canadian Organic Regime (COR)
- ✓ the European Union (EU) among others.

Domestic: third party certification under the national organic standards by a national certification body.

- ✓ **Laos Certification Body (LCB)**
- ✓ No international recognition
- ✓ Nor foreign accreditation



# II/ Organic Agriculture and certification

## Barriers to entry

➔ Third party certification inaccessible to smallholders

Over 60% of the sub-region's 332 million inhabitants is engaged in small-scale agriculture



High administrative load

ECOCERT

Initial Request - Organic Certification

Before we can consider a certification, this document will be reviewed and you should be in contact with your request.

Please fill out sections 1 to 5 and send us section 6. Section 6 should be completed by someone who is not involved in the production, processing, or distribution of the products. If you are a producer, distributor, processor, or someone else, please contact us for more information.

1. Personal information

Name of the person or firm: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

2nd phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

3rd phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

4th phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Declaration

6. Comments

7. Declaration



High cost for certification

Ex: ECOCERT, French certification body

✓ between \$US 1 035 and \$US 1 285 to certify from 0 to 500 Acres of crops for one year

## II/ Organic Agriculture and certification

### Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS)

**IFOAM definition, 2008:** *“locally focused quality assurance systems [...] based on active participation of stakeholders and built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.”*

- ✓ PGS are particularly adapted to smallholders
- ✓ Interesting tool for expanding organic agriculture across the Mekong region



Culturally appropriate



Affordable: voluntary time involvement



# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## PGS emergence in Mekong Region

➔ Most farmers join a PGS because they want to sell their organic products locally at a premium price and they therefore need to label to guarantee the quality and justify higher prices.

**ADB:** The Greater Mekong Sub-region Core Agricultural Support Program (**CASP**), since 2006  
→ GMS countries to “*be recognized as the leading producer of safe food, using climate-friendly agricultural practices, and integrate them into global markets through regional economic corridors*”.



### III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## No one size fits all

As Volg et al. rightly stated in 2005,

« Organic practices in the regions of the world should be different in order to meet local production patterns, but equal with respect to their effectiveness in the environmental and health protection of all living creatures. »

# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Cambodia

### Mapping of PGS initiatives in Cambodia



Source: IFOAM – Global Map of PGS initiatives

- 2006: creation of the Cambodian Organic Agriculture Association (COAA)
- 2013: Support of GIZ and Oxfam Quebec to the *Centre d'Etude et de Développement Agricole Cambodgien* (CEDAC)
- 2016: first PGS initiatives
- 2017: 2 PGS pilots out of 13 are operational



- ✓ Government shows a positive attitude
- ✓ On-going development of national organic standards



- ✓ Product labelling fraud
- ✓ Threat to PGS reputation

# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Myanmar

Mapping of PGS initiative in Myanmar



Source: IFOAM – Global Map of PGS initiative

- Myanmar organic sector is the less advanced of the Mekong region.
- **2006**: The Myanmar Organic Agriculture Movement Group (MOAG) = umbrella for organic farming initiatives at the national level
- **2013**: MOAG becomes Myanmar Organic Grower and producer Association (MOGPA).
- **17 organic certificates** through third party assessment method.
- **8 PGS groups** under development whom 4 certified in May 2017



- Good relationship between MOGPA and the government



- Limited capacities: low number of PGS master trainers
- Certification process undergone hastily to be ready for ThaiFex in June 2017
- Thus, the risk of fraudulent use of the certificates and labels is high

# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Vietnam

Mapping of PGS initiatives in Vietnam



Source: IFOAM – Global Map of PGS Initiatives

- **2005:** ADDA in collaboration with the Vietnamese Farmers Union (VNFU) launched a project aiming at raising awareness and knowledge of farmers on OA
- National organic standards not enforced
- Greater involvement of the private sector with farming organic products for export (e.g. Hiep Thanh - Ecolink).
- **Vietnam Organic Association (VOA)** coordinated the organic sector at the national level
- **2008:** advocacy for PGS by ADDA, VNFU and VECO with the private sector



- PGS Vietnam recognized by IFOAM
- More than 300 farmers and 30 PGS groups



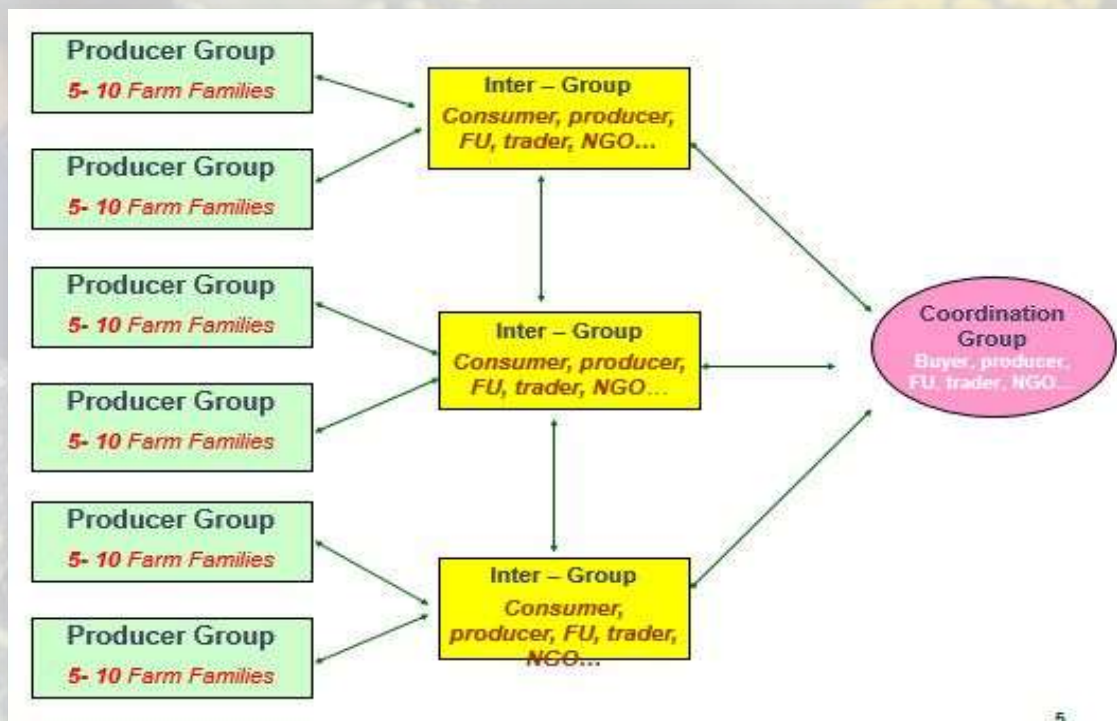
- PGS not officially recognized by the government as a mechanism to guarantee safe and organic vegetable production.
- Slow speed of replication compared to its potential

# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Vietnam



PGS Vietnam structure

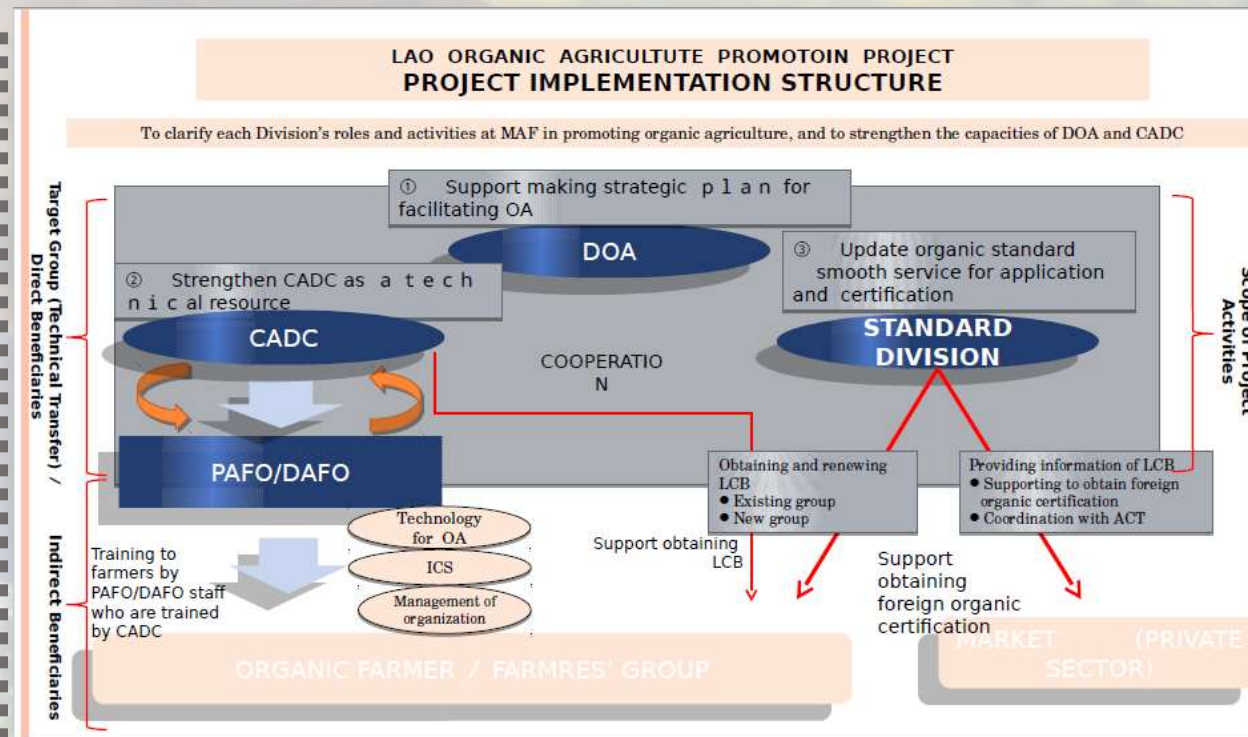


# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Laos

Relatively advance legal framework:

- ✓ 2005: Adoption of **national organic standards** developed with the support of **PROFIL** project (Swiss cooperation)
- ✓ 2006: first **organic farmers' market**
- ✓ 2008: **Lao Certification Body (LCB)** and the **Clean Agriculture Development Center (CADC)**
- ✓ 2013: JICA launched the **Lao Organic Agriculture Promotion Project (LOAPP)** to strengthen the capacity of DOA/MAF related to the inspection and certification  
→ **LCB** has no international recognition but is widely accepted within the country as the **government's certification body**



**90 farmer's groups** and **17 companies** had received organic certification in 2016, which represent **1,637 farmers** and **3,240 ha** of the organic agriculture land

# III/ Different trajectories in the Mekong Region

## Laos

### Mapping of PGS initiative in Laos



Source: IFOAM – Global Map of PGS initiatives

- 3 pilots have been launched in 2016
  - ✓ Savannakhet PGS, vegetable and fruits, facilitated by DOA  
**24 farmers**
  - ✓ Xiengkouang PGS, vegetables and fruits, facilitated by SAEDA  
**57 farmers**
  - ✓ Huaphanh PGS, dried bamboo shoots, facilitated by GRET  
**182 producers**



- Only country in the region where PGS is considered as an official certification tool by DoA



- Lack of financial resources
- Limited market access: weak involvement of private sector





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*Thank you for your attention*