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Participatory guarantee systems (PGS) for consumers' buying groups

A tool for farmer-citizen dialogues

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Colophon

Participatory guarantee systems (PGS) for consumers' buying groups. A tool for farmer-citizen dialogues.

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1 Introduction

This report explores the potential for a participatory guarantee system (PGS) for consumers' buying groups in the Netherlands. A consumers' buying group is a group of citizens who buy collectively from local farmers and producers. Vegetables, fruit, dairy, bread and other products are delivered weekly to a central location by producers, or collected by members of the consumers' buying group. Here, the consumers' buying group makes a choice of farmers or producers with which it does or does not enter into a relationship. This choice may, for example, be made on the basis of quality requirements, practical principles or personal preferences.

A PGS can potentially help consumers' buying groups establish concrete principles for sustainability which are adapted to local needs, opportunities and values. IFOAM¹ recognises PGS as a locally focused alternative to organic certification schemes. It allows producers to tell the story behind their products and production methods if they do not have an organic label (SKAL, Demeter, etc.). At the same time, it gives the consumers' buying group insight into the sustainability of local producers. PGS assumes active participation of farmers and citizens in defining, measuring and evaluating sustainability and in developing appropriate procedures to ensure and test sustainability principles. A PGS depends on trust between producers and consumers of the consumers' buying group and expects transparency, openness and cooperation from both parties - for the purpose of development and mutual learning. Apart from abstract and political discussions on sustainability, this in turn creates space for local and practice-based conversations. In this way, PGS can be an important tool for farmer-citizen dialogues in transparent and sustainable local food chains.

In the PGS Field Lab², together with consumers' buying group Goed Volk, we explored the social process for setting up a PGS for local consumers' buying groups that unites farmers and citizens. The PGS Field Lab consisted of five sessions, each with its own focus. As PGS is relatively unknown in the Netherlands, the experiences and lessons from this Field Lab could be valuable for various organisations in the Netherlands that work around local and sustainable food systems. We also propose a pathway to guide new consumers' buying groups in the Netherlands formulate and assure sustainability principles through a PGS.

2 Field Lab Consumers' Buying Group Goed Volk

This chapter describes the Field Lab that took place in early 2022 with consumers' buying group Goed Volk in Lichtenvoorde. Loosely based on 'Theory U' (see Box 1), the Field Lab consisted of five sessions for both consumers and producers. Various other regional producers with a focus on sustainability and strengthening relationships with consumers were also present.

The sessions were designed and facilitated by Jacob Smessaert and Laura van Oers, researchers at Utrecht University. The development of the sessions consisted of an iterative process in which outstanding questions or wishes that followed from the session guided the design of the next session.

The Field Lab took place on a biweekly basis at Biotel Achterhoek in Lievelede, near Lichtenvoorde. Each

1 The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM)

2 Field Labs are hands-on environments where ideas are jointly developed, tested and implemented.

session lasted about three hours and consisted of a) moments of self-reflection via 'personal diaries' in which participants individually answered questions on paper (see Appendix A), b) presentations, c) discussions in groups of various sizes, d) a freshly prepared meal and e) decisions or making follow-up agreements. Parts of the sessions were recorded with an audio recorder for research purposes.

The overview of the five sessions (Table 1) shows that a diversity of working methods, group compositions and tools were used to support and guide the discussion around the different components of a PGS.



Photo 1 - *Biotel Achterhoek*

Box 1 - A brief explanation of Theory U

Theory U is a process model for transformation of people and organisations. The downwards side (uncovering) of the 'U' illustrates the deepening process and the rising side (enacting) the movement towards acting and testing new ideas. The tipping point at the bottom of the 'U' is reached when the organisation has a clear understanding of what drives them and what is needed.

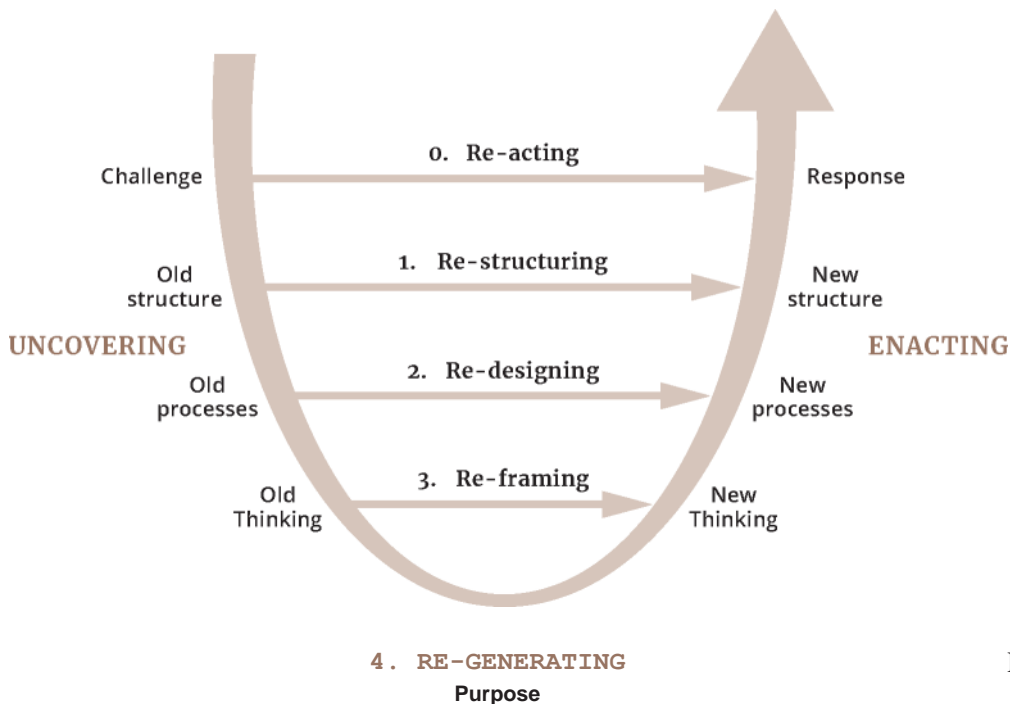


Figure 1 - Theory U³

Put briefly, Theory U testifies to the importance of taking time to reflect and listen before taking action. Often, groups tend to want to take action straight away, whilst that action actually makes more sense and has more impact when the motives behind it are clear and supported by the group. Theory U proves to be a particularly valuable process for tackling issues that require thinking and acting outside the box. The starting points for transformation in Theory U are joint observation, learning and planning.

Session 1

During the first Field Lab session, participants got to know each other and the ideas behind PGS. Participants in this session included some consumers from the consumers' buying group, some producers supplying the consumers' buying group and other producers from the region. As an introduction, we discussed the possible added value of PGS from various perspectives: those of the community supported agriculture (CSA) network, the consumers' buying group and the researchers. In addition, we asked participants to fill in their diary assignment.

³ Source : <https://thesystemsthinker.com/connecting-to-source-the-u-process/>



Photo 2 – *Diary assignment*



Photo 3 - *Memo notes*

A PGS is underpinned by shared sustainability principles. The first session of the Field Lab therefore aimed to open the discussion about values within the consumers' buying group. Through the question "*What do you expect from a local and sustainable food system?*", these values were first explored individually and then collectively. Participants were asked to write their answers on memo notes.

During the session, the various values were grouped into five overarching themes: 'Economy', 'Ecology', 'Collaboration', 'Community & Identity' and 'Education'. There was a brief discussion about adding a sixth theme 'Logistics and Practicality', but it was decided not to do so as this is not really about values but rather their practical implementation. Collectively defining the themes went quite smoothly; the discussions were mainly about placing the different values into themes. This was not about whether the value was formulated correctly or incorrectly, nor whether everyone agreed with it. It was about getting a broad overview of the different views in the group, to see where there was like-mindedness and where there were tensions. With the discussion shifting to the underlying values within the themes, we noticed different tensions and heard different views on certain values and requirements, for example within the theme 'Ecology'. Below is a selection of notes from this theme:

- *Food quality should be organic, biodynamic or equivalent*
- *Restoration and conservation of natural resources*
- *Sustainable (towards positive impact on nature, climate, animal welfare)*
- *Healthy for consumers, producers and nature*
- *Production in balance with plant, soil, animal and nature and biodiversity*
- *Ecologically produced products*
- *Seasonal offerings*
- *Without pesticides, as few fossil inputs as possible*
- *Locally well-produced food, not necessarily organic*
- *Regenerative*

As a result, the logical next step for the group in the second Field Lab session was to further develop the themes and, more importantly, interpret the underlying values for the consumers' buying group. At the end of session 1, it was decided that the next session would involve discussion on what these themes and values mean in concrete terms for the actions of the consumers' buying group.

Session 2

The aim of session 2 was to explore the themes surrounding the consumers' buying group in greater detail. In short: how does the consumers' buying group translate the themes for a sustainable a local food system into shared principles for its actions? After the welcome, all participants again took part in a diary assignment.

During this session, small groups reflected on developing the themes for the consumers' buying group. Each group consisted of two producers and two consumers. At the start of the session, each group started with one of the themes from session 1. Due to the number of attendees, it was decided to bundle the themes of cooperation and education; however, these themes were dealt with individually.

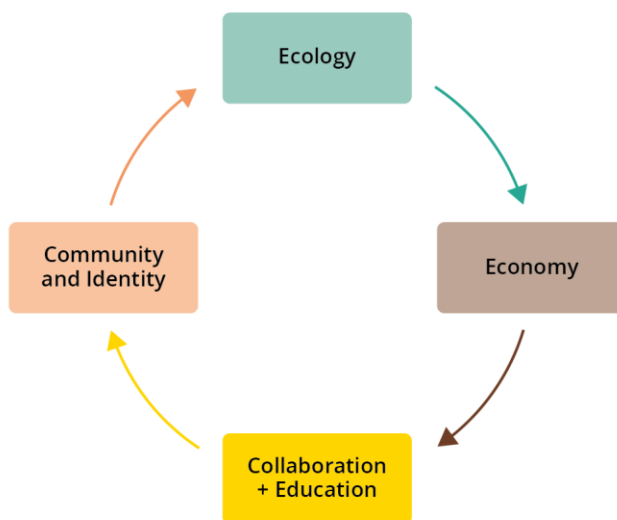


Figure 2 - Schematic representation of rotation of the assignment

In total, the session consisted of three rounds, in which the themes rotated and the groups built on each other's work. To illustrate, the group that started on 'Ecology' moved on to 'Economy' in round 2 and to 'Cooperation + Education' in round 3.

In the first round (45 minutes), we asked the 'instigator' group for each theme to identify what the most important values are for this theme and how they define them. In doing so, the group had access to the memo



Photo 4 – a group discussing

notes with the values from session 1 ('what do you expect from a local and sustainable food system?') and were asked to reflect on whether certain values do not belong to this theme, whether any values are missing and whether they wanted to add other values to this theme. We then asked them to select the most important core values and propose a definition to which the following groups could respond.

In the second and third rounds (both 20 minutes), the initial input from the first group was discussed and supplemented by a new group. We gave the 'discussant' group the following guiding questions:

- What questions do we have about these values and definitions proposed by the group?
- What is unclear about these values?
- What choices does the consumers' buying group need to make regarding this issue?

The biggest discussion arose around the 'Ecology' theme where both the 'instigator' and discussant' groups indicated that a lack of frameworks for sustainability creates ambiguity. At the same time, participants commented that it was unclear how the choice of 'local' fits within, or weighs up against, sustainability criteria. It was decided that it is up to the consumers' buying group to develop these frameworks. As it became apparent that these discussions had not taken place within the consumers' buying group before, we decided to use the next Field Lab session to discuss the relationship between organic and local food. At the end of this session, a discussion also arose about producer access procedures: on what grounds do we cooperate with a producer, and for what reasons are producers invited or excluded? This raised the question of whether multiple producers can supply the same product. Both questions were taken forward to session 3.



Photo 5 - *Local potatoes*

Session 3

During session 2, the group members decided that it would be good for the consumers' buying group to first make some decisions without the producers. The aim of session 3 was to find group consensus on two central questions that had come up during earlier sessions.

The first question concerned the products offered by the consumers' buying group: how does the group define local, and what are the minimum criteria that producers must respect? The second question revolved around the dilemma of whether, and under what conditions, the same product can be offered by different producers. Unfortunately, we did not have time during the Field Lab to achieve consensus on this second question.

For the first question, we tried to reach consensus through consent. We started with a variety of scenarios that combined different demands around local and sustainable food, and asked members to participate in discussing a particular scenario (see Appendix C). Consumers' buying group members had already reflected on the scenarios and the implications of their preferred scenario for the consumers' buying group in preparation for Session 3.

At the start of session 3, we asked members to position themselves in the room using five different scenarios. Gradually, we modified and nuanced the scenarios with input from all members to arrive at a scenario that everyone could live with. We allocated about two hours for this. With regard to the first question, the following group consensus was reached:

"Our consumers' buying group sources products within a 30 km radius from sustainable producers. If something is not available locally (and if we nevertheless believe it is important to offer this product), we will source it from organic wholesalers. Sustainability is about products that are of organic quality and requires sustainable production methods from the producer."

In this way, the group managed to find the right nuances around the tensions surrounding organic versus local food. Here, we found that the term *sustainability* is appropriate, but at the same time too vague. It was decided to discuss this in more detail during the next session, and several people took on the task of doing some preparatory work for this.



Photo 6 - Group discussions

Session 4

It was decided to once again hold session 4 with only consumers' buying group members, but due to miscommunication, several regional producers also participated. During session 3, sustainability was defined as products of organic quality, and that this calls for a sustainable production method by the producer. Producers who have organic certification (such as SKAL or Demeter) are therefore automatically considered to meet these criteria. For producers who are not certified, this question is still open.

So the aim of this session was to discuss how the consumers' buying group can know whether producers who are not organically certified fit the group's (ecological) sustainability vision.

To introduce this discussion, three short presentations had been prepared. Firstly, Bregje Hamelynck from the CSA network explained how GASAP, a network of consumers' buying groups from Brussels and Wallonia, is structured and makes decisions on entry requirements for producers. Secondly, together with the group, we went through the definition of agroecology as prepared by Voetsel Anders, to gain inspiration on general principles and more specific practices that could fit the consumers' buying group. Finally, the board of the consumers' buying group had formulated some ideas in order to come up with a proposal in terms of entry requirements.

During the group discussion after the presentations, it quickly became clear that it was too early to make concrete decisions around entry requirements and putting them into practice. On this, we decided to focus the discussion more on how the consumers' buying group could continue to have these conversations and make decisions on entry requirements over time. It was decided to divide the next steps into short-term and medium-term ambitions.

In the short term, it was decided to work towards more transparency, both from producers to consumers and vice versa. The decision was made to work on this with the group and further explore the question of more transparency during the last session of the Field Lab. For the medium term, they wanted to work out the entry requirements and the form and content of the farmer-citizen dialogues, although no consensus was reached on the specific working method with which this would be done. The main conclusion of this session is that the motivation was present to start a longer process that will grow alongside developments within the consumers' buying group. The group also believed it would be useful to start thinking in more concrete terms about conversation starters for producers and citizens.

Session 5

The aim of the final session of the programme was to feed back to producers what had been discussed and decided with consumers' buying group members during sessions 3 and 4, and to initiate a dialogue on transparency between consumers' buying group producers and consumers. During session 4, the consumers' buying group realised that establishing criteria and entry requirements for producers required more discussion among members. A concrete suggestion for the short term was to gather more information about the different producers and their production methods, and to put this information on the consumers' buying group's website for (future) members.

Since transparency works both ways, the following questions were discussed in groups with at least one producer and consumer. On the one hand, it was about transparency about the producer's production method for members of the consumers' buying group: What does this mean? What should be reported on the website? What information do we need for this? On the other hand, we talked about transparency about the consumers' buying group's operation, vision and requirements for the producer: What do producers want to know about the consumers' buying group's operation and requirements? How can this be realised?

The dialogues around transparency fits into a broader framework of farmer-citizen dialogues in which PGS is a means or tool rather than an end in itself. In the last part of session five, we wanted to initiate these dialogues and reflect with the participants on what farmer-citizen dialogues could look like, what the added value for farmer and citizen could be, and how to ensure that these dialogues are valuable and instructive for both parties. Using an envisioning exercise, we invited farmers and citizens to imagine themselves in the role of the other party during a fictional farm visit and to ask themselves what discussions are important in this context.

Afterwards, these questions were discussed in small groups: *as a citizen, what would you want/need to ask the farmer? As a farmer, what would you want/need to ask the citizen?*

A common understanding what topics need to be discussed and how these conversations can be pleasant and instructive is only the first step. Further developing these dialogues in the context of a PGS revolves around the following questions: Who will engage in the conversation with producers? Where does this conversation take place? How is reporting to take place to other members of the consumers' buying group?



Photo 7 - Farmer-citizen dialogue

Table 1 - Overview of sessions

Field Lab	Goal	Target group	Working method	Conclusions	Follow up	
Session 1	Becoming acquainted with each other and PGS	Members consumers' buying group	Individual reflection (diary)	Overview of values and group into different themes (economy, ecology, cooperation, community and identity, education)	Interpret and further develop the themes and core values	
	Overview of values underpinning a sustainable and local food system and identify key themes	Producers consumers' buying group	Presentation			Translation to consumers' buying group action
		Other regional producers	Brainstorm			
			Group discussions			
Session 2	Consider themes and core values for consumers' buying group action in greater depth	Members consumers' buying group	Individual reflection (diary)	The consumers' buying group should develop frameworks around sustainability criteria and entry requirements	More in-depth discussion needed with consumers' buying group members on producer access requirements and tension between sustainable-local	
		Producers consumers' buying group	Small group discussions (rotating)			
		Other regional producers	Group discussion			
Session 3	Group agreement reached around minimum criteria for producers Specific focus on 'ecology' theme	Members consumers' buying group (excluding producers)	Individual reflection (diary) Group process to achieve consent (scenarios)	Group consensus around the definition of sustainable food in a local context	Making the concept of sustainability concrete in entry requirements for producers	
Session 4	Discuss how the consumers' buying group decides whether producers who are not certified organic fit the consumers' buying group's sustainability vision	Members consumers' buying group (some regional producers were also present)	Presentations Group discussion	Decisions on short- and medium-term follow-up steps (transparency and entry requirements, respectively) Motivation to start a process that grows with the development of the consumers' buying group	Discussion on transparency and continuing farmer-citizen dialogues.	
Session 5	Feedback to producers of consumers' buying group decisions and conversations	Members consumers' buying group	Presentations	The value of dialogue for both producers and consumers and the need for conversation starters for dialogue	Further develop frameworks for farmer-citizen dialogues (form and content)	
	Initiate dialogue on transparency between consumers' buying group producers and consumers	Producers consumers' buying group	Imagination exercise and role-play			Online transparency along both sides
		Other regional producers	Small-group discussions			

3 Impressions and advice for the CSA network

In this chapter, we discuss our observations from the Field Lab and the insights we derive from them for conversations about PGS for consumers' buying groups.

Sustainability vision: what do we expect from a local and sustainable food system?

Discussions on the sustainability vision (*'What do we expect from a local and sustainable food system?'*) revealed various facets of sustainability. At the same time, it emerged that the conversation quickly focused on environmental sustainability, with the topic of pesticides in particular taking centre stage. The relationship between organic production and local economy was seen as an important discussion topic.

Our first recommendation is to set up the discussion on the sustainability vision broadly, and to provide space for a diverse interpretation of 'sustainability'. What can help is a brief introduction to the different facets of sustainability in the food system. At the same time, and because the sustainability vision and priorities will be different for each consumers' buying group, we recommend remaining sensitive to local interests, relationships and developments.

The second recommendation is to make it possible to discuss trade-offs between different facets of sustainability. During the Field Lab, the trade-off between 'organic' and 'local < 30 km' was explained by the facilitators. By offering consumers' buying group members different scenarios, it became possible to reach a consensus around an appropriate balance between the 'local' principle and the sustainability of producers and supplied products.

We expect that other trade-offs may need to be discussed in the drafting of the sustainability vision and, along with this, the actions of the consumers' buying group. Examples of potentially conflicting issues that could be worked out in a similar way:

- Criteria for 'exotic' products (price and distance)
- Accessibility of the consumers' buying group to diverse consumers and fair income for the producer (price and solidarity)
- Producers with whom you work with (one or more producers per product category)
- Continuation with producers (loyalty and the 'most suitable' party)

In drawing up the scenarios, it is important that, in addition to two extreme variants - where one side takes centre stage and the other falls away - there are also intermediate variants. We also recommend that all participants individually consider which scenario best suits their point of view before a group discussion takes place to reach consensus. It is important that the facilitator of the group discussion removes the scenarios for which there is no enthusiasm and helps the group refine or nuance the remaining scenarios. Ideally, one scenario should eventually be found that all consumers' buying group members agree with ('consensus'). Constantly challenge the group to make the implications of adjustments explicit, by describing the situation within the context of the consumers' buying group ('scenario testing'): *'if we agree on this, it means that ...'*

In short, we recommend arriving together at a supported definition of sustainability that fits the consumers' buying group and the local context. Take time together to explore what each person considers sustainable and what values this refers to.

It is interesting to be explicit about the trade-offs here and acknowledge contradictions. Try to make values as specific as possible, and maybe elaborate on their different dimensions. Make sure that when new people join the group, they know what the group understands by sustainability and how this is interpreted in practice.

Actions of the consumers' buying group: how do we translate our sustainability vision into actions?

In making the translation from the general sustainability vision to the actions of the consumers' buying group, we noticed that the consumers' buying group found it difficult to work towards concrete criteria. Consumers' buying group members shared the concern that vague terms would leave too much room for interpretation, and thus become meaningless. For example, they were asked, *"If we say we want to work with sustainable producers, everyone nods yes. But what exactly do we expect from these producers?"*.

Although there was a need for example lists - such as organic or biodynamic quality requirements (SKAL/EKO/Demeter), for example - consumers' buying group members were reluctant to work with lists that were too long. During session 4, which shared examples of lists and GASAP's methodology, consumers' buying group members expressed their desire not to make it *"too complex, too difficult or too big"*. Our impression is that sample lists can be useful for consumers' buying group members to gain more insight into the variety of sustainability criteria, but are not suitable as a measurement tool. This was evident from the discomfort in the room when members reflected on 'testing' the farmer against criteria. Rather, members wanted to stay away from a 'check list' and were afraid of creating an atmosphere of distrust by being placed in the role of evaluator. Especially when relationships are so close (geographically and socially), it is more interesting to build trust through regular meetings and dialogue.

Therefore, our advice is to think above all about conversation starters in this step of the conversation on PGS. Indeed, it was noted that many members of the consumers' buying group are concerned about starting the conversation with farmers, because they assume they have too little knowledge to do so in a fruitful way.

Entry procedures: who works together and what do we expect from each other?

Consumers' buying group Goed Volk was already working with local producers before the talks on PGS. So for this reason, the initial focus was on clarifying existing procedures, i.e. how were current suppliers found, and on what basis were they accepted into the consumers' buying group? Discussions with consumers' buying group members from the first hour, including the board, revealed that this has mainly been an informal process, with producers for various products (bread, milk, meat, vegetables, etc.) being found through personal contacts.

In the conversation about entry requirements for producers, it quickly became clear that informal procedures are not always defensible to the rest of the consumers' buying group. In addition, conversations about what the consumers' buying group expects from 'sustainable producers' often mirrored the current situation and existing producers. Had the consumers' buying group had the conversation about access and entry requirements earlier ('who do we cooperate with?'), it might have led to less discomfort.

We advise the CSA network to encourage new consumers' buying groups to have the conversation about sustainability vision and the choice of appropriate producers before entering into relationships with producers. In doing so, the consumers' buying group can ask their prospective producers to subscribe to a certain intention, for example, stating that they are aiming for the buying group's sustainability vision.

It is up to the consumers' buying group to determine which criteria are 'mandatory', in the form of minimum

requirements, for example, and which criteria are rather ‘recommended’. Mandatory criteria are clear guidelines that a producer must meet to be part of the consumers’ buying group, while recommended criteria are guidelines that the consumers’ buying group would like to see and that the producer is expected to progressively work towards in cooperation with the consumers’ buying group. In this way, it is possible for a consumers’ buying group to remain relatively open while still promoting a vision of the food system and local economy and taking concrete steps towards it.

For existing consumers’ buying groups, it is important to recognise existing relationships with different farmers in the area and consider how tension can arise between these and a particular sustainability vision. It is also important to identify together what role affinity and personal relationships play in producer selection and retention. And not to forget to consider the role of (organic) wholesalers for products that are not available locally/organically.

An important discussion we had during the Field Lab was about the consumers’ buying group’s transformation strategy. In the discussion about entry and access requirements, the discussion arose about the role of the consumers’ buying group: as a consumers’ buying group, do you want to develop a vision around sustainable short chains and then find producers who fit this vision, or do you want to collaborate with local farmers and move towards more sustainable food systems together? In other words, as a consumers’ buying group, do you want to support farmers who make the transition to more sustainable practices, or do you want to support (reward) farmers who, in your eyes, are already working sustainably. What room for evolution do you build in and how can you capture this in agreements with producers? It is important to explore together what you would like to see in the future and how this can possibly be introduced gradually and not to forget to actively listen to the knowledge and vision of the producers.

We see the conversation on transformation strategy as an important component in setting procedures for entry and follow-up because it determines, for example, whether there is a minimum expectation, and how much room there is within the procedures for good intention and future ambitions. The desire to include ambition for change in determining entry requirements came out strongly in the Field Lab. A producer who is not yet perfectly in line with the sustainability vision today can thus show in his or her story which sustainability steps have already been taken, and which will follow in the future. Establishing such a promise again requires transparency and clear agreements. One of the questions that arises here is: what if the consumers’ buying group finds a producer who is more in line with the sustainability vision than the current producer?

We recommend that the CSA network also allows member consumers’ buying groups to explicitly consider which producers fit the consumers’ buying group’s vision and transformation strategy, so that there is not too big a gap between the consumers’ buying group’s objectives and the visions of new producers. New collective visions and demands can naturally evolve dynamically, and consumers’ buying groups can define specific moments when their vision and operations can be questioned and evolve according to the members and activities at that point in time.

Finally, the Field Lab discussion on entry procedures also clearly illustrated the importance of transparency. This applies both to producers (about their production methods and the reasons behind them) and to the consumers’ buying group (about their working methods, organisation and choices). Be clear about what the producer can expect from the consumers’ buying group: who are the members of the group, what is its vision, what are its plans, how will collaboration take place?

Similarly, be clear to members what the different producers' production modes are, why different producers are part of the consumers' buying group, and how previous decisions were made. Give enough space to the producers to tell their stories, in order to understand each other better.

Follow-up procedures: How do we keep the conversation going about the sustainability vision?

During the Field Lab, members briefly discussed follow-up procedures, i.e. once we have established a relationship, how do we ensure that we keep the conversation going about the sustainability vision? An important lesson in this respect is that it is not about 'control', but about a mutual desire of producer and citizen for dialogue and a strengthening of the sustainability vision. It is important that consumers' buying groups are clear about their follow-up procedures, both to members and to producers within the consumers' buying group. We recommend that consumers' buying groups consider, for instance, what happens if a producer deviates from the sustainability vision. In addition, consumers' buying groups can also use follow-up procedures to refine the sustainability vision and, for example, make 'recommended' practices 'mandatory'.

From the Field Lab, we also draw lessons about the frameworks of dialogue. In the last session, we practised farmer-citizen dialogues, as part of the PGS conversation. This showed that from both sides, a recurring conversation is seen as something valuable and interesting. In this regard, consumers' buying group members shared their desire for farm visits and for clear conversation starters to engage with farmers on location. Here, inquisitiveness is paramount, and questions such as: why does she/he do it a certain way, what are her/his motives, and what are her/his dreams for the future? Mutual trust is an important prerequisite for dialogue, but can also be built precisely through this dialogue.

In a follow-up process, the consumers' buying group can reflect on the practical frameworks for dialogue. That is: how often, with whom and where do these conversations take place? This also relates to feedback: how is the information that is gathered shared with the rest of the consumers' buying group, and how is the information considered in the light of the consumers' buying group's sustainability vision?

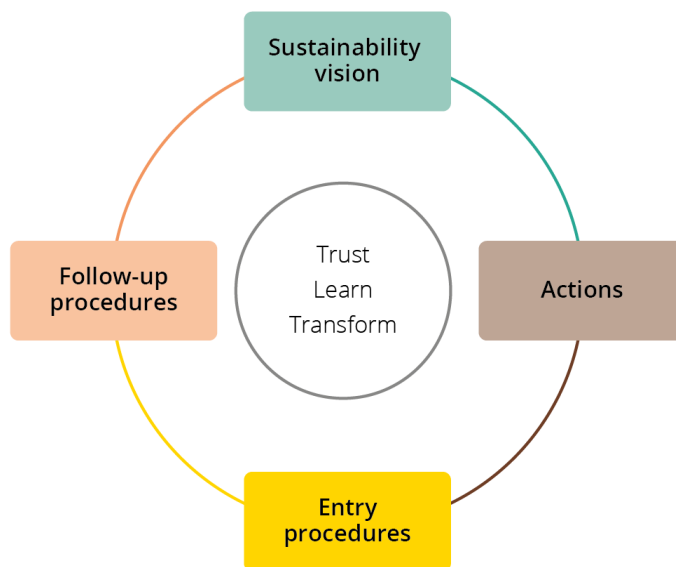


Figure 3 - PGS as a tool for dialogue

4 A proposed pathway for beginning consumers' buying groups

Based on our impressions, we suggest the broad outlines of a similar PGS track in which beginning consumers' buying groups meet at least three times and discuss the following topics:

SESSION 1: What is sustainability?

- What is the sustainability vision of consumers' buying group members?
- What does this mean for consumers' buying group action?
- What are the important key themes for this consumers' buying group?
- What values do they attach to these themes?
- Where do tensions and potential conflicts arise?

SESSION 2: Entry requirements and entry procedures

- What do we expect from our producers?
- What do we expect from our members?
- Conversation on transformation strategy
- What is 'mandatory' and what is 'recommended'?
- Transparency and declaration of intent

SESSION 3: Conversation starters farmer-citizen dialogue

- What information does the consumers' buying group want from the farmer? What information does the farmer want from the consumers' buying group?
 - What norms and values are central to this conversation?
 - What does this conversation look like in practice?
 - How do we build trust?
 - How does the sustainability vision consumers' buying group evolve: from recommended to mandatory criteria?

In addition, we have the following tips:

- Build in enough moments for individual reflection through diary assignments.
- Provide (external) guidance to prepare and facilitate the sessions. Supervision, preferably by people who are experienced in both the subject matter and group processes, is important for the atmosphere and quality of the discussions. It can ensure that everyone can actively think along around substantive questions, while the facilitator keeps an eye on the time and goals of the session. The CSA network could train some people as PGS facilitators.
- Recognise the importance of an enjoyable evening. These talks ask quite a lot of people so a pleasant setting and good food are important incentives for sustained participation.

5 Conclusion

In this report, we discussed the PGS Field Lab process, shared our impressions and drew several lessons for conversations around local and sustainable food systems. We conclude that PGS can be an interesting tool for farmer-citizen dialogues in the Netherlands. For us, PGS is not a linear path of 'agreement-check-evaluation' but a round model in which dialogue is continuous and the sustainability vision can evolve and be kept in focus together.

In the further development of PGS within the Dutch CSA network, we think it is important to think in concrete terms about what exactly PGS is or what it can mean for consumers' buying groups. Is the aim to bring citizens closer to farmers and communities based on solidarity? Or, is it about autonomy from supermarkets and industrial supply-chains and the elimination of third-party guarantees via certificates? Or is PGS about creating new, ambitious criteria for defining and measuring sustainability? These things can of course co-exist and partly overlap, but it we consider it important to think in what ways PGS best suits local needs and realities.



Photo 8 - *Conversations at the garden farm*

6 Who are we?

This research was conducted by Laura van Oers (1991) and Jacob Smessaert (1995), both PhD candidates at Utrecht University at the Copernicus Institute for Sustainable Development. We study the transformation to a sustainable and fair food system and explore what is needed to facilitate this transformation. Our main focus is on alternative forms of organising within (agro)ecological agriculture: what new models and methods help make food systems more fair, inclusive, democratic and sustainable? Who are important actors in making food systems more sustainable, and what is the relevance, for example, of citizens uniting in food collectives?

Our research takes place in the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. For this subproject, we collaborated with the Dutch CSA network (Bregje Hamelynck) and consumers' buying group Goed Volk (Ben Freriks). By actively contributing to exploring PGS in the Netherlands together with these organisations, we hope to gain better insights into these processes and make relevant recommendations for science and practice. Although much has already been written about PGS and its advantages over dominant certification systems for farmers and citizens, it is still an open question how PGS can make a concrete contribution to the transformation towards sustainable food systems in the Netherlands.

Laura holds a master's degree in innovation science (Utrecht University) and graduated on the topic of community-supported agriculture (CSA). Besides her PhD, she is active as a volunteer with Ontgroeï (Dutch degrowth movement) and Voedsel Anders (movement for sustainable and fair food and farming systems). Jacob holds degrees in agronomy (Université de Liège) and political ecology (AgroParisTech). He is also a member of degrowth.info and active in several collectives working on food sovereignty (such as Food Autonomy Festival).

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Appendices

A - Diary questions for self-reflection (per session)

Session 1

1. *What is 'sustainable food' to you?*
2. *Why did you join/supply consumers' buying group?*
3. *What motivates you to participate in this workshop series?*
4. *How does PGS fit into your picture of the food system?*
5. *What are your expectations from the programme?*

Session 2

1. *What did you remember from the previous session?*
2. *Do you agree with the themes discussed last session? Are there things you miss?*
3. *Around which topics do you see any tensions emerging?*
4. *What (else) do you think we should talk about in the Field Lab?*
5. *What important outcome do you wish to see from this Field Lab?*

Session 3

How does the consumers' buying group weigh up the location of products and the type of products offered?

1. *Which scenario do you prefer and why?*
2. *What implication(s) does this scenario have for the consumers' buying group?*

What is the procedure for deciding whether interested suppliers can become part of the consumers' buying group?

1. *Which scenario do you prefer and why?*
2. *What implication(s) does this scenario have for the consumers' buying group?*

Session 4

1. *In what ways did your preference for 'sustainable-local' change in the previous session?*
2. *How do you see the function of sustainability requirements in the further development of the consumers' buying group?*
3. *Is it up to all members of the consumers' buying group to develop the requirements for producers (regarding sustainability)? How do you see your own role in this process?*
4. *What other criteria besides local (<30 km) and sustainable (= of organic quality and sustainable production method of the producer) would you like to see as a requirement? In other words, "I think all producers in our consumers' buying groups should meet the following criteria:..."*

Session 5

1. *What did you learn from the Field Lab?*
2. *What did you think went well during the process? What did you think went less well?*
3. *What is your advice for other consumers' buying groups who want to go through a similar journey?*

B - List of values divided into different themes (session 1)

Ecological	Economic	Cooperation	Community and identity	Education
respect	fair and affordable, local economy	consumers' buying group participants support each other by creating a certain volume and exchanging ideas on nutrition and lifestyle	accessibility	value development
producing with an eye for vitality by imitating natural processes	fair cultivation, i.e. limiting quantity for quality	connecting	respect for each other, understanding of motives	no wastage of food
the quality of the food must be organic, biodynamic or equivalent	fair price producer	direct contact	diversity	propagate and challenge and raise consumer awareness
respect and attentiveness for all living beings (earth, plant, animal and human)	fair wage	cooperating	equal opportunities	consumers' buying group participants support each other by creating a certain volume and exchanging ideas on nutrition and lifestyle
restoration and conservation of natural resources	farmer-citizen solidarity	being transparent = education	Food community	being transparent = education
ecological	locally sustainable where possible, otherwise from further afield	involvement	self-sufficiency	
sustainable (towards a positive impact on nature, climate, animal welfare)	locally well-produced food, not necessarily organic	transparent (what do I grow, how do I grow it, how does it taste)	pride	
nature	financially good for producers and consumers	together (short lines, dialogue etc; everyone takes responsibility)	resilience	
no poison	affordable for everyone	social aspect, connection between producer and buyer	tasty	
for the health of consumers, producers, nature	fair for producer and consumer	reinforce each other	entertainment	
production in balance with plant, soil, animal and nature, biodiversity	short line producer-consumer	communication (what's growing, what do you like, what do you want to buy)	staying/spending time	

Ecological	Economic	Collaboration	Community and identity	Education
ecologically produced products	support for local economy	solidarity and joint responsibility for and on the part of members	connection	
good for people, nature and the community		transparent (consumers know how the product was produced)	flavourful	
diversity (offerings per season, exchange/supplement with colleagues)		balance of give and take	solidarity and joint responsibility for and on the part of members	
non-toxic, natural products, minimal fossil inputs				
integrity of nature (plant, human, animal)				
sustainable				
locally well-produced food, not necessarily organic				
regenerative				

C - Scenarios for seeking consent (session 3)

How does the consumers' buying group weigh up the location of products and the types of products offered?

1. Our consumers' buying group sources products within a 30 km radius only from organic producers
2. Our consumers' buying group sources products from organic producers within a radius of 30 km. When our consumers' buying group wants to offer a product that cannot be found organically within this radius, it sources it from non-organic producers within the same radius.
3. Our consumers' buying group sources products from organic producers within a radius of 30 km. When our consumers' buying group wants to offer a product that cannot be found organically within this radius, it sources it from organic producers in a wider radius.
4. Our consumers' buying group sources products within a 30 km radius, regardless of the producers' production method and certification.
5. Our consumers' buying group purchases products from organic producers regardless of distance.

What is the procedure for deciding whether interested producers can become part of the consumers' buying group?

1. A product is only offered by one producer.
2. A product can be offered by several producers, provided there is a clear difference in variety of the product (e.g. different type of potato) or the cultivation method of the product (e.g. organic and non-organic).
3. A product can be offered by several producers even if there is no obvious difference in variety or production method.