

SA's first organic pollinator programme launched

The South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO) in collaboration with the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) South Africa (SA) has launched South Africa's first Ecological Organic Agriculture Pollinator programme. This programme is training 20 people to set up PGSs throughout South Africa that will help build more connected local food systems, provide organic assurance for consumers and support organic growers in sharing knowledge.



Image Supplied.

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGSs) are locally focused on quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on the active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange and is an accessible and appropriate model for smallholder organic farmers seeking local markets.

Colleen Anderson, SAOSO secretariat, says: "Third-party certification for organic produce is often too expensive and administratively burdensome for smallholder farmers to attain. PGS is a consumer- and producer-based alternative, underpinned by the principles of shared vision, participation, trust, transparency, learning process and horizontally."

PGS SA is launching the Ecological Organic Agriculture Pollinator Programme with support from the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture in Southern Africa (KH SA), a collaborative country-led partnership funded by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It is one of five Knowledge Hubs for Organic Agriculture.

KH SA operates in Zambia, Namibia and South Africa with plans to extend the project to Malawi in 2021. The other four Knowledge Hubs for Organic Agriculture are implemented by GIZ in North, West and Eastern and Central Africa.

Ecological and organic agriculture practices

The pollinators, from seven provinces, are attending training sessions on ecological organic agricultural practices. Subsequent to this, they will set up PGS groups and advocate for organic production, all in support of sustainable farming practices in South Africa.

Organic production is increasingly viewed by international organisations, such as the United Nations, as a strategic way to address rural poverty, malnutrition and biodiversity loss, particularly in a time of climate change.

Sasha Mentz, the programme coordinator, states: "PGS SA is receiving an increasing volume of inquiries about how to set up PGSs because consumers want assurance that produce is grown organically. We are also seeing a growing demand from small-scale producers for training on ecological and organic agriculture practices."

“ We urgently need to transition from large-scale, chemical-intensive and monocropping farming systems to support localised chains of organic production. ”

Organic production builds soil health and fertility by increasing the carbon content of the soil, boosting its ability to retain water and enabling effective nutrient cycling. This results in plants that are rich in nutrients and more resistant to drought, pests and diseases. Healthy soils retain and store more carbon, helping to mitigate climate change. The African Union Commission has established an African organic farming platform to identify best practices in the organic sector (Ecological Organic Agriculture Initiative – EOA-I). It supports the attainment of several of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Providing ongoing extension support

The pollinators will each establish and support a new PGS group and train stakeholders in their areas to replicate the system across South Africa. On completion of training, they will continue to support the activities and growth of the newly created PGS group providing ongoing extension support to organic farmers. Municipalities will be approached to provide further support to PGS groups as they can play an important part in local economic development.

Mentz notes: "We urgently need to transition from large-scale, chemical-intensive and monocropping farming systems to support localised chains of organic production. PGS can play a key role in encouraging and supporting organic agriculture through local market customer demand."

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