

9th REGIONAL MEETING OF
PACIFIC HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (PHOAFS)
(15 – 17 May 2024) – virtual

Paper reference	Section 4 Agenda Item 5
Title	Update: Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom)
Action	For Information
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Background

1. The Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) is a membership organisation and the region's peak body for organic agriculture. POETCom has managed the Pacific Organic Standard (POS) and Pacific Organic Guarantee Scheme (POGS) on behalf of the Heads of Agriculture of the Pacific Community since 2006. POETCom has 75 member organisations, organic and agroecological farmers, representing nearly 25,000 farmers across 15 Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICT). *This represents a 28% increase since the last Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry meeting in March 2023.* The POETCom Secretariat is hosted within the Land Resources Division (LRD) and leverages POETCom's access, influence, and success throughout the Pacific.

Purpose

2. This paper provides updates on the organic movement in the region and the review of the POET Com Governance, the Pacific Organic Standard (POS) and the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) as agreed during the 8th Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services meeting.

Progress update: POETCom Governance Revision

3. The Development of the final revised Governance documents has taken much longer than our original work plan anticipated, as the following explanation details. Since the work was not completed as scheduled, a POETCom General Assembly was postponed from 2023 to 2024.

POETCom Governance Revision Working Group

4. The POETCom Governance Revision Working Group was established through a Call for Nominations in April 2023. The group comprises 13 members: seven men and six women from seven PICTS and technical services experts from Australia and New Zealand. The members represent POS farmer and processor users, certification bodies, and Government regulatory staff, ensuring diversity in the group.

The Working Group is divided into two Focus Groups: POETCom Governance and POS/PGS Management. The group is facilitated by the POETCom Coordinator, the Protégé Project Manager, and one of the Consultants who led the review.

In August 2023, the Working Group had an inception meeting and met twice to discuss priority issues. They focused on establishing a charter between SPC and POETCom, a membership that includes voting, strengthening focal points and POETCom core services, and strengthening the PGS system. The working group is now ready to review the draft revised documents from the secretariat. The documents will be implemented once approved by the POETCom Board and membership.

POETCom Charter

5. The Working Group has identified that the first step towards creating the POETCom Charter is establishing a formal agreement with the SPC. This includes clarifying the roles and responsibilities of SPC and POETCom. In early 2024, the Secretariat met with the SPC Legal Division to begin the process of these clarifications. Once the Charter is in place, POETCom can develop a strategy and proposals for funding.

The process to review POETCom Governance.

6. The project is advancing much more slowly than we anticipated. To ensure Governance review is delivered by 2025, the Secretariat has developed a Workplan and a Roadmap (Annex 1 attached) to help guide the revision process in 2024, including processes with SPC Legal, the POETCom Board, and Membership validation at National and Regional Assemblies. The goal is to present the final product to the PHOAFS in 2025.

Pacific Organic Standard Review

7. The first draft of the Pacific Organic Standard (POS) Guidelines in French and English was released in early 2023 and has since proved to be a valuable resource. The final publication with graphics and illustrations is expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2024 through the PROTÉGÉ project. It's important to note that the POS Guidelines will be updated regularly to remain current, relevant, and valuable. In June 2023, Papua New Guinea's office of the National Institute of Standards and Industrial Technology approached POETCom to discuss using the POS, including the Guidelines, in their National Organic Conformity Assessment and Certification Schemes. The POS was explicitly developed for the Pacific Island economies, and this is an excellent example of how it continues to serve the region as intended by the HOAFS. The accompanying Guidebook also adds to the value of the POST as a resource for the region.

Update on Organic Certification

8. According to the IFOAM Organics International 2024 World of Organic Agriculture report, published in February 2024 and based on 2022 data collected in 2023, the organic movement is expanding across the Pacific.

Here are some key findings.

Organic Certified Land

10. There are **98,663 hectares** of organic certified land in eight Pacific Island countries and territories: Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, and Vanuatu. This represents a **34% decrease from 2023**.

Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)

11. There are **17,988.66 hectares** under the PGS, which is a **55% increase** over 2023 PGS involves local communities in the certification process.

Third-Party Certified Land

12. There are **80,787.34 hectares** third-party certified, showing a 61% decrease from 2023 Third-party certification involves external organisations verifying organic practices.

PGS Groups

13. There are **12 operational** PGS groups in **six** Pacific Island countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, representing **1,038 farmers**.

Two newly approved PGS groups in 2023:

14. Cornerstone Niu Enterprises (Fiji): A project within the Social Empowerment Education Program [SEEP] starting with 45 farmers from Naitasiri, Viti Levu. Palau Organic Growers Association (POGA): Starting with five core farmers and processors, with anticipated growth in the coming years. Additionally, **six** PGS groups are under development in Fiji, Niue, and Samoa.

Third-Party Licensees

15. There are **68** third-party licensees, representing a **5% increase** over 2023. These licensees involve **22,068 growers**, which is a **37% increase** over 2023 in **eight** Pacific Island countries (Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu). This growth is stronger than the global average **increase of 26%**. The increase in organic certification under the POETCom-managed PGS system indicates strong growth in local and regional organic value chains.
16. Third-party licensee numbers **increased by 37%** in 2022, showing a strong post-COVID resurgence. However, third-party certified hectares **decreased by 61%**, partially due to better reporting and the loss of approximately 100 organic vanilla farmers in Niue.

Regional Pool of Certification Auditors

17. In 2023, as part of the EU-funded SAFE Pacific project, POETCom embarked on establishing a regional pool of certification auditors with the training of 15 carefully selected individuals from seven countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, New Caledonia, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu. These individuals are undergoing training to become lead auditors and consultants specialising in Organic and Food Safety. The goal is to create a pool of Pacific auditors. Doing so makes the certification process more cost-effective and contributes to local employment.
18. In conjunction with establishing a regional auditor pool, POETCom is negotiating Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with organic and food safety certification bodies active in the Pacific region. These MOUs aim to support a regional certification mechanism by fostering collaboration to improve scheduling and the use of trained auditors. This strategic effort will enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of organic and food safety certifications.

Supporting national organic policy interventions

19. Pacific Island Governments continue to create a supportive organic policy environment as the demand for certification grows and regional and national agencies and development partners recognise the value of organic agriculture as a development tool for the Pacific Island context.
20. National Organic Policies, including incorporating organic principles in national agriculture policies, are imperative in successfully building a high-integrity organic sector, assuring consumer confidence in the Organic Label, and creating public-private partnerships. Organic Agriculture is the key contributor to sustaining our cultures and communities, improving farmer livelihoods, people's health, and the environment in the Pacific.
21. New Caledonia and French Polynesia remain the only countries that have regulated organics. Vanuatu's government has endorsed its first national organic policy, and the governments of Palau and Fiji have now drafted policies that are waiting for official endorsement by authorities. In the case of Fiji, in October 2023, POETCom assisted the Fiji Ministry of Agriculture with the final consultation of the Fiji Organic Policy before it goes before the Cabinet in 2024. Consultations were held in Labasa (Northern), Narere (Central), and Lautoka (Western). LRD/POETCom co-facilitated the meetings, including organising farmers' attendance.

22. Others included.

- Kiribati: In November 2023, a situational analysis was prepared, including with the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agriculture Development (MELAD), to review the potential of organic agriculture in Kiribati.
- Samoa: The Samoa Agriculture and Fisheries Sector Plan (2022/23 – 2026/27) Strategic Outcome 1 includes references to supporting the development of organic production and markets.
- Cook Islands: The development of the agricultural regulations will include the Pacific Organic Standard as the regulated standard for organic farming.
- Federated States of Micronesia: Organic practices and concepts were incorporated throughout the 2023-2027 Draft Agriculture Policy, released in May 2023.

POETCom International Links

23. To ensure that the Pacific is staying engaged in international discussions and direction setting in organic agriculture, POETCom remains active with regional and global organisations, including:

IFOAM Organics International

24. The Oceania Pasifika IFOAM regional group fosters partnerships with the Australian and New Zealand Organic Movements. This collaboration has allowed POETCom to collaborate with input and comment as their National Organic Policies are developed, for example, to assure that POS certified product from PICTS continues to be accepted as equivalent for use as ingredients and that the Organic Pasifika mark continues to be recognised in the marketplace.
25. POETCom is discussing with the Convenors of the Intercontinental Network of Organic Farmers Organization (INOFO) about joining membership to strengthen the small-holder farmer voice on the global stage and to jointly share and access communications and knowledge products.

Recommendations:

29. The members are invited to:

- (i) **Note** the progress and ongoing work of POETCom in building the organic movement in the Pacific.
- (ii) **Note** POETCom's revised roadmap and work plan for POETCom Governance Revision and Pacific Organic Standard Review.

Annexe 1: POETCom Governance Revision Roadmap

Tasks and Milestones		Timeline																											
		April-24			May-24			June-24			July-24			August-24		Sept-24		Oct-24		Nov-24		Dec-24		Jan-25		Feb-25		March-25	
Phase 2	Revision and consensus																												
2.1	Document revision/drafting																												
2.1.1	POS ownership & Organic Pasifika Trademark Licensing drafting	█																											
2.1.2	POETCom Charter/Statutes drafting including: mandate and vision of POETCom, link with SPC, roles and responsibilities towards SPC, roles of the various bodies, members.	█																											
2.1.3	ToR of the General Assembly and advisory board	█																											
2.1.4	Membership policy	█																											
2.1.5	Standard Committee ToR Revision							█																					
2.1.6	PGS Committee ToR Drafting							█																					
2.2	Working Group meetings as needed	█																											
2.3	Final consensus by Working group and SPC Legal							█																					
Phase 3	Board & LRD Approval																												
3.1	Documents to Advisory Board & LRD								█																				
3.2	Comment period								█																				
3.3	Board Vote								█																				
Phase 4	GA Approval																												
4.1	Translation													█															
4.2	Documents to Membership													█															
4.3	Comment period													█															
4.4	GA Vote & consultation on POETCom Strategic plan													█															

4.5	Revision of governance documents and POETCom Strategic plan																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																										</
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