

ORGANIC NEWS

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Over the past few months, our organic community has continued to grow, connect and make progress, with new developments, ongoing initiatives and important work towards a more sustainable food system. Here's a look at what's been happening.

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FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON: BAKHUSELE MATHUPHA



With all the warnings about El Niño and the extreme weather we are facing, I think we should seriously consider copying the food forest method that I have been using at Phawu Agripark.

I started this almost three years ago after realising just how hungry my community was. I noticed how poorly nourished some of our schoolchildren are, struggling with development and learning, and it made me ask a simple question: How can we talk about education, development and a better future when we are not talking seriously about food and

nutrition from pregnancy onwards?

The reality is that in my community, very few households have a food basket beyond maize, beans and pumpkin. We have almost no household fruit or nut production, very little beekeeping, and very few diverse food gardens. Many families depend almost entirely on shop-bought food, often with very limited budgets.

My parents taught me something very simple: Food is grown. I took that knowledge and multiplied it. I went on to

do courses and training, not because my parents' knowledge was somehow incomplete, but because I wanted to verify what I already knew, learn more, and be able to stand tall and say: I know some of this, and I have evidence and experience to back it up.

This is why I teach, train and advocate for regenerative organic farming practices. Climate change is not a hoax. Poverty in South Africa is a real-life issue.

And many people have lost confidence in farming because they have become dependent on agricultural inputs they cannot afford, fertilisers, pesticides and commercial seeds that can leave small farmers vulnerable when prices rise or the rains fail.

A food forest is not a magic solution. But it is one way of thinking differently about food security. Instead of putting everything into one crop, we can build diverse food systems:

fruit trees, bananas, vegetables, legumes, herbs, roots, livestock, pollinators, medicinal plants and soil-building species. We can design farms and homesteads that protect soil, hold water, produce food and create resilience.

That is what I have been trying to demonstrate at Phawu. I am not saying people must copy everything I do. I am saying: Look at your land differently. Plant something that will feed you next year. Plant something that will feed your children. Plant something that will still be standing when the maize fails.

**Build soil. Harvest water.
Plant trees. Diversify.**

Because when climate shocks come, food security cannot start at the supermarket. It has to start in the soil, in our homes and in our communities.

**Water first.
Soil second.
Food third.**



THE GROWING LEADERS TRAINING OF TRAINERS PROGRAMME IN MPUMALANGA

**25 participants.
Five organisations.
Five days. One agrihub.
Countless possibilities.**

From late July into early August, the first face-to-face session of the Heal the Planet Growing Agroecology Leaders course brought together 25 emerging leaders from across Mpumalanga who will go on to train 450 farmers.



Working alongside experienced facilitators, participants didn't just learn about agroecology,

they helped build it. Together they co-designed and developed the Ratanang Colab AgriHub, establishing agroforestry systems, preparing healthy soils, building compost and creating a living classroom that will support future generations of farmers.

Delivered through a partnership between SAOSO, WWF South Africa, Project Biome, Ratanang Colab and the African Conservation Trust, the

course equips participants with practical skills they can take back to strengthen food systems and build resilient communities.

The course differs from conventional agricultural training because participants

were not positioned as passive recipients of expert knowledge. They were asked to become co-designers of a living site and to reflect on how the tools and methods could be used in their own communities. This gives the cohort a direct experience

of the methodology they will later facilitate: observe the local system carefully, identify existing assets and constraints, develop options with the community, test practical interventions, learn from the results and share that learning across the network.

RATANANG COLAB AGRIHUB: BUILDING A LIVING CLASSROOM

The Ratanang Colab AgriHub is developing into a practical demonstration and learning site for the Growing Leaders cohort and surrounding farmer networks.

Agricultural and training specialist Alex Kruger, with more than three decades of grassroots experience, worked with the local team, Social Employment Fund participants and course participants to prepare the site,

linking permaculture design with practical skills for small-scale and community-based producers. The team assessed slope, water pressure, storage and production zones, using participatory design and surveying tools to develop the plan with community members and emerging trainers. Production beds were then prepared with biochar and compost using locally available organic materials,

while agroforestry lines were established with indigenous, productive, medicinal and leguminous species to build biomass, improve soil cover and fertility, and provide shade for future crops. Over time, the site will also provide a local resource for biodiversity, propagation and practical examples of regenerative land use for farmer networks in Bushbuckridge and surrounding areas.



From Fish Hoek to the Wild Coast: Our PGS family keeps growing

"There are moments in this work that remind you why the Participatory Guarantee System exists in the first place," says PGS Administrator and Coordinator, Maxabandile Mlauli. "This year we have witnessed the Participatory Guarantee Systems network in South Africa come alive through all the various activities that have been taking place in the PGS Working Group."

On the mountainside farms of the Cape Peninsula in Fish Hoek and on the banks of the Umzimvubu River in Port St Johns – farmers, consumers, community members, retailers gathered together to mark a quiet moment in the history of our local food system. Although the two communities are separated in time and space, the same message weaved in both spaces – a shared vision, a spirit of collaboration and knowledge sharing is the cornerstone to transforming our food system from the ground up.

A Community of Practice, in the truest sense

On 27 June, the Cape Peninsula



PGS group gathered at Neighbourhood Farms in Fish Hoek for the first Community of Practice Day, and it did exactly what those words promise. Farmers from Noordhoek, Kommetjie, Capri, Ocean View, Masiphumelele, Fish Hoek and Hout Bay sat alongside residents, retailers and Food Club partners, and shared their journey in organic farming – from seed to soil, and how to get good food from a backyard in the far south onto a neighbour's plate without losing the story of how it was grown – the stories told were inspiring and enlightening. The seed swap was the heartbeat of the day, open-pollinated varieties were exchanged, each seed carrying a little more resilience back into the ground it came from.

The real currency of PGS is trust. It cannot be bought with a certificate fee; it is earned one seed swap, one farm visit, one honest conversation at a time. PGS is never a finished exam, it is peer exchange, seed sharing and mentorship – a system designed to keep growing wiser with every season. No single authority sits above the group. Farmers and consumers stand shoulder to shoulder, each with a voice on how the system is run. Growing methods, decisions and challenges are all laid open. What you display on a market table is exactly what happened on the land. Farmers review farmers; consumers walk the fields alongside them – assurance is built together, not handed down. As our operational director Matthew Purkis reminded

everyone, "knowing where your food comes from is fast becoming essential, not a luxury." Watching a dozen small-scale growers commit to walking that road together, peer to peer, is proof that



the PGS model is not a theory we import — it is a practice we are building, one farm visit at a time.

Port St Johns plants its flag

On the 7 August, the Wild Coast answered. Port St Johns marked the launch of the Port St Johns PGS group led by Noluthando “Ndoza” Fadane. The air in the room was filled with hope, with enthusiasm, with curiosity. The launch grew out of the Port St Johns Agroecology Awareness and Advocacy Group, chaired by Zithobile Silo, and it showed in every detail – song and dance, plates of African cuisine, tables dressed in honey, bananas, vegetables and herbs grown by the very hands that welcomed us.

This is now the eighth PGS node in the Eastern Cape and the fourth to be launched this year. For a region where distance, weather and poor roads can make a farmer feel forgotten, a PGS group becomes a place of belonging and is more than just about paperwork and organic seals — it is a promise that no one has to face the season alone; it is one heartbeat, one vision that unites a community. It was moving

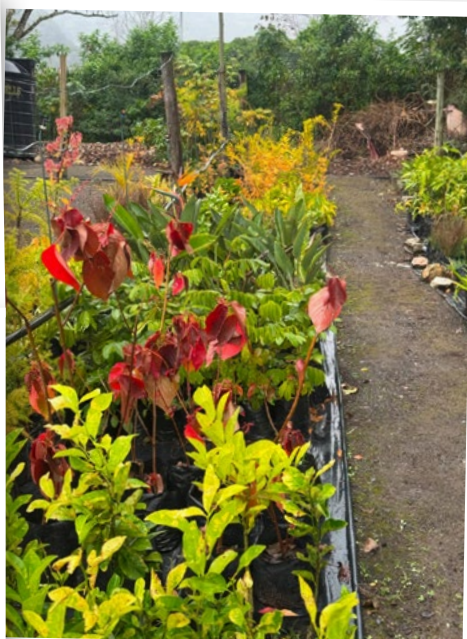
and inspiring to hear the words spoken by Climate Change Youth Ambassador Amanda Ngqukutu, who spoke not of yields and markets but of healing, of what the soil gives back to a person who tends it. It was a reminder that food sovereignty is never only about what fills a plate, or a pantry, or a fridge; it is about what restores a community’s dignity and sense of belonging.

Two coasts, one movement

Fish Hoek and Port St Johns could not look more different, yet they are answering the same call: farmers organising themselves, consumers choosing to

participate, and markets rebuilt on trust and transparency. South Africa counts an estimated 2.5 million smallholder farmers, yet they contribute barely five percent to our agricultural economy. But every Community of Practice Day, every new node like Port St Johns, chips away at the isolation and shortens the distance between the hands that grow the food and the hands that cook it. And with every seed swapped and every farmer welcomed into the fold, it proves that food sovereignty is not a policy paper — it is a practice, built in community halls and farm fields, by people who simply decided to trust and learn from one another. Yes, these two activations will be the first activities and we will be collaborating with them to introduce organic farming and PGS in schools throughout the Eastern Cape.

They have secured offtake agreements for the school Gardens that act as a communal garden and the farmers who are cultivating the school gardens will be structured into a PGS Group. Whereby they will learn about organic farming Agroecology etc.



TAKING ORGANIC FARMING TO THE SCHOOL GARDEN

We also headed to Snomonde Primary School in West Bank, East London on the 1st of October and to Nonkcampa Primary School, King William's Town on the 2nd of October, as part of the PGS SA and SAOSO activation with the M.M Xotyeni Foundation (MMX Foundation).

These are the first activities with the newly formed PGS Group and we will be collaborating with them to introduce organic farming and PGS in schools throughout the Eastern Cape.

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of Agriculture that act as a communal garden and the farmers who are cultivating the school gardens will be structured into a PGS Group. Whereby they will learn about organic farming and agroecology.

NEXT PGS WORKING GROUP MEETING

It is with great pleasure to confirm that the next PGS Working Group meeting is scheduled to take place on the 5th of November, 2026. We are looking forward to engaging with the collective as a whole and hearing the voice of the farmers.

For more information or to get involved, contact maxabandile@saoso.org

RESEARCH ROUNDUP

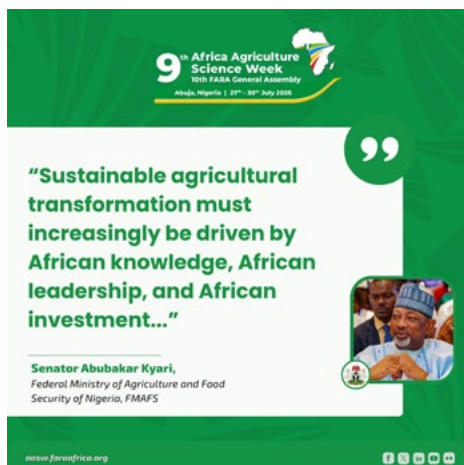
Internationally, the Technology Innovation Platform of IFOA (TIPI, of which Raymond Auerbach is President, and which specialises in applied, farmer-centred research) is collaborating with ISOFAR, which carries out peer-reviewed organic research internationally.

TIPI and ISOFAR will organise a pre-conference workshop on Building Organic Science Leadership for the next Organic World Conference (to be held in the Philippines in 2027), as well as planning the Scientific Track of the OWC. The Boards of TIPI and ISOFAR will meet next month to plan these activities.

Also, NOARA, with the valued support of FARA, FiBL, AfrONet, EOA-I and other partners, convened a side event during the 9th African Agriculture Science Week (AASW9) on Tuesday, 28 July 2026, to share progress and engage stakeholders on

the development of the draft Organic and Agroecological Research Agenda for Africa (OARAA 2036). This has been a major project of NOARA, and is

being broadly discussed in many Agroecology forums throughout Africa at present. The emerging proposition is to consider evolving OARAA 2036 beyond an internal research framework—originally developed with the aspiration of securing recognition within the African Union ecosystem; NOARA and partners wish to move towards a Continental Policy and Advocacy Instrument capable of articulating Africa's research priorities in organic and agroecological agriculture and engaging strategically with research and development funding institutions.



South Africa's food system is frequently held up across Africa as a model of agricultural modernisation, efficiency, and food production—an example many countries aspire to emulate. Yet beneath this image of success lies a profound contradiction. Despite producing enough food, maintaining sophisticated agricultural industries, and exporting food worldwide,



hunger, malnutrition, diet-related disease, ecological degradation,

farmer distress, worker precarity, and deepening inequality continue to define the lived reality of millions. The African Centre for Biodiversity report, [The architecture of control: corporate power, financialisation, and democratic food futures in South Africa](#), argues that the problem is not scarcity—it is power.

EVENTS

The Good Life Show in Jo'burg

Three days. Countless conversations. One growing movement.

In mid-September, SAOSO was a partner at the Good Life Show in Johannesburg and every conversation at our stand reminded us why this work matters: it's never just about produce; it's about people.

And none of this happens without our farmers. From Lawrenz Farm, Sunset Organics, Mandie

se Kombuis, AloeDale Farm, to GreenWorx Organic Farm SA, our PGS Igoli family showed up in full force, bringing the soil, the stories, and the soul behind every harvest. That same fresh produce also made its way into the hands of the chefs cooking up a storm on the show floor, proof that organic doesn't just look good; it tastes even better.

Our Chairperson, Bakhusele Mathupha, connected with the crowd through his wisdom on agroecology, sparking real curiosity about the sector's future.

Our Secretary Tandi Hopa was in her element too, chatting, laughing, and making every visitor feel like family.

Across the stand, the whole SAOSO team met people exactly where they were: asking questions, sharing knowledge, and turning strangers into supporters of the movement, one conversation at a time. All while looking effortlessly good in our SAOSO merchandise! More details to come on how you can get yours!



Organic & Natural Expo in Sandton

In August, SAOSO attended the Organic & Natural Expo 2026 in Sandton, Gauteng, representing the organic sector and PGS while

sharing knowledge and engaging with the public. What emerged was a much bigger opportunity: consumers are increasingly looking for organic produce, while businesses and other stakeholders are actively seeking

organic farmers as potential suppliers.

Overall, the expo was a valuable experience for SAOSO and the team, providing an opportunity to engage directly with consumers and sector stakeholders, build relationships and gain valuable insight into the growing demand for organic produce and stronger market access for PGS farmers. organic farmers as potential suppliers.

One of the highlights was seeing AAAJ Farmers Tripleaj, one of our PGS farmers and a leading producer of certified organic pharmaceutical herbs and sustainable farm products, exhibiting at the event.



PGS STORYTELLING

Our mobile journalists have published a series of short videos highlighting some of our farmers and supporting retailers in the Western Cape, including Valota Farm, Botanical Taste, Organic Zone, and the Food Club Hub.

Watch the stories:



Sumaiyah Zalgoanker visits Food Club Hub and Native Way:

https://www.instagram.com/p/Dc_hd9uAn-n

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Dcl56PSAuIN>



Hannah Hopper visits Botanical Taste and Organic Zone:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DbSIMJODHp->

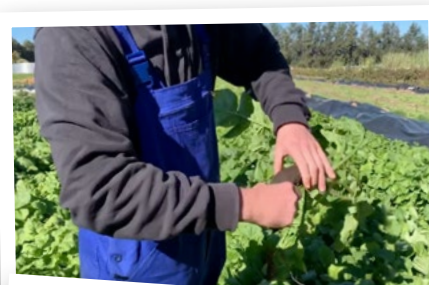
<https://www.instagram.com/p/Dd1JVi5AsRi/>



Lucky Mcedi visits Valota Farm:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Dca7bpSDd8F/>

These stories were made possible through a collaboration between PGS South Africa, SAOSO, the Knowledge Hub for Organic Agriculture in Southern Africa (KHSa), and Mycelium Media Colab, showcasing the people and places helping to strengthen the organic movement in South Africa.





Be part of the 16 Days of Global Action on Agroecology 2026!

From 1–16 October 2026, you can build solidarity and action towards a future where rural women can exercise their rights, lead agroecological transformation and live free from hunger, toxic pesticides, violence, exploitation and climate injustice.

Dive into the campaign + toolkit [here](#)



The architecture of control: corporate power, financialisation, and democratic food futures in South Africa – [Report](#)

A must read from the African Centre for Biodiversity about power in South Africa's food system.

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

You have the power to make a difference! Start by asking your local retailers where their food comes from—and encourage them to stock certified organic products.

Get to know your local PGS group: visit farms, connect with the farmers, learn about their practices, and see where their produce ends up. Use the PGS Pollinator Map to find a group near you.

Want to support SAOSO? Become a member or make a donation to help grow the organic movement in South Africa. Every action matters!



Become a member!



Donate today!



Future Newsletters: We'd love to hear from you! Got news to share or a topic you'd like us to cover in the newsletter? Send us an email at info@saoso.org.