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## Empowerment as an effect of participation in participatory guarantee systems (PGS): A case study in Argentina

JANNA PFISTER, CHRISTIAN R. VOGL, SONJA KAUFMANN, NIKOLAUS HRUSCHKA

*BOKU University, Dept. of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, Germany*

### Abstract

Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) can provide local solutions to promote sustainable and equitable agri-food systems. They enable direct relationships between different actors in the food system, strengthen local markets for organic products, and encourage the active participation of different stakeholders in decision-making processes that affect and guarantee the quality of locally produced and consumed food. The active participation of members is crucial to the effectiveness of PGS and brings many benefits. One of these benefits is empowerment, which is often emphasised but lacks a comprehensive, theoretically grounded understanding. The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the empowerment ('power to', 'power with' and 'power within') of producers through their participation in PGS. An exploratory case study involving three PGS initiatives in Argentina was conducted in 2023, using a survey of 21 producers and semi-structured interviews with key informants to address the research objective, based on qualitative content analysis. The results indicate that PGS can promote empowerment processes among producers by enabling positive changes in the dimensions of 'power to' (increased knowledge and economic independence, improved access to markets and machinery through cooperation), 'power with' (increased social network and cohesion) and 'power within' (increased self-confidence and appreciation). These empowerment processes appear to result from the interplay of collective and individual facets of empowerment, spanning social, economic and political dimensions. Institutional and political support for PGS initiatives seem to play an important role in facilitating the empowerment process of its members. Further research to validate and complement these findings is needed to build a comprehensive understanding of participation in PGS and its impact on the lives of participating producers, to inform both existing and new initiatives.

**Keywords:** organic certification, certification, empowerment, local food systems, participation, participatory guarantee systems, PGS