

# GUIDE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COLLECTIVE CERTIFICATION IN A PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM

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—  
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## **Quotation**

Andrianarinosy H. and Lemeilleur S. (2021). *Guide for the implementation of the collective certification in a Participatory Guarantee System*. CIRAD.

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# PREAMBLE

## Purpose of the guide

➤ The PGS is understood here as defined by IFOAM in 2008: “*Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) are locally focused quality assurance systems. They certify producers based on active participation of stakeholders and are built on a foundation of trust, social networks and knowledge exchange.*” (Annexe 1 and 2, key elements and characteristics of PGSs according to IFOAM). Thus, this participatory certification is based on the assessment of professionals by their peers (producers, craftspeople, etc.) and sometimes their community (buyers, distributors, local associations, etc.) to ensure compliance with the commitments of the specification(s). The assessment is usually done *in situ* where the activity takes place, followed by a local committee review which collectively gives an opinion on the award of the label for each participant.

➤ The award of the label is materialised by the granting of a certificate which gives the right to use the logo and its name for goods and services whose production practices have been controlled and meet the corresponding specifications.

➤ In many contexts, there may be producer collectives that wish to join a PGS. In these cases, the creation of a collective rather than individual certification may be justified according to several objectives. Collective certification can make sense to enhance the value of a collective approach (a differentiated logo can then be considered), to account for collective production and/or processing, and/or to sell collectively.

➤ In some cases, collective certification is guided by the desire to homogenise production practices, and thus avoid mixing within a collective structure, or to disseminate good practices among a large number of producers.

➤ Finally, because the entry of a large number of producers can destabilise an existing PGS, it is not uncommon for collective certification to be used to organise the control of a group of producers who are numerous and have a homogeneous product (specialised in a particular production, for example) on the same territory.

➤ This document aims to help formulate a definition of collective certification, specific to each PGS initiative and then to guide the assessment of each applicant collective. It is not intended to specify what is or is not mandatory to create a collective certification regulation, but rather to identify the relevant questions that are necessary to formulate such a regulation.

## Use of the guide

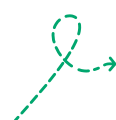
➤ The arrowed tree facilitates the collective assessment by asking a set of relevant questions for the collective certification.

➤ Please note that this guide is not hierarchical according to the questions order. It could be read in a different order.

➤ The questions are divided into two main parts (structure guide, and control and participation guide), which are themselves divided into thematics.



**It is important to take into account the points of attention. They may lead to not recommending the implementation of a PGS if the difficulties raised cannot be resolved.**



**Each positive answer guides you to the next with the dotted lines. (For all negative answers, read the attention point and continue to the next question with the dotted lines).**

# CONTENTS

6	STRUCTURE GUIDE ~~~~~
	1. GOVERNANCE
	2. CHOICE OF CERTIFICATION
8	3. INTEGRATION POLICY
	4. SOCIAL POLICY
10	5. PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES
	6. MARKETING ACTIVITIES
12	7. SPECIFICITIES OF THE COLLECTIVE
14	CONCLUDING NOTES
16	CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION GUIDE ~~~~~
	WITHOUT MEMBERS' CONTROL
	WITH ALL MEMBERS' CONTROL
18	MEMBERS' CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION BY SAMPLING
20	CONCLUDING NOTES
21	METHODOLOGY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GUIDE
22	ANNEXE 1
	THE 6 KEY ELEMENTS OF PGSS AS DEFINED BY IFOAM
23	ANNEXE 2
	THE 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF PGSS AS DEFINED BY IFOAM
24	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
25	ABBREVIATIONS

# STRUCTURE GUIDE

## GOVERNANCE

➤ Horizontality is a key element in the definition of PGS (Annexe 1). It is expressed in the idea of a democratic structure and the collective responsibility of the participants. As this certification particularly seeks to value the collective dimension of the implementation of the label, it may be expected that it will apply in particular to democratic collective structures (cooperatives, SCOP, SCIC, associations, etc).

➤ A right to decide is represented by a right to vote but also a right to propose and debate.

➤ These structures embody the gathering of individual production units which value their production jointly. In this sense, structures such as GAECs or any other groups of associates on the same production unit would be more a matter of individual and not collective certification.

For organic agriculture, the European Union recommends that private structures, whose providers respect the specifications but have no right of decision in the private structure, should promote the organisation of their providers in a legal collective structure which will then be the holder of the group certificate for organic agriculture. The private structure may apply for the certificate individually, as an operator in the chain. IFOAM, on the other hand, denounces the additional cost of creating an additional legal structure.

The boxes refer to the new European regulation for group certification from 2022.

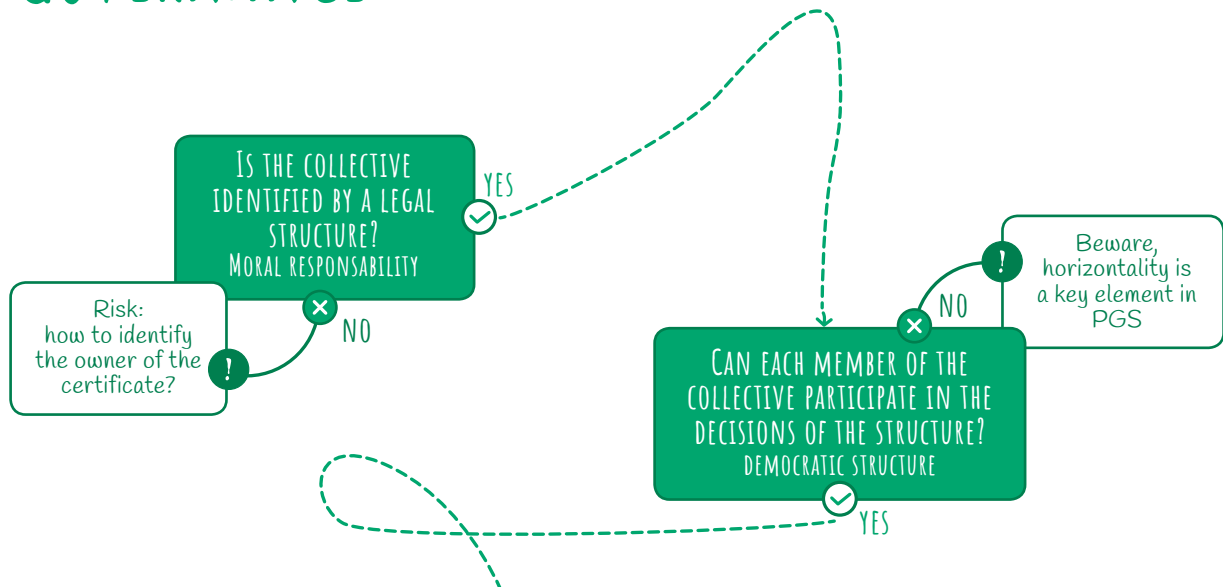
## CHOICE OF CERTIFICATION

➤ This collective certification process should preferably be a collective choice, preferably by direct democracy within the structure in order to involve all the members who will have to comply with the label. The decision may be reiterated in the General Assembly (annually or for a defined period of time) and adopted by the majority of members. A large majority may be preferred (e.g. a two-thirds or three-quarters majority rather than a simple or absolute majority of 51%) to avoid division between members, lack of commitment to the certification project and higher risk of non-compliance by reluctant members. Unanimous majority voting may, on the other hand, be problematic because there may be a permanent protest vote linked to dissatisfaction that is not directly linked to membership of the label.

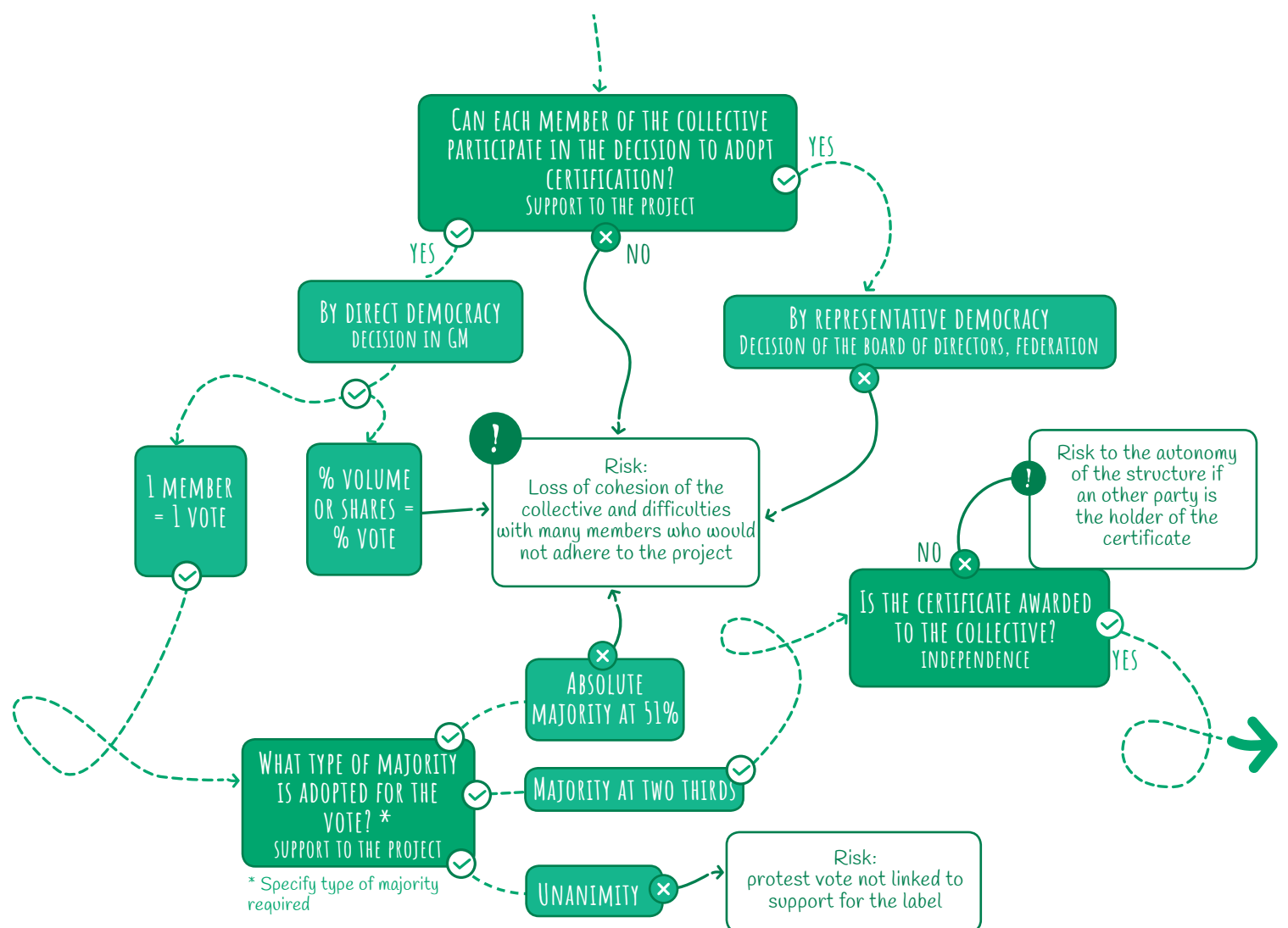
➤ The certificate in collective certification is preferably granted only to the certified collective structure. It should not be granted to a third party who would valorise the collective production on his own account, nor to individual members.

For organic agriculture, the European Union has decided to no longer grant the collective certificate to a third party (processor, exporter, wholesaler, etc.) who would value the collective production on its own account.

# 1. GOVERNANCE



# 2. CHOICE OF CERTIFICATION



## INTEGRATION POLICY AND SOCIAL POLICY

➤ Initial and ongoing training, support mechanisms to have access to means of production and to economic viability for new or old members are all tools recommended to enable a better compliance over time of all members to the certification project. Internal solidarity is also a common tool in participatory guarantee systems.

For organic agriculture, both the European Union and IFOAM recommend mandatory initial training in group certification.

This is also the case in many other sustainability labels (Fair trade, Rainforest Alliance, etc.)

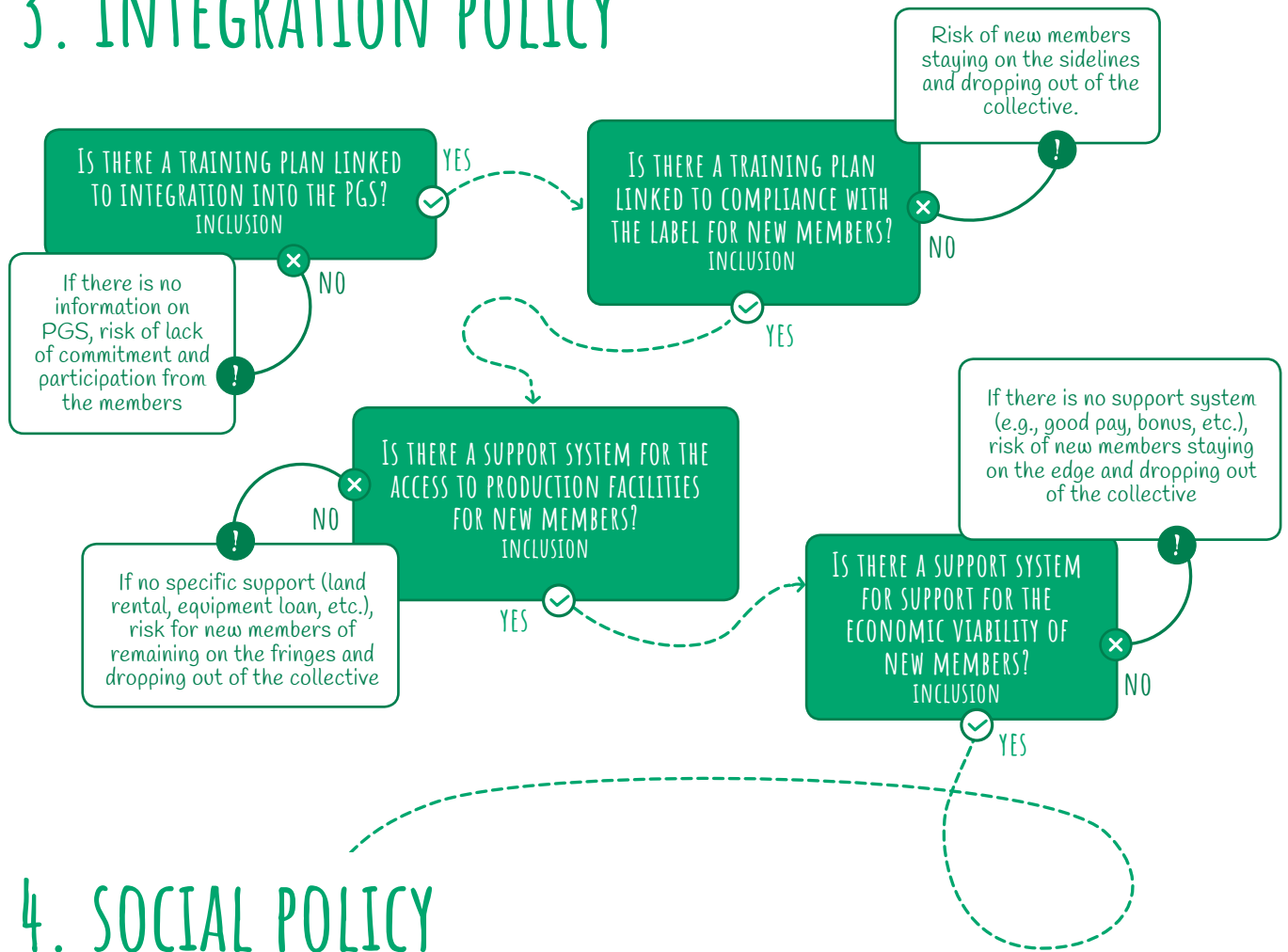
IFOAM also recommends that continuous training becomes mandatory in group certification.

➤ Following the values promoted in the PGSs, the social policy towards the employees of collective structures should allow the consideration of their interests (e.g. employees' college with a representative on the board, etc.).

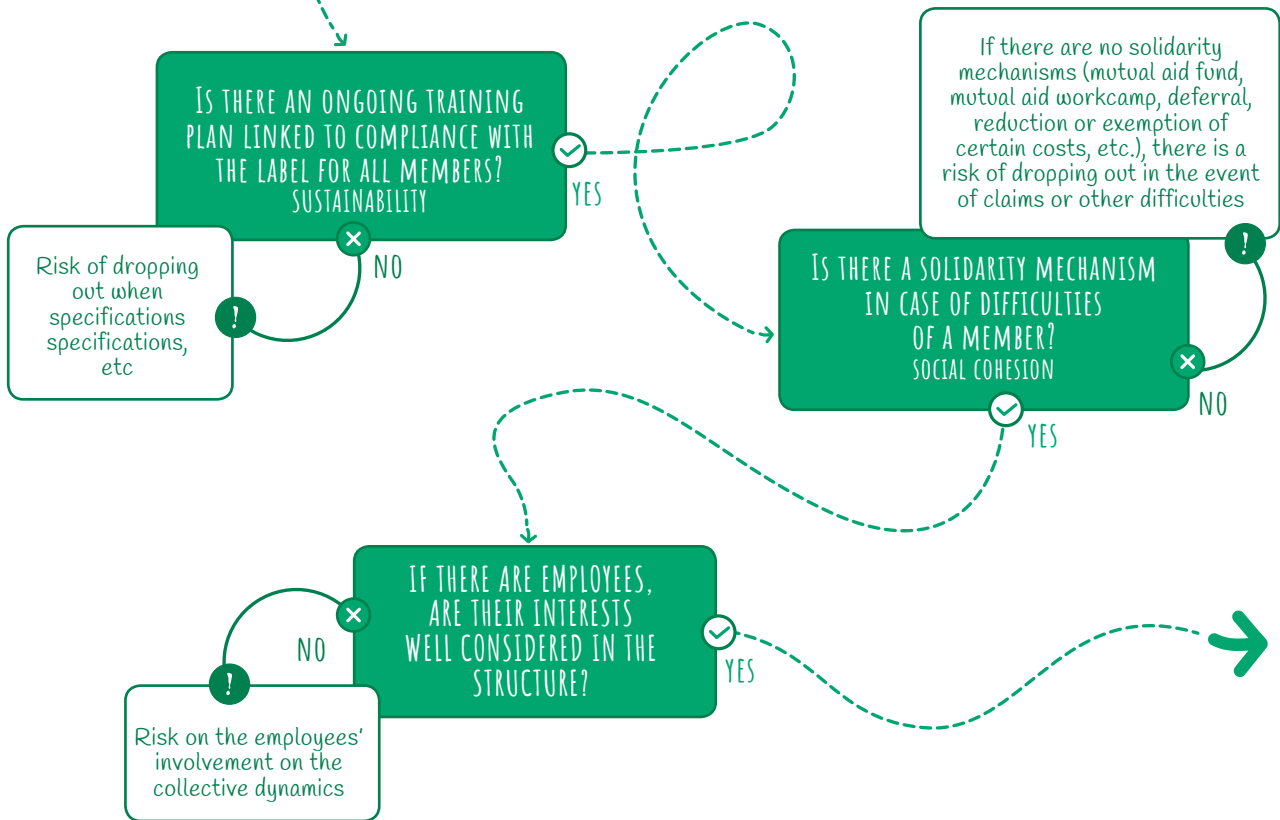
In the fair trade label *Small Producer Symbol*, the organisations with more than 25 employees must allow the creation of an employee committee.

In France, from 11 employees onwards, the setting up of a social and economic committee (SEC) representing the staff and meeting at least every two months is mandatory.

# 3. INTEGRATION POLICY



# 4. SOCIAL POLICY



# STRUCTURE GUIDE

## PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES

- In order to avoid the risk of fraud and to ensure collective support to the certification project, it is recommended that all members comply with the label.
- Depending on the PGS, it may also be required

For organic agriculture, the European Union demands that all members of the collective structure comply with the specifications in order to obtain group certification.

If some members do not follow the specifications, two different legal entities must be set up to sell certified and non-certified products separately.

Here again, IFOAM denounces the cost of creating another legal entity.

that the other products of the members that are not concerned by the collective structure correspond to the specification(s) or are *at least* in line with the shared vision of the label. This position is, however, controversial as the collective structure can also be considered as the extension of a production unit only on the activity that concerns it.

## MARKETING ACTIVITIES

- In order to promote the production of its members as a priority, it may be interesting to limit the purchase-resale of production that is not produced by the members. In this case, the collective structure holding the label undertakes not to buy and resell more than X% of its turnover (for example: 30 or 50%) or volume.

- If, however, it does resell, the external productions should either have equivalent certifications (which must be specified as such), or be consistent with the shared vision of the label.

- As with individual certificates, it is often recommended that the certified collective structure not sell to a single buyer to ensure its commercial independence (e.g. < 25% per buyer).

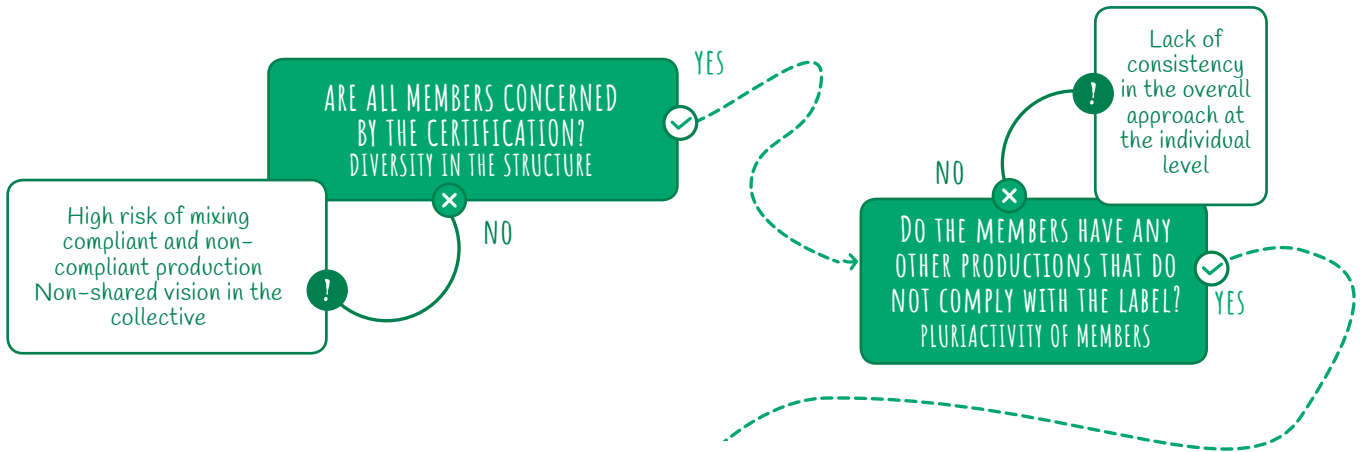
- If the structure allows its members to sell their production individually, they should not be able to do so with the collective certification - i.e. the label on their products (except for the members who would also be individually certified for the label). In this case, a limit of a X% of turnover or volume is sometimes set for individual sales (e.g. 5% or 25%).

In some cases, for very small collectives (e.g. less than 7 members), members may sell their production individually and on their own account with the collective label if managing a collective accounting system is too expensive.

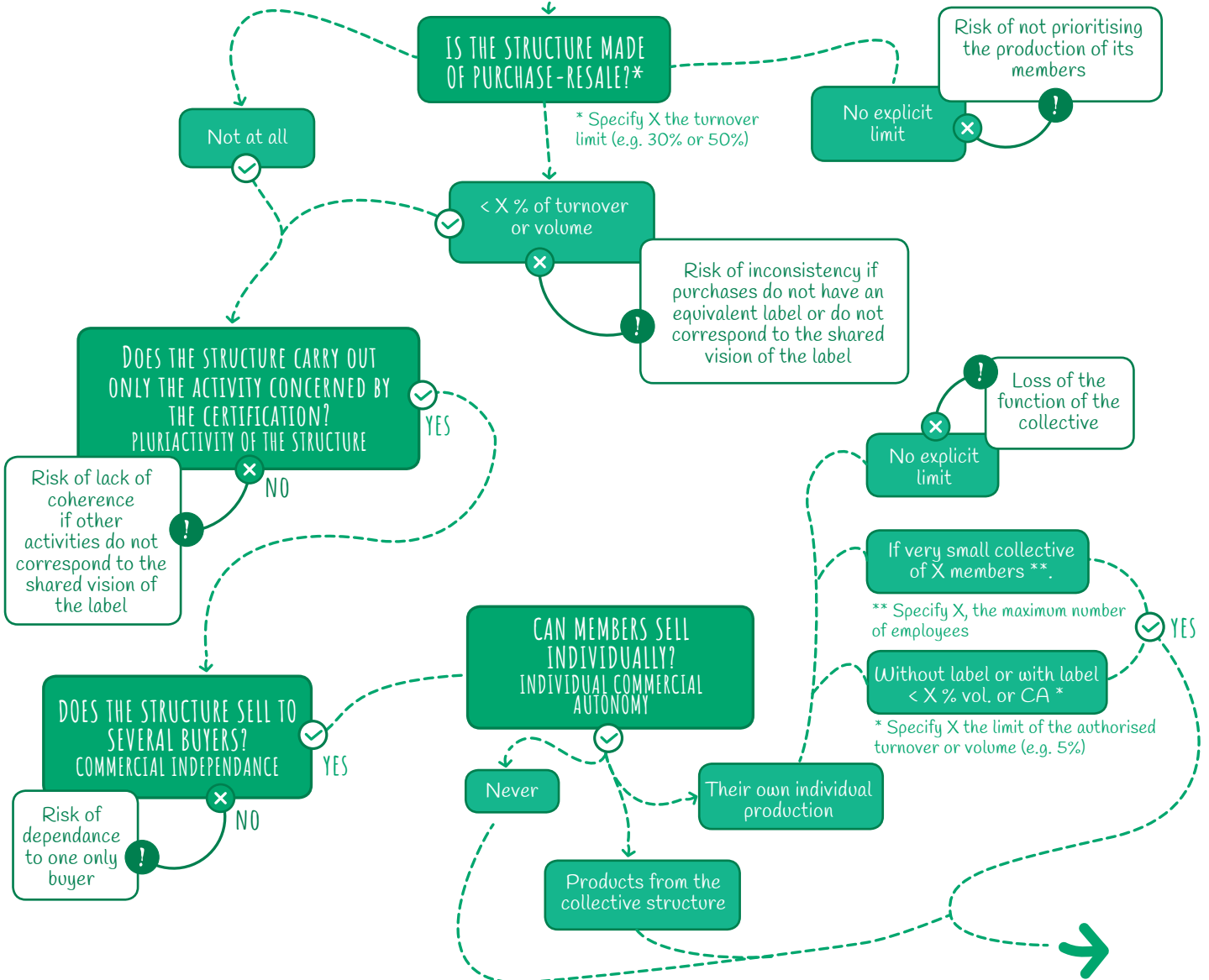
In France, for a producer who makes direct sales, the limit is 30% of the turnover in purchase-resale.

For organic agriculture, both the European Union and IFOAM prohibit individual sales with the label for members of a group certification.

# 5. PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES



# 6. MARKETING ACTIVITIES



# STRUCTURE GUIDE

## SPECIFICITIES OF THE COLLECTIVE

➤ It is possible to limit the number of members of certified collective structures.

For organic agriculture, debates have been organised in 2020 between the EU and IFOAM concerning the maximum number of members of a collective structure benefiting from the group certification: the EU advocated a maximum size of 500 members, while IFOAM did not wish for a limit for the collective structure, but sub-groups for internal control systems of maximum 1000 members. The limit of 2000 members per certified collective structure was finally adopted

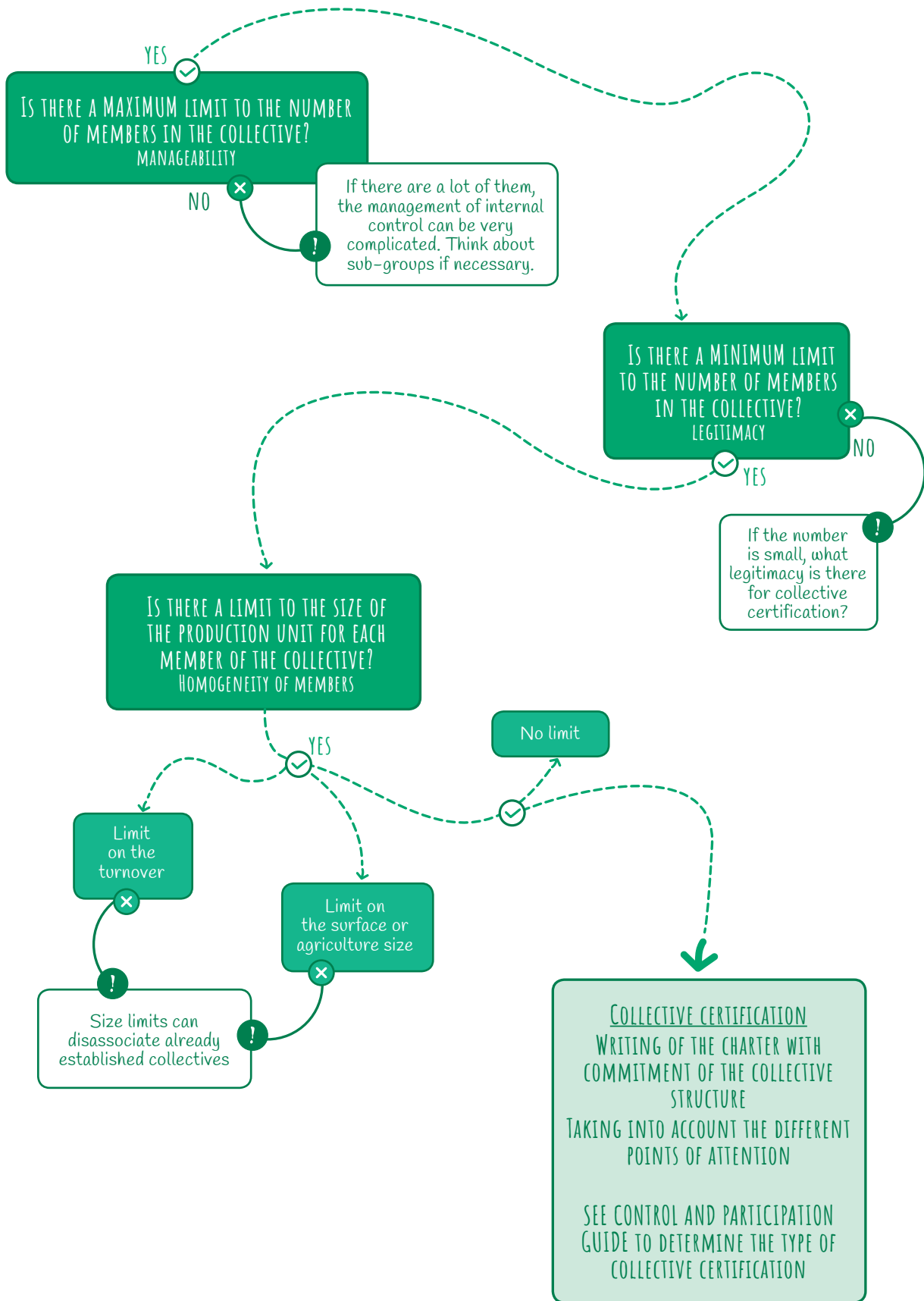
➤ Similarly, there may be a maximum limit on the size of members of certified collective structures. However, entity size limits are often a contentious issue as they are only relevant for a given activity in a given context. These limits can also disassociate already established collectives if some members are excluded from these limits.

For organic agriculture, the European Union states that a collective can apply for group certification if the cost of the third party certification exceeds 2% of the turnover of each farm, if its members have farms with an area of <5 ha, or if their individual turnover is < 25,000 euros/year.

IFOAM was against these size restrictions.

The fair trade label *Small Producer Symbol* limits the size on the area or the agriculture sizes to ensure the participation of peasant structures. For instance, at least 85% of the members must have less than 15 ha (regardless of the certified agricultural activity).

# 7. COLLECTIVE SPECIFICITIES



# CONCLUDING NOTES

- ④ At the level of the central PGS bodies, it could be interesting to create a specific commission for collective certifications where different issues specific to them can be collectively discussed. The validation of new collective structure applications could also go through this commission and by the concerned local committees, in charge of *in situ* assessments. It could also have the role of providing training for new structures.
- ④ In order to highlight the collective dimension of the implementation of the label, the logo affixed on the products could be used differently to distinguish between individual and collective certifications.
- ④ The amount and the invoicing modalities to pay for the collective certification must be defined within the PGS bodies (according to the total number of members? the number of members controlled by the PGS? the turnover?).



# CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION GUIDE

Different types of collective certification can be identified in the PGSs depending on the type of control and participation arrangements established in the certified collective structure.

## Collective certification Type 1:

This collective certification concerns structures where:

➤ The members ARE all individually certified by the label or are certified by a label considered as equivalent (and specified as such).

Only the structure itself is therefore controlled. The members participate individually in the life of the PGS. The representatives of the structure can nevertheless participate, when it exists, in a commission of the collective structures, which can then have a representation in the PGS.

## Collective certification Type 2:

*This type of collective certification concerns producers who are far from any local committee, i.e. isolated members. A PGS might not accept isolated members, and therefore might not take into account this type of collective certification.*

This collective certification concerns structures where:

➤ the members ARE NOT (or not all) individually certified,

- ARE distant from each other, or ARE NOT far from each other,
- ARE NOT close to any existing local committees (= isolated members),
- but their number IS NOT very high.

Beyond the control of the collective structure, the members will be controlled by inspectors or employees appointed by the central PGS body since they are not close to a local committee. Because of their remoteness, they cannot participate in inspections for other committees. On the other hand, for those who are NOT distant from each other, they can accompany the internal controls through the outside inspectors.

The representatives of the structure can nevertheless participate, when it exists, in a commission of the collective structures, which can then have a representation in the PGS.

## Collective certification Type 3:

This collective certification concerns structures where:

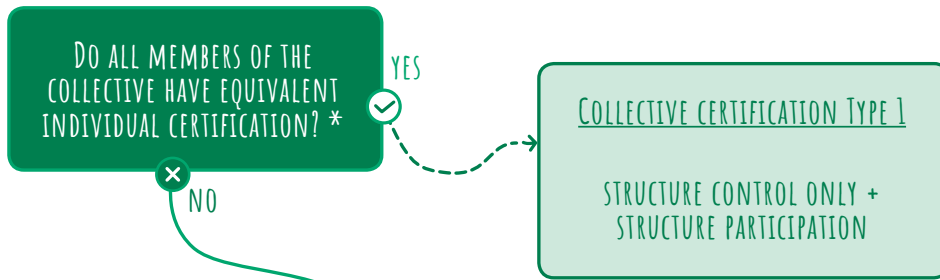
- the members ARE NOT (or not all) individually certified,
- ARE close to a local committee (if they ARE NOT distant from each other) or to several existing local committees (if they ARE distant from each other),
- but their number IS NOT very high.

Beyond the control of the structure, the members will be controlled by the local committee(s). Because of their proximity to these local committees, they participate in the controls of other members in the committees to whom they are close.

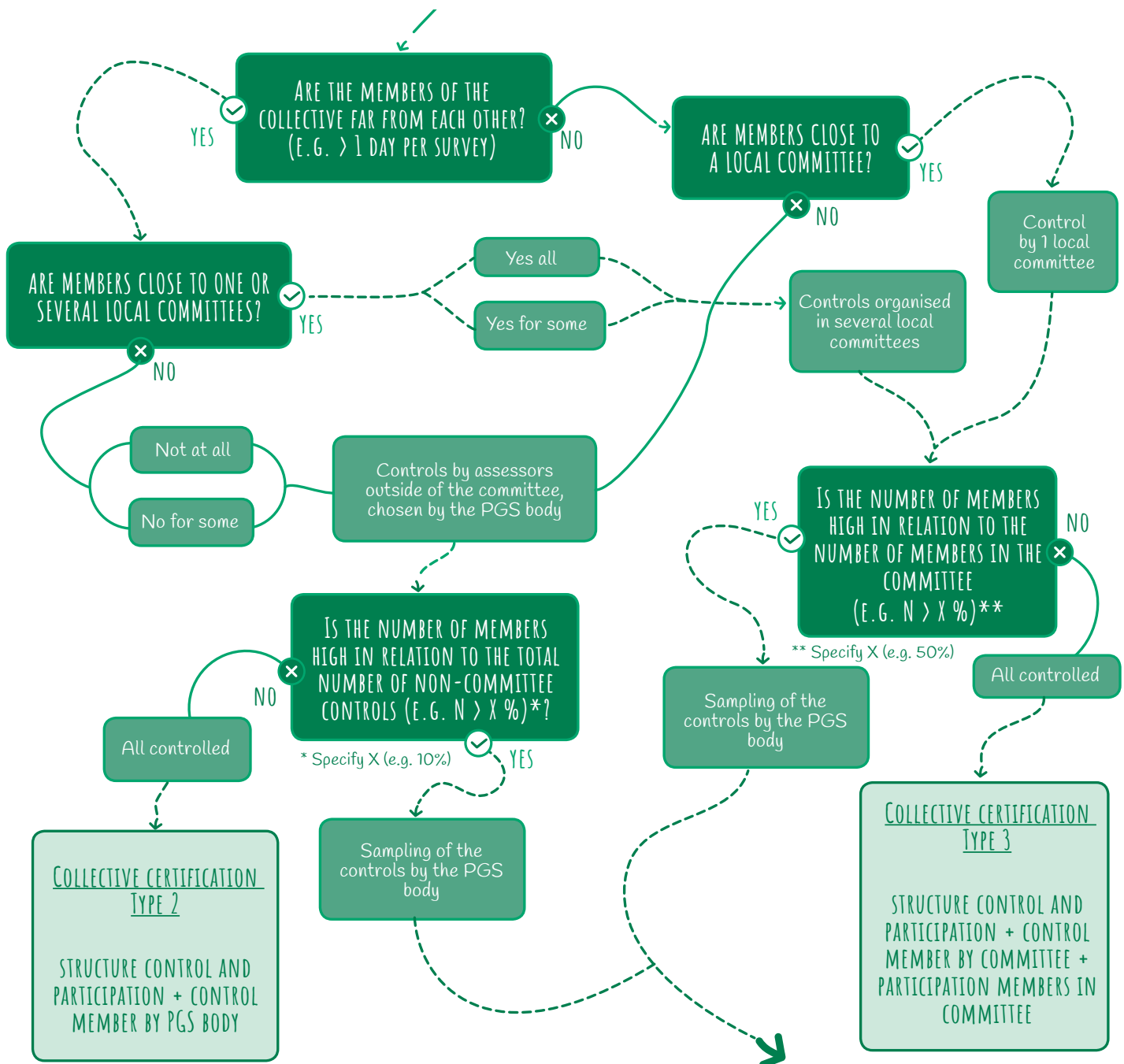
The structure can participate both through the members in the life of the local committees and their representation in the PGS bodies but also directly in the collective structures commission, if it exists, and have a representation in the PGS.

# 1. WITHOUT ANY CONTROL OF THE MEMBERS

\* Specify the certifications considered to be equivalent



# 2. CONTROL OF ALL MEMBERS



# CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION GUIDE

## Collective certification Type 4:

*This type of collective certification concerns producers who are far from any local committee, i.e. isolated members. A PGS might not accept isolated members, and therefore might not consider this type of collective certification.*

This collective certification concerns structures where:

- the members ARE NOT (or not all) individually certified,
- ARE distant from each other,
- ARE NOT close to existing local committees (they are isolated members),
- and their number IS very high (in relation to the total number of isolated certified members).

Beyond the control of the

collective structure, the members will be controlled by inspectors or employees appointed by the central PGS body, and by sampling (preferably random). This sampling of controls makes it necessary to create a participatory internal control system (PICS) of the members. The latter can be organised in sub-groups by collective visits (recommended to about 4-8 members) or by rotating assignment of one/several peers. Unlike the classical Internal Control System (ICS), one or several employees of the organisation may not carry out the internal control on their own only.

Due to their remoteness, their participation is only related

to the internal control of the members. The representatives of the structure can nevertheless participate when it exists in a commission of the collective structures, which can then have a representation in the PGS.

## Collective certification Type 5:

This collective certification concerns structures where:

- the members ARE NOT (or not all) individually certified,
- ARE distant from each other,
- ARE close to different existing local committees,
- but their number IS high (in relation to the total membership of the local committees concerned).

In addition to the structure control, members are controlled by peers from the local committees on a sampling (preferably random) basis.

This sampling of controls makes it necessary to create a Participatory Internal Control System (PICS) of the members.

This can be organised in sub-groups by collective visits (recommended to about 4-8 members) or by rotating assignment of one/several peers. Unlike the classical ICS, one or several employees of the organisation may not carry out the internal control on their own only. Because of their proximity to a local committee, they participate in the controls of

For organic agriculture, the EU and IFOAM recommend sampling by production groups if there are several productions among the members.

For organic agriculture, the EU indicates a minimum sampling of 5% for the group certification.

IFOAM recommends instead the square root of the number of members  $\sqrt{N}$ , or a minimum sampling of 3% for the groups with more than 400 members.

In Nature & Progrès, the control of 25% of the members is applied for collective certifications.

According to IFOAM, the sample can be random but must take into account new members and risks in certain members.

For organic agriculture, the European Union indicates to carry out residue controls for 2% of the members of the group certification. IFOAM denounces the cost related to this too high sample level.

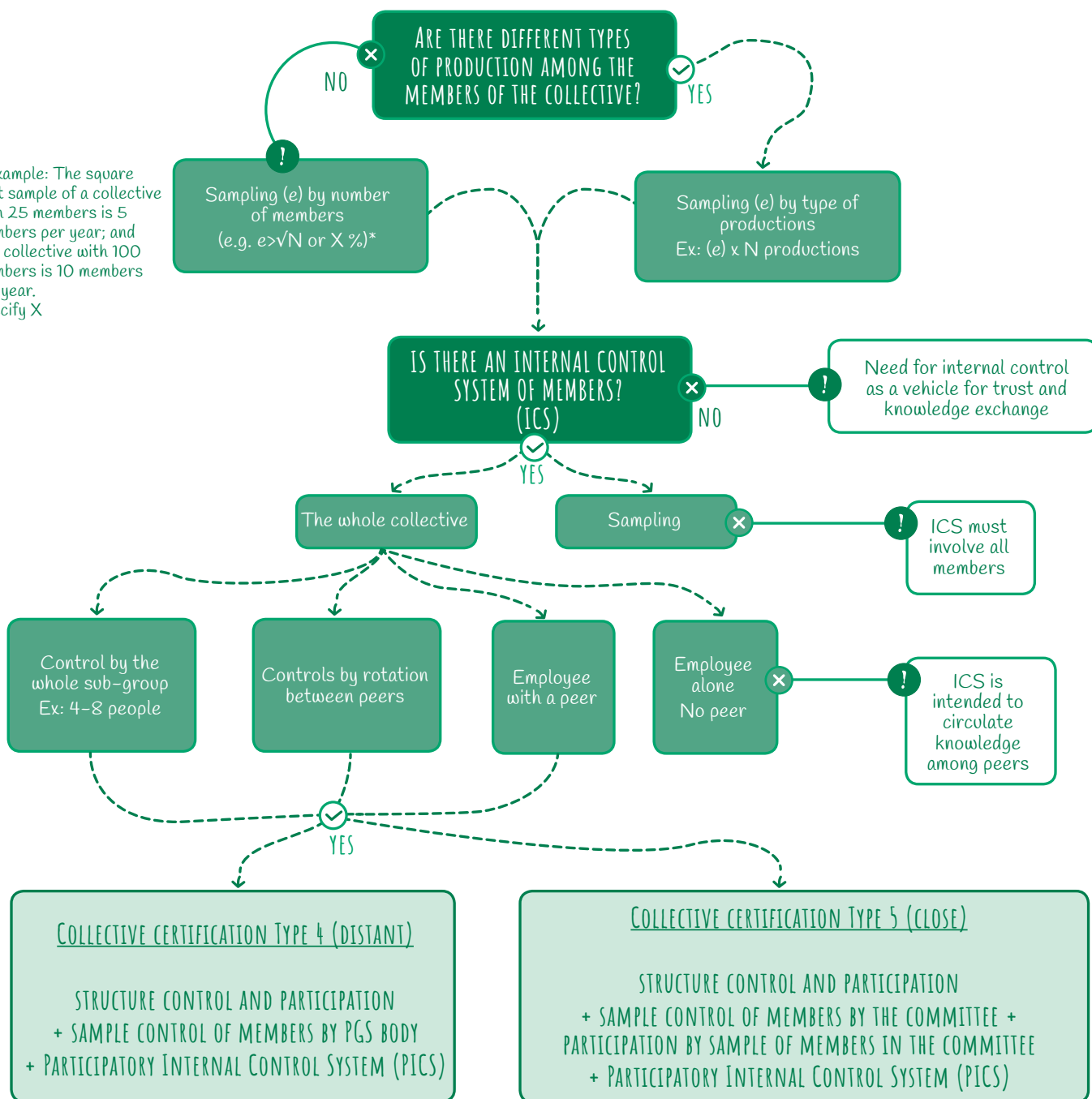
Rather than creating different legal structures linked to the maximum number of members, IFOAM advocates internal control systems in subgroups with partial de-certifications of an entire subgroup, if it is non-compliant. In any case, members with non-conformities should be removed from the group certification.

the other committee members but also on a sample basis (only a percentage of the collective structure members participate each year). The structure can participate, through the members, both in the life of the local committees and their representation in the animating

commissions of the PGS, but also directly in the commission of collective structures if it exists and have then a representation in the PGS.

### 3. CONTROL AND PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS BY SAMPLING

\* Example: The square root sample of a collective with 25 members is 5 members per year; and of a collective with 100 members is 10 members per year. Specify X



# CONCLUDING NOTES

➤ The control of the collective structure must comply with a well-defined specification or regulation in the PGS. This control could be carried out by other certified collective structures to allow the exchange of knowledge and the improvement of good practices.

➤ The PGS should take a position on isolated members, both for individual and collective certification. It is also important to specify what is meant by “isolated” (e.g. maximum distance from a local committee or another non-isolated member, administrative limit, etc.).

➤ Local committees involved in collective certification controls must be consulted on the choice of the control modalities to be put in place so that they correspond to the means, capacities and functioning of the committees.

➤ When it is set up, the participatory internal control system (PICS) must be well explained in a document at the level of the structure as well as the sampling method and the annual list of controlled producers in order to allow the follow-up from one year to another.

➤ The collective structure should notify the central PGS body of new and outgoing members, and keep up-to-date records of incoming and outgoing volumes.

➤ It is good practice for new members to sign a contract with the structure indicating its commitment to certification, the internal control process and training (annexe 2). For illiterate producers, it is good practice to read the contract aloud.

➤ A central register of all non-conformities identified during internal controls is kept in the collective structure.

➤ There should be a procedure about consequences for members for whom serious non-conformities have been identified during internal controls.

➤ The corrective measures requested must be followed by the collective structure.

➤ A conflict resolution mechanism internal to the collective is strongly recommended to manage disagreements.

# METHODOLOGY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GUIDE

## 👉 Literature review:

- Regulation 2018/848 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 30 May 2018 on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 — in particular Article 36 on group certification.
- IFOAM EU & IFOAM Organics International (2019) “Group of Operators in the new EU Organic Regulation - Input for the EU Commission and the Member States”
- IFOAM EU (2020) Input for the Public Consultation on the draft Commission Delegated Regulation amending Regulation (EU) 2018/848
- Fair Trade International (2019) Fair trade Standard for Small Producers’ Organizations
- SPP Global (2018) Small Producer Symbol. General standard.
- FNAB (2020) Specifications, Organic. French. Fair trade
- Fair Trade USA (2019) Standard for agricultural production
- CSR roadmap

## 👉 Participatory workshops with several collective structures:

- Workshop with an informal collective in Corsica – 5 hazelnut producers in association, different plots, close to each other but far from the local committee, shelling machine in common but individual sales, problem of having a common accounting. (September 2020)
- Workshop with a cooperative of aromatic and medicinal plants in the Gard - 15 producers, different plots, far from each other, close to several local committees, joint processing, joint sales. (February 2021)
- Workshop with two salt private companies in Guérande – respectively 90 and 5 salt providers on different salt manufacturing, close to each other and close to a local committee. Sale by the company but sampling at 25% for non-individually certified providers.
- Workshop with two salt cooperatives in Guérande and Noirmoutier – respectively 250 and 90 members who are non-individually certified providers, in different salt manufacturing, but close to a local committee. Each of them does joint sales. Sampling at 25% for one and 10% added to an internal control system for the other.

# ANNEXE 1:

## THE 6 KEY ELEMENTS OF PGS AS DEFINED BY IFOAM (2008)

### **1. Shared vision:**

where the main stakeholders (producers, NGOs, traders, consumers and even governments) collectively support the fundamental principles that guide both the production standards and the operating rules of PGS.

### **2. Participation:**

Participatory certification is based on the commitment of stakeholders who are involved in the production and consumption of the concerned products, including participation in the initial design and subsequent operation of the system.

### **3. Transparency of the system and its actors:**

Transparency is created by the fact that all stakeholders, including producers and consumers, know and understand how the guarantee system works, including the standards, the guarantee process and how decisions are made. This implies the existence of basic documentation on the PGS and its availability to any interested partner. Commercially sensitive information that is compiled during the operation of PGS is to be treated confidentially.

### **4. Trust:**

The integrity basis for PGSs leans on the idea that producers are trustworthy. Thus, non-compliance is the result of an involuntary act related to a difficulty rather than a deliberate act of cheating.

### **5. Learning process:**

The development and verification of PGS principles and rules not only lead to credibility of the quality targeted, but also contribute to a continuous learning process that develops the capacities of the stakeholders involved. The exchange of knowledge and know-how between members is fundamental.

### **6. Horizontality:**

It induces equal decision-making and thus power-sharing among stakeholders. Participatory certification engages all concerned at the same level of responsibility to assess the product and its production method.

# ANNEXE 2:

## IFOAM'S 10 CHARACTERISTICS OF PGSS (2008)

1. Standards set (or chosen) by partners
2. A brand or seal (label)
3. Basic organisation (permanent collective action)
4. Appropriate for peasant agriculture (local and inexpensive)
5. Principles and values (peasant agriculture, organic agriculture)
6. System documentation and procedure
7. A signed document as a token of honour
8. Mechanisms to verify farmer compliance
9. Clear and previously defined consequences (sanctions)
10. Mechanisms to support farmers (support, coaching)

# GLOSSARY

**Absolute majority:** during a collective decision, an absolute majority is reached when more than 50% of the votes of those who express themselves agree.

**Certificate holder:** Natural or legal person to whom the certification is officially attributed (whose name appears on the certificate)

**Certification:** any form of guarantee affixed to a product whose production and/or transformation practices have been controlled and comply with the corresponding specifications. It leads to the award of a certificate giving the right to use the logo and its name.

**Collective certification:** certification awarded to a group of producers and/or processors united within the same legal structure (company, association, cooperative, etc.)

**Collective:** a group of people structured collectively, without necessarily a legal recognition of the collective status.

**Group certification:** term used in the reference systems of sustainable development standards, equivalent to collective certification, necessarily implying an internal control system and an external inspection by third party.

**Guarantee system:** modalities of a certification allowing to control the production and/or transformation practices and to guarantee the respect of the corresponding specifications.

**Internal control system (ICS):** control modalities of all the members of a collective taken in charge by the collective itself to check compliance with the specifications. In general, this system is then controlled by third party in group certification process.

**Label:** The term label has no legal meaning. We consider a label as a system made up of two elements: 1) a reference system with specifications and 2) a logo with its name, affixed to the products resulting from this reference system.

**Local committee:** in the framework of a PGS, the local committee is the entity which locally manages the organisation of the control and decides whether or not to grant certification to the members belonging to this committee.

**Participatory guarantee system (PGS):** participatory certification based on the assessment by peers (producers, craftsmen, etc.) and sometimes their community (buyers, users, distributors, local associations, etc.) to guarantee compliance with the commitments of the specifications.

**Participatory Internal Control System (PICS):** an internal control system whose modality of control of all members is ensured by peers (and not by an employee, for example) to check compliance with the specification(s). In general, this system is then controlled by a PGS body or a local committee.

**Pluriactivity of the members:** for a producer/processor member of the collective, pluriactivity refers to the fact of carrying out other professional activities apart from the one regulated by the certification.

**Pluriactivity of the structure:** the structure which is certified develops activities not covered by the specifications.

**Structure:** can refer to any legal entity/legal person, collective or individual: individual enterprise, association, cooperative, company, etc.

**Two-thirds majority:** during a collective decision, a two-thirds majority is reached when more than two-thirds (66%) of the votes of those who express themselves agree

# ABBREVIATIONS

**Admin Committee** Board of Directors

**CA (in French)** Turnover

**EU** European Union

**GAEC** Agriculture association (in French:  
Groupement Agricole d'Exploitation en Commun)

**GM** General Meeting

**ICS** Internal Control System

**IFOAM** International Federation of Organic  
Agriculture Movements

**PGS** Participatory Guarantee System

**PICS** Participatory Internal Control System

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# GUIDE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COLLECTIVE CERTIFICATION IN A PARTICIPATORY GUARANTEE SYSTEM

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