

## **The Winding Road towards Recognition of the Quality of Brenjonk Organic Produce**

**By Slamet**

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### **Joining with AOI and the Benefits**

In 2008 Brenjonk started to widen its network to be able to reach its vision. Becoming the member of AOI was a fitting step for Brenjonk in widening its network, because of the aligned vision and missions of the two organizations. Since joining AOI, Brenjonk has improved its knowledge base on how to correctly implement organic quality assurance system. Brenjonk started to develop its ICS governance and perform trial and error to its organic quality assurance system. From then on, Brenjonk gained valuable experience, ranging from process documentation, internal inspection, making decision based on the inspection result, and also reacting to external challenges that often dishearten Brenjonk community members.

With perseverance in implementing ICS, Brenjonk succeeded in becoming the first AOI member to obtain the organic certification of Indonesian Participative Organic Quality Assurance (*Penjaminan Mutu Organik Partisipatif Indonesia*, PAMOR INDONESIA). Brenjonk gained the confidence needed to market its produce to the public, from the local to international level.

By producing organic produce under PAMOR INDONESIA logo, Brenjonk develops organic marketing network with external parties. First, Brenjonk formed partnership with CV Media Inovasi Kita (MIK) Surabaya. Through CV MIK, Brenjonk produces are promoted and marketed at a few supermarkets in Surabaya. Besides, Brenjonk produce are also marketed directly to households in Surabaya. Starting from 100 packets of produce monthly, after a few years the public interest of Brenjonk produce with PAMOR INDONESIA certification has increased agreeably. Currently Brenjonk has been able to market its produce of 6 thousands

packets per month. This number is large enough for Brenjonk, even though it is relatively small for a private company, because it proves the determination of Brenjonk community members to participate. They collect and market the produce in varying volumes, from 1-2 kilograms to tens of kilograms, twice weekly.

Meanwhile, its customers have also increased and more varied. Brenjonk has formed partnership with hotels, local markets, outlets in tourism sites, restaurants, teachers and parents of students, women's associations, and also built its own outlets.

Brenjonk keeps promoting its produce with PAMOR INDONESIA. In every activities, training, or other meeting in local, national, and international level, Brenjok promotes PAMOR INDONESIA to more than 2 thousands audience from various background, such as farmers' groups, local and international non-governmental groups (NGOs), regional governments, the Ministry of Agriculture, academicians, women's associations, the National Program of Investment (*Program Nasional Penanaman Modal*, PNPM), schools, government agencies, companies, and entrepreneurs. In 2009, Brenjonk got the opportunity to participate in a scholarship program in the Netherlands, while in 2010 it is involved in the Organic World Congress in South Korea. In the two events Brenjonk presented the implementation of ICS and PAMOR INDONESIA.

### **Facing Organic Business Giants**

The vigorous promotion of organic produce under the PAMOR INDONESIA logo by Brenjonk and its partners seems to upset other business actors in organic produce. When Brenjonk produce were displayed at an exclusive supermarket in Surabaya, challenges started to strike Brenjonk. Those include unfair treatment such as removing Brenjonk produce from the organic shelve to the conventional shelve, and campaigns of PAMOR INDONESIA as an illegal logo because it has not received government's legal recognition. As a result, Brenjonk produce are rejected in many supermarkets in Surabaya, because the management think the logo is illegal and the organic claim is false. Only long-time partners continue to do business with Brenjonk. This of course affects the sales growth, which slows down in the last three years.

Brenjonk is not dispirited with the challenge. To widen market in similar stance with other business actors, Brenjonk decided to register its produce to BIOcert to get Organik Indonesia logo. Since November 2012, Brenjonk effectively markets its organic produce with the logo, without leaving PAMOR INDONESIA. By placing both logos on the package of its produce, Brenjok strives to both widen its market and promote PAMOR INDONESIA logo as a participation-based organic certification.

PAMOR INDONESIA is a participation-based assurance system of organic farming that involves producers or the farmers and other parties (traders, consumers, non-governmental organizations, government agencies) in examining and acknowledging the conformance of organic standards. The main role of organic assurance in PAMOR INDONESIA is the farmers that must assess and declare the conformance of their agricultural practice with the referred organic standards. The reference of PAMOR INDONESIA are organic farming assurance practices of the farmers communities as controlled by institutions and organizations throughout Indonesia, and also the standards of Indonesian National Standard (*Standard Nasional Indonesia, SNI*) for Organic Food.

## **PAMOR INDONESIA**

### **Recognition of Participation-based Quality Assurance to Protect the Produce of Small-scale Farmers**

The current growth of organic produce markets makes the consumers and producers wonder, do all the organic produce really come from organic farming? Consumers doubt the claim, while organic farmers worry about consumers' mistrust because some produce in the market are falsely claimed as organic.

To solve the problem, AOI and its member organizations continues to strive for the recognition of its members' organic produce. One decision of the Members' Meeting (MM) of AOI in 2008 in Yogyakarta in relation to Program Directives (PD) 1 was: "strengthening of institution and product quality of small-scale farmers to gain better market access." Specifically, PD 1 also stressed protection of farmers through the formulation of fair trade social standards and participatory guarantee system (PGS).

PGS or community-based assurance system has many advantages compared to third-party assurance. It entails lower cost; it can even be provided free of charge. It is easy to integrate into the socio-cultural system of local communities, thus easing implementation and supporting the development of organic communities. It is quite reliable, because the inspection can be performed anytime to all plots, which is impossible for third-party assurers that only inspect sample plots once yearly.

PGS that was agreed upon at the MM 2008 was called “PAMOR INDONESIA”. It is an initiative of AOI to promote community-based organic assurance system. This promotion was intended as an advocacy to the government to recognize community-based organic assurance system as being equal to third-party assurance system; and also as a way to recover consumers’ confidence in organic produce. The main purpose is to use PAMOR INDONESIA as a tool to improve farmers’ welfare and support sustainable development.

The logo of PAMOR INDONESIA is owned by AOI and has been registered as a logo and brand at the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Technically, the license to use PAMOR INDONESIA logo by operators is published by the PAMOR INDONESIA Unit, which was founded by AOI. The monitoring and controlling of the use of the logo is performed by PAMOR INDONESIA Units in the respective regions together with AOI National Secretariat and member organizations. The use of PAMOR INDONESIA logo/label must conform to the rules and regulations established by AOI. AOI charges a fee to operators that use PAMOR INDONESIA logo for each sticker posted in the produce package. The fee is minimum but is maintained to provide an incentive to AOI in operating the PAMOR INDONESIA program throughout Indonesia.

Many trade practices of organic farm produce have implemented community-based assurance. Each assurance system has its unique characteristics, such as standard reference, assurance mechanism, marketing techniques, and varieties of produce, but all transactions are under a participation-based system.

In the beginning, community-based assurance system applied to specific consumers or communities or through words of mouth. But lately community-based assurance has become wider, building from the social network, to reach consumers that do not interact with the producers. Unfortunately, it is difficult to use the social network as leverage towards a

credible assurance system, because a formal system must adhere to a determined set of criteria, including documenting mechanism and detailed traceability by farmers with the help of field guides (NGOs, traders, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, or individuals).

It is unfortunate if community-based assurance system is not recognized as a feasible and reliable assurance system. The most important thing is that this system can guarantee the organic character of the produce with reliable and credible mechanism, thus protecting both producers and consumers.