Agricultural Marketing Service

Good Agricultural Practices
The Path to GroupGAP Certification

The USDA GroupGAP Program is a farm food safety certification method developed by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division. GroupGAP provides specialty crops producers new local and national market access by meeting buyers' Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification requirements, verifies food safety compliance by all members of participating groups, and strengthens rural economies.

The GroupGAP Advantage

- Saves group members money through cost and resource sharing

- Improves group members' accountability and performance by leveraging shared resources

- Decreases documentation and maintenance requirements of group members who operate under a single Quality Management System

- Uses internal audits and a shared food safety manager(s) to make member compliance easier

How to Get Started

Determine if GroupGAP is Right for You	- Do you have, or can you create, a group of producers ready to implement GAP, and to share the cost of and responsibility for implementing food safety practices? - Does your group have, or is it willing to hire, individuals to (1) write and implement a Quality Management System and (2) meet the requirements to be a USDA auditor? - Will your buyers accept GroupGAP certification?
Form a Group	A group is any collection of producers who agree to operate within a Quality Management System (QMS), and who have the operational resources to support the QMS and food safety audit service implementation. The group determines which crops and processes to certify. There is no maximum or minimum number of group members. Identify your group members, the number/types of crops each grows, and each member's production type (e.g., traditional, plain, organic, greenhouses, hydroponic, centralized packinghouse). **(Continued on back)**

Identify Individuals to Fill Key Roles

An individual may serve in multiple roles within the Group.

- Group Leader – point of contact responsible to USDA for (1) implementing the Group's Quality Management System, (2) ensuring all necessary procedures are taking place, including internal audits, (3) coordinating external producer audits with the USDA or state auditor, and (4) scheduling the USDA system audit.

- Group Management Team – oversees the group and the Quality Management System, and works continuously to review and improve the system.

- Internal Auditors – perform three types of audits: one internal audit of each group member; unannounced audits as determined by the length of the growing season; and, follow-up audits for any member who does not meet USDA acceptance criteria. Internal auditor(s) require regular training and work each year to maintain auditor credentials.

- Internal QMS Auditor – leads the internal audit of the group Quality Management System to determine that (1) the program has been properly implemented, and (2) the group and its members are adhering to all group policies.

Choose USDA Audit Service

GroupGAP is a certification method, not an audit type. Groups choose their audit service type (e.g., GAP & GHP, Harmonized GAP, or Mushroom GAP), including optional areas of focus such as food defense or the global markets addendum. This decision should be based on your members, the crops they grow or process, and buyer acceptance.

Develop and Implement a Quality Management System

Your group will establish written processes, procedures, and policies for things like management responsibilities, document control, training, and auditing. Appendix I of the GroupGAP Users Guide outlines Quality Management System requirements; examples are available under Resources for Implementers on the Wallace Center website at www.ngfn.org/resources/food-safety

Apply for GroupGAP

Submit a Request for Audit Services (Form FV-237a), an Agreement for Participation in Audit Verification Programs (Form FV-651), a member list, and an application fee to apply for GroupGAP. Forms are available at www.ams.usda.gov/groupgap

Train Internal Auditor(s)

Required training includes:

- Basic GAP training,
- Audit service-specific training, AND
- Fundamentals of auditing, OR
- Exemplar global certified ISO internal auditor or lead auditor course

Information about training opportunities is available on the GroupGAP web page

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information, visit our website at www.ams.usda.gov/groupgap

GroupGAP User's Guide: https://go.usa.gov/xXKHH

GroupGAP FAQs: https://go.usa.gov/xXKHs

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