

**USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ Audit Service**  
*A GFSI-Technically Equivalent Food Safety Verification Program*

**Questions and Answers**

**1. Why did USDA develop the USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit?**

Buyers are increasingly requiring their suppliers to undergo Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) audits. USDA introduced this new service that is recognized as being GFSI technically equivalent so that all in the specialty crops supply chain can use a single H-GAP Plus+ audit to meet this and other marketing and regulatory requirements. With this technical equivalence, the USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit program now has greater acceptance within the retail, foodservice and manufacturing buying community. One audit that meets both standards saves sellers time and money.

**2. What is the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)?**

[Global Food Safety Initiative](#) is an international industry network which is part of [The Consumer Goods Forum](#). GFSI was created in 2000 to find collaborative solutions to reduce food safety risks, reduce audit duplication and costs while building trust within the entire supply chain. GFSI recognizes food safety certification programs to defined requirements outlined in its [Benchmarking Requirements](#). GFSI is composed of food safety experts from retail, manufacturing and food service companies, as well as international organizations, governments, academia and service providers to the global food industry.

**3. How is the Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit different from other USDA GAP audits?**

The new USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit is the only USDA GAP audit recognized as being Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) technically equivalent. To create this service, USDA augmented the USDA Harmonized GAP audit to meet GFSI equivalence standards.

**4. Why would I want to use the Harmonized GAP Plus+ service?**

USDA's Harmonized GAP Plus+ is the audit service to use if you are required to undergo a GFSI-benchmarked audit for market access. Many retail, food service, and institutional buyers require their suppliers to undergo a food safety audit conducted against one of the GFSI [recognized certification programs](#). With this technical equivalence, the USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit program now has greater acceptability within the retail, foodservice and manufacturing buying community.

**5. How do I know if I need a Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit?**

Buyers determine what standards they require of producers/sellers, so be sure to verify the specific buyer requirements before scheduling and undergoing an audit. Not all buyers have the same requirements. Most large national and international buyers are increasingly requiring a food safety audit against one of the recognized certification programs benchmarked by GFSI.

**6. How does the USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ service relate to other USDA GAP programs?**

USDA offers several types of GAP audit services. USDA GAP audits are our basic service. These audits are aligned with industry best practices and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommendations. USDA Harmonized GAP audits meet industry best practices, FDA best practices AND are aligned with the Produce GAP Harmonization Initiative and the Food Safety Modernization Act’s (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. The new USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audits include all USDA GAP and Harmonized GAP alignments AND are recognized by GFSI.

**USDA GAP Service Tiers**

For market access, I need:	Global Food Safety Technical Equivalence	FDA FSMA Produce Safety Rule Alignment	Produce GAP Harmonization Initiative Alignment	Adherence to Industry and FDA Best Practices
USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+	X	X	X	X
USDA Harmonized GAP		X	X	X
USDA GAP & GHP				X

**7. Who conducts Harmonized GAP Plus+ audits?**

USDA audits are conducted by trained and licensed federal and federal-state department of agriculture employees who have years of experience and understand the production and marketing of specialty crops.

**8. How much does a USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ audit cost?**

By law, USDA must fully recover the cost of these services. Producers are charged for actual hours USDA invests to complete the audit process -- direct time to review, approve, certify and post audit results at the prevailing USDA audit rate published annually in the Federal Register. The new Harmonized GAP Plus+ service also requires payment of an annual \$250 fee to maintain the certification.

**9. Why are you charging a \$250 certification fee for USDA Harmonized GAP Plus+ Audits?**

The annual \$250 certification fee covers GFSI charges for the benchmarking process.

**10. I’m not sure I can afford the Harmonized GAP Plus+ service? Can you help me?**

There are several ways you can save money on a GAP audit. USDA offers a [GroupGAP](#) audit program that allows grower groups operating under a single food safety management system to leverage resources and collaborate on food safety issues which lead to reduced costs for GAP certification. Other options are to apply for service as an individual or to coordinate the scheduling of audits with other producers in your area to reduce the travel costs.

### **11. Why did USDA undertake GFSI Technical Equivalency?**

This is an extension of USDA's work to help grow marketing opportunities for specialty crops producers, increase purchasing options for buyers and provide consumers with access to more and diverse fresh, local produce.

Many retail, food service, and institutional buyers require their suppliers to undergo a food safety audit conducted against one of the GFSI [recognized certification programs](#). Without GFSI technical equivalency, the more than 4,000 growers, packers and handlers who utilize the USDA GAP Program could not use the USDA audit to also meet the requirements of those buyers.

Representatives from many specialty crops sectors, including grower groups, commodity boards and trade associations, formally requested USDA consider aligning the USDA GAP Program with GFSI to reduce audit fatigue and overall costs of multiple food safety audits.

### **12. What is USDA's involvement with GFSI?**

In addition to undergoing technical equivalency, USDA has participated in several GFSI technical working groups, most recently the Global Markets for Primary Production working group. USDA was able to provide technical expertise on the primary production practices for fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops.

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