



Agricultural Marketing Service

Innovative GroupGAP Food Safety Program

Unique Verification Program Opens Doors for Produce Industry

Along with a number of programs and services that facilitate marketing, the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) helps create opportunities for growers and buyers through its Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) Audit Programs, which verify that operations follow industry-recognized food safety practices and recommendations from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

After 3 years of field testing, AMS is launching GroupGAP, a new food safety certification option that will increase opportunities for the entire industry to supply and buy GAP-certified produce.

Benefits to Buyers and Retailers

The GroupGAP Program is an innovative solution that helps retailers and buyers meet the increasing consumer demand for local food while maintaining strong food safety standards.

- USDA-AMS certifies that the grower groups are following industry-recognized food safety practices.
- More small and mid-sized farmers can demonstrate that they have met retailer food safety requirements for “buy local” programs.

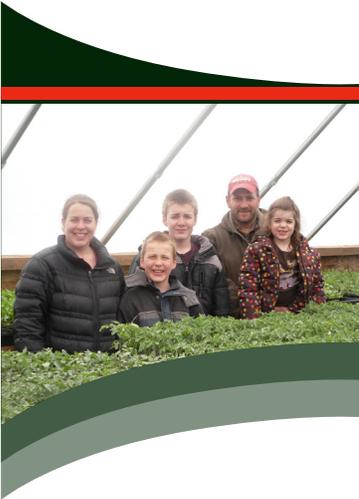


- These new suppliers help stores build an inventory of local food from growers who previously couldn’t access mainstream retail markets.
- GroupGAP efficiencies allow buyers and retailers to broaden their base of suppliers, so they are more resilient in the face of supply challenges or disruptions.
- Diverse product offerings are available from a group of growers rather than a single grower, and
- Importantly, GroupGAP will comply with upcoming FDA requirements under the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Paving a New Path for Small Growers To Reach the Retail Market

At the same time that retailers need assurances that vendors are complying with food safety guidelines, demand for local food is expanding beyond farmers markets into grocery stores, restaurants, schools, and other institutions. As more and more retailers require these types of audits, demand for AMS services has increased, with the agency performing over 3,800 GAP/GHP audits in 2014.

(continued on back)



How it Works

Many small and mid-sized farmers currently face challenges paying for the food safety certification needed to participate in these larger markets. The GroupGAP Audit Program makes it easier for growers and cooperatives, particularly small growers, to afford GAP certification. Under the program, an entire group of growers can be certified, potentially saving money and time by leveraging economies of scale in the marketplace. GroupGAP helps smaller operations comply with food safety requirements. Members of a group can:

- Fully leverage existing resources and share certification costs.
- Develop and implement their own quality management systems and food safety programs.

- Reduce individual documentation and maintenance requirements, and
- Maintain compliance via internal audits by a single, shared USDA-trained food safety manager, with verification by USDA-licensed auditors.

Partnerships at Work

AMS is working with its long-time partner, the Wallace Center at Winrock International, to implement GroupGAP. Moving forward, GroupGAP will partner with State extension agencies and other organizations that support small and mid-sized growers through outreach to buyers, retailers, and food hubs.

Visit www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp for information about GroupGAP certification. You can also contact the Specialty Crops Inspection Division at: (202) 720-5870.

Visit www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional for information about AMS' support of the local food sector. You can also contact the Transportation and Marketing Program at: (202) 720-8326.

Additional Resources

www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/specialty-crops-program

www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/transportation-marketing-program

www.ams.usda.gov/about-ams/programs-offices/outreach

www.wallacecenter.org

www.fda.gov

www.grants.gov

GroupGAP helps small and mid-sized farmers comply with the food safety requirements needed to supply larger markets.