



What is USDA GroupGAP?

USDA GroupGAP is a farm food safety audit program that allows a group of producers to attain a single GAP certification. In order to participate in the program, a group must:

- Operate under a shared Quality Management System (QMS) that incorporates a food safety standard;
- Agree to be audited by USDA as one body;
- Perform internal audits of the member farms to ensure compliance with the chosen food safety standard (Standard USDA GAP/GHP or Harmonized GAP); and
- Undergo annual USDA unannounced audits on a percentage of farms within the group.

General Comparison of the Traditional GAP Approach and GroupGAP (Farm Level)

ACTIVITY	USDA GAP/GHP	USDA GroupGAP
Manages Food Safety Program	Individual Grower	The group assigning one accountable individual to internally verify food safety compliance and assist with administrative duties
Audit Frequency	1 External Audit; 1 potential unannounced audit (both annually)	1 Internal Audit; 1 External Audit; Mandatory Unannounced Internal Audit; Mandatory Unannounced External Audit (both annually)
Training Requirements	One GAP workshop (recommended annually)	One GAP workshop
Certificate Holder	Individual Farm	Central Entity (food hub, support agency, or central business entity)
Certification Costs	Individual Grower	Shared among group members as determined by the group
Traceability	Individual Grower	Central Entity and group members cooperatively
Transparency	Varies among growers	Creates transparency of the group in every level of the operation, building confidence in customers, managers, and producers
Continual Improvement	Varies among growers	Requires implementation of a quality management system (QMS), a set of policies, processes and procedures that can be measured, analyzed, reviewed, and continually improved
Customer Satisfaction	Varies among growers	A systems approach, ensuring consistency in meeting customer needs

Tripp, Patricia. "New Appalachia Foods Becomes NC's First Group GAP Certified Food Hub." Carolina Farm Stewardship Association: May 2016. <https://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/new-appalachia-foods-becomes-ncs-first-groupgap-certified-food-hub/>.

Group GAP Frequently Asked Questions

How much does GroupGAP cost?

Based on the GroupGAP pilot, the estimated minimum first year cost to achieve certification for a group of any size is \$25,000. The average cost of an individual audit in North Carolina is about \$1000.

How many farms does a group need to have to pursue GroupGAP?

There is no minimum number of farms required to pursue GroupGAP; any cost savings will depend on the size of the group, size of the farms, distance between farms, and other factors. Anecdotal evidence based on the GroupGAP pilots indicates that a group of 25 or more farms is needed to achieve cost savings in the first year, compared to individual certification.

Do all farms have to grow the same crop?

No. Farms can produce multiple crops in different locations.

Do farms need to be a certain size?

No. There is no size requirement for farms to participate in GroupGAP.

What are the geographic restrictions?

There are no geographical restrictions on group membership. Any group of producers can be considered a group if they share a food safety program and are operating under the same quality management system.

Can packinghouses or warehouses be included?

Yes, a packinghouse or warehouse can be part of a group, and could act as the central entity managing the group.

Additional Information

For more information on GroupGAP in NC, contact **Trish Tripp, NCGT Produce Supply Chain Development Lead**, who led the GroupGAP pilot in North Carolina, at trish@artisanfoodsolutions.com.

For resources on GAP certification and Post-Harvest Handling, please visit www.ncgrowingtogether.org. **Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (CFSA)** provides consulting services and one-on-one assistance. Visit www.carolinafarmstewards.org or contact Karen McSwain, CFSA's Farm Services and Food Systems Director, at karen@carolinafarmstewards.org.

The USDA GroupGAP site has comprehensive resources on the program, including the GroupGAP Users Guide, growers' at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap>.

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