



GAP Certification Overview



Transfarmation



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What is GAP?

Good Agricultural Practices, or GAP, is a program whereby farmers obtain audits of their fruit, vegetable, and mushroom operations to verify that these products are produced, packed, stored, and handled in a way that maximizes food safety and helps prevent microbial contamination. USDA-certified auditors usually perform audits once per year during harvest, but unannounced audits may also be conducted. The different types of GAP audits include USDA GAP, Harmonized GAP, Harmonized GAP Plus+, Mushroom GAP, and the Leafy Green Marketing Agreement. Be sure to understand what your buyers require.

GAP audits typically cost \$900–\$1,600. Cost will vary depending on the size of the operation, travel time required, complexity of the growing operation (variety of crops, number of processes), and administrative time required. Federal and state grants may be available to help mitigate costs.

Why is obtaining GAP certification important?

GAP audits are voluntary; farmers are not required to be GAP-certified to sell what they grow. But many produce buyers require their vendors to be GAP-certified. GAP certification indicates to any buyer, whether large and institutional or an individual customer at a farmers market, that the produce to be purchased has been grown and distributed in a manner that minimizes food safety risks. Thorough preparation for the certification process also ensures that an appropriate action plan is in place in the event of a product recall.

How do GAP programs recommend that farmers prepare for an audit?

Food safety training: Familiarize yourself with applicable food safety requirements, and create your own food safety plan. The USDA recommends the [On-Farm Food Safety Project](#) as a resource for learning about food safety and developing a food safety plan for your farm.

Risk assessment: Assess all aspects of your farm that may affect food safety, including exposing your crops to contaminants. These may include the following:

- Water supply
- Soil and soil amendments
- Animals
- Equipment and tools
- Facilities
- People



The FDA and USDA's [Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#) is a great resource for reviewing common areas of concern and best practices for reducing risk.



Self-auditing: Familiarize yourself with the verification checklist the auditor will use to assess your farm. Find the checklist by choosing the relevant GAP audit-service link listed [here](#). Conduct a self-audit, and note any areas that you may need to address prior to your GAP audit.

Supplies: Be sure to have all the necessary supplies on hand, including these:

- First-aid kits
- Clipboards for your logs and checklists
- Surface sanitizer
- Handwashing items (liquid hand soap, single-use paper towels, lidded garbage can)
- Personal protective equipment
- Potable water

Review the relevant audit-verification checklist from the list linked above to get a good idea of all the supplies needed.

Mock recall: Conduct a mock recall to prepare yourself for a possible actual recall. The Carolina Farm Stewardship Association makes information about mock recalls available to anyone on their [website](#) in addition to offering technical assistance to guide member farmers through the entire GAP-certification process.

What resources exist to help with this process?

GAP certification isn't right for every grower, but farmers needing a GAP audit should spend some time looking for helpful resources in their areas. Training programs may be available through local extension offices or universities. Additionally, local farmer-focused nonprofits may offer educational programs that can help farmers understand the certification process, prepare for and schedule an audit, and develop a food safety plan. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture is also an excellent resource for GAP audit information and offers audit preparation checklists on their [website](#).

REFERENCES:

"Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Audits," USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp>.

"GAP Certification Programs," NASDA Foundation, <https://www.nasda.org/gap-overview/>.