

# **THE GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES PROGRAM FOR FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Food safety is a constant concern of consumers, producers, wholesalers, retailers and those agencies responsible for the consumer's health. Consumers in the United States have benefited by the diligent efforts of federal and state food safety programs. However, recent outbreaks of food born illness (see FDA GUIDE TO MINIMIZE MICROBIAL FOOD SAFETY HAZARDS FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES) and the perception that imported fruit and vegetables may not be properly inspected for safety, has created awareness for additional food safety programs.

**The Good Agricultural Practices Program for Fruits and Vegetables (GAPP)** is designed to:

- Minimize microbial food hazards
- Minimize or eliminate damaging practices to the environment
- Protect worker health
- Educate consumers
- Promote food safety

The GAP program is a joint effort of the Georgia Crop Improvement Association, the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, the Georgia Department of Agriculture, and the University of Georgia Departments of Food Science and Horticulture.

## **AGENCY and RESPONSIBILITY**

**The Georgia Crop Improvement Association (GCIA)** was organized in 1946 and made the legal seed certifying agency by passage of House Bill #104 in 1956. Senate Bill #583 in July of 1997 superseded this bill. Both bills authorized the Dean of the University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences to designate the Georgia Crop Improvement Association as the legal seed certifying agency in Georgia.

The Georgia Crop Improvement Association's participation in the **GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES PROGRAM** is a natural extension of third-party certifying activities regularly performed for seed, Organic Production, Quality Assurance and Identity Preserved Programs currently offered by the association.

The GCIA is responsible for the inspections of production sites and packaging facilities. Records relating to pesticide use, composting, worker hygiene, etc. will be audited. Two inspections per year will be performed. The executive director of Georgia Crop Improvement Association will determine if an inspected site and/or packing facility has met GAPP program requirements. The Executive Director may approve, deny, or place in pending an application.

The GCIA Executive Director will investigate any alleged abuses of the GAPP Program and make a report to the GAPP Committee.

**The Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA)** represents the industry by promoting Georgia grown products, legislative involvement, providing research funds, newsletters, conferences and other services to its members.

The mission of the GFVGA is:

- To provide a viable and united voice to represent the fruit and vegetable industry.
- To encourage efficient production, packing, handling, storing, and processing of fruits and vegetables.
- To develop marketing and promotional programs to increase public awareness of the health benefits of eating fruits and vegetables and to encourage consumption of more Georgia products.
- To support applied research that benefits the industry.

The GFVGA is responsible for promoting the GAPP program to consumers, wholesale and retail buyers, establishing fees for the program, receiving applications, and publishing a list of GAPP participants.

**The Georgia Department of Agriculture** is responsible for collecting target samples of fruit and vegetables and testing for residual pesticides. FDA and USDA standards are used.

**The University of Georgia Departments of Food Science and Horticulture** has the responsibility to provide technical assistance to the GAPP program, train producers, county agents, etc. in the implementation of Good Agricultural Practices.

## **I. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

The Good Agricultural Practices Program Committee will:

- Review and approve any standard changes and fees.
- Hear appeals and be the final authority.
- Annually review applications and inspection/auditing reports after the on-site inspection.
- Review any investigations by the GCIA Executive Director of complaints about abuses in the production and sale of GAPP products, determine penalties for abuse of standards or labels and negotiate satisfactory settlement of the complaint and reimbursement for the investigation cost.

### **The GAPP Committee will be composed of:**

- GCIA Executive Director (Chair)
- GFVGA Executive Director (Secretary)
- Two University of Georgia Representatives (Appointed by Dean of College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, renewed or new appointment every three years)
- Two GFVGA Representatives (Appointed by GFVGA, renewed or new appointment every three years)
- Georgia Department of Agriculture representative. (Appointed by Commissioner of Agriculture, renewed or new appointment every three years)

### **GAP Standards or Procedures Changes Process (Initiated by a GAPP participant)**

The GFVGA Executive Director must be notified in writing by any GAPP participant of suggested standards, process or fee changes. The GFVGA executive director will contact the GAPP Committee Chair. The person making the suggested change may present their suggested change to the committee.

### **Appeals**

The GFVGA Executive Director must be notified in writing by the GAPP Participant of any appeals of actions taken by the GCIA Executive Director, Inspection/Auditing staff. Administrator will have thirty days to contact the GAPP committee and establish a date for the hearing. Within thirty days of notification there will be a meeting of the GAPP Committee. The person making the appeal may present his appeal to the committee. Decisions of the GAPP Committee are final and must be made within thirty days of the hearing conclusion.

### **Inspectors**

The GCIA Executive Director will provide inspectors/auditors. Inspectors/Auditors must not have a conflict of interest with parties they are inspecting and they are bound to maintain confidentiality regarding information in the application and information obtained as part of the inspection process. **Inspectors may not act as consultants or endorse specific items or products.**

## **II. APPLICATION FOR INSPECTION**

Application is made by submitting a completed form with the appropriate fee to the GFVGA Executive Director. See attached Resource Sheet for address. Inspection/auditing is an annual process. GAPP participants must annually renew by submitting a new application. GAPP approved (certificate has been issued) participant must apply for renewal of their

certificate prior to the anniversary date of the certificate. Upon receipt of the renewal request a new certificate will be issued and an inspection will be performed within the following sixty days, preferably during the growing/packing season. New applications may be accepted at any time.

The applicant must provide a knowledgeable authorized representative of the operation to be present with the inspector to answer questions, sign appropriate papers, and be present at exit interview.

The applicant will be notified within 30 days of an inspection schedule.

The inspector may take samples of water, soil, plant tissue, plants, etc. for testing. A receipt will be given to the producer; the producer will not charge the GAPP program for the sample taken. The applicant will pay the cost of testing, and the applicant will receive a copy of the analysis.

Inspectors will conduct an “exit” interview with the applicant or authorized representative upon completion of the inspection process. The inspector will cover all potential problem areas noted on the inspection form.

Upon review of the inspectors report, the GCIA Executive Director will approve, deny, or place an application in pending. If placed in pending or denied the GCIA Executive Director will have 15 days to notify the applicant.

Participation in this program will not be denied to any person due to discrimination because of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

### **III. FEES**

A fee schedule is provided with the application.

Inspection fees for specialized production, conditioning, packaging, or processing not covered by the fee schedule will be agreed upon prior to inspection.

**Re-inspections/Audits:** \$100.00 per trip  
Plus mileage at the GCIA board approved rate.

**Fee Refund Policy:** fees are non-refundable except in the following instances:

Withdrawal of initial application prior to the on-site inspection. A processing fee of \$50 will be retained by GFVGA.

#### **IV. NON-COMPLIANCE, WARNINGS, PENDING**

Non-Compliance with the GAPP Program standards may result in the loss of approval.

The GAPP committee may, at its discretion, issue written warnings for minor infractions of the standards and administrative procedures. Warnings will be for a three-year period. If more than three warnings are in effect for a certified operation at a given time, the farm, handler, processor will lose approval for one year.

Fraud will result in immediate termination of approval.

#### **V. LIABILITY**

No GAPP program staff member, inspector, board of directors, committee member, officer, may be held liable or responsible for any amount in excess of the administrative fees paid. Any monetary claim arising out of or relating to the administration of the program will be settled by arbitration. The GAPP Committee will chose a representative, the person making the claim will chose a representative, and the two representatives will choose a third party for arbitration. The decision will be final. Signing of the GAPP Application is considered agreement with the above.

#### **VI. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All employees, contractors, and committee members must adhere to the principals of confidentiality. Information submitted by applicants for approval will not be released to the public, including production practices, ingredients, customer list, complaint log, etc. without written permission of the applicant. However, the following may be released:

- A. The name, address and telephone number of the applicant.
- B. To confirm whether or not the applicants operation was approved on a specific date.
- C. Any information to comply with a court order.
- D. Any information to comply with a request from the Georgia Department of Agriculture investigating an alleged complaint.
- E. Any information to comply with a request from the USDA investigating an alleged complaint.

#### **VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Conflict of interest is defined as having an economic interest with a producer or packer under review for approval one year prior to, during or one year after work or employment was concluded. Staff, contractors and committee members with a conflict of interest must make the conflict known and not participate in discussion or decisions regarding the producer or packer under review.

#### **VIII. MEETINGS**

All meetings will be conducted using the latest editions of "Robert's Rules of Order."

# STANDARDS FOR GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES PROGRAM

## I. General Information

The basis of the Good Agricultural Practices Program is to provide a safe food product for consumers. The focus is to reduce the risk of microbial and pesticide contamination. Additional benefits of the program are worker safety and protection of the environment.

**Current technologies cannot eliminate all potential food safety hazards associated with fresh produce that will be eaten raw. \***

When the applicant has successfully completed the inspection/audit process, the GCIA director will issue a GAPP "CERTIFICATE". The certificate may be copied by the GAPP program producer and presented as proof of approval.

Upon receipt of the GAPP "CERTIFICATE" a producer may use the GAPP seal on shipping containers, invoices, letterhead, promotional items and advertising.

The GAPP seal will only be used on products grown under the GAPP program rules. For the GAPP seal to be used on produce both the production farm and packing facility must be approved.

The inspection of a GAPP program producer is a verification of a process. The GAPP approved producer is responsible for complying with the standards and is responsible for product quality and safety.

The Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables was used as the basis for these standards.

## II. Audits/Inspections

At least one audit/inspection should be made during the growing and packing season.

The application and audit/inspection report is one form, divided into seven sections. Each section covers a specific area. Not all sections are applicable to the audited/inspected site. All areas not in compliance with the GAPP program must be corrected. The executive director of the GCIA may allow a reasonable time for corrections. Normally these will be items requiring design and construction. A re-inspection is required of these items.

Non-compliance items that are immediate health or safety issues will be corrected prior to the completion of the audit/inspection or the application will be rejected.

All questions with a **D** in the last column require that the auditor/inspector visually see a document relating to the question. There are two documents acceptable for compliance.

- An official document will likely originate from a laboratory, vendor, professional, etc., (i.e. water test, pesticide license).
- A written plan of action made available to all staff and employees (i.e. plan for spill containment of pesticides, cleaning of packing equipment).

## **SECTION I - GENERAL**

This section covers items applicable to all sites involved in GAPP production. The General Section must be completed for all applications.

- General
- Control of chemical hazards
- All GAPP documentation must be maintained for 24 months.

**STANDARD:** The producer must be knowledgeable of production sites to prevent unwanted product contamination.

The environment must be protected by providing protection to soil and water from fuel and fertilizer tank spills or leaks.

The producer must have knowledge of pesticides; safety, application, records, etc. Only trained and licensed personnel may apply restricted-use pesticides.

The producer should attend classes, training, seminars, etc. conducted by any credible entity to become familiar with and stay current with GAPP changes or new procedures.

## **SECTION II - CROP PRODUCTION**

This Section covers the production of GAPP Program products.

- Environmental concerns
- Animal manure contamination
- Pesticide drift
- Source and testing of water for irrigation and crop protection
- Manure and municipal biosolids

**STANDARD:** Product must be produced in an environment that is safe from non-approved pesticides. The use of buffer strips, crop alternatives (winter crops vs. spring or summer), the use of barriers, covering crops, etc., are permitted.

Product must be protected from manure; animals, runoff from lagoons and composting operations, pastures, feed lots, etc.

Water used for irrigation and crop protection must be tested for human pathogens and parasites. See the reference section of the GAPP Handbook for water standards for water testing and quality requirements.

Wells must be designed and constructed to comply with local and state regulations.

Non-composted manure may be used if incorporated into the soil within three weeks of planting and 120 days before harvest.

All composted material must comply with NRCS standard 317.

All manure or compost purchased for use must have a specification sheet from the vendor indicating that NRCS rule 317 was complied with.

Records of manure applications must be available for auditing.

### **SECTION III- FIELD HARVESTING, PACKING AND TRANSPORTATION**

This section is for those sites that harvest and pack in the production field.

- Sanitation facilities for workers
- Worker hygiene
- Sanitation of harvesting equipment

**STANDARD:** The producer must provide an environment that reduces possible microbial contamination of product by field workers; sanitation of gloves, knives, baskets, use of chlorinated water for rinsing of product, etc.

There must be an adequate number of field sanitation units. These units must be conveniently located and properly equipped and serviced.

Field workers must be properly trained in the use of field sanitation units.

Supervisors must monitor field worker hand washing.

Supervisors must be familiar with signs and symptoms of infectious diseases.

### **SECTION IV-PACKING FACILITY**

This section covers those items involved in the packing of produce.

- Source and testing of water used
- Sewage treatment
- General sanitation of facility
- Receiving at packing facility
- Washing/packing line sanitation and safety
- Hygiene
- Sanitation
- Recognition of infectious disease

**STANDARD:** The product packing facility must be operated in a manner that reduces microbial risk, maintains or enhances quality. Producer must provide a safe working environment and train workers in procedures that minimize microbial contamination.



Water used in the packing of product must be tested for pathogens and parasites. See in the reference section of the GAPP Handbook the water standards for water testing and quality requirements.

Wells must be designed and constructed to comply with local and state regulations.

Possible contamination of the site by adjacent sewage treatment facilities must be prevented.

On site sewage treatment systems must be designed and constructed in compliance with local and state laws.

There must be an “individual” responsible for plant sanitation issues.

Only food grade lubricants are to be used in the packing facility.

Good sanitation practices, both inside and outside of facility, must be followed.

Producers must train workers in good personal hygiene principles.

Supervisors must be familiar with signs and symptoms of infectious diseases.

There must be an adequate number of restrooms. Restrooms must be conveniently located and properly equipped and maintained.

Water chlorination levels must be monitored to ensure 100-200 parts per million and a pH of 6.5 to 7.5 unless permission is granted to use lower rates.

There must be a pest control program.

## **SECTION V-STORAGE**

This section covers the storage of produce.

- Safety and testing of water used in chillers and for ice
- Packing container sanitation
- Cleaning of pallets
- Cleaning of coolers
- Temperature monitoring

**STANDARD:** Packers must ensure that storage of product maintains quality and reduces microbial contamination.

Ice must be produced with tested potable water.

Packing containers must be protected from contamination by rodents, birds, etc.

Storage sites must be maintained to reduce microbial activity.

Proper storage temperatures must be monitored.

## **SECTION VI- TRANSPORTATION**

This section covers the movement of GAPP produce from the packing site to the first buyer. This section will also be used for field pack produce.

- Personal hygiene and sanitation
- Truck cleanliness
- Rodent, insect, temperature control
- Truck loading process

**STANDARD:** Packers must follow ensure that product is handled to reduce microbial contamination and maintain product quality.

Good hygiene practices must be followed.

Trucks must be checked for cleanliness, odors, debris, and correct temperature.

## **SECTION VII- TRACE ABILITY**

This section covers the system designed to track a product from the producer/packer to the first buyer.

- Finished product
- Specific grower and field
- Packing date
- Harvest date

**STANDARD:** Producers must have a system for tracing product form the field to the first buyer.

The tracking system must identify:

- The specific grower
- The specific field or farm of production
- The date of packing
- The date of harvest

\*Guide to Minimize Microbial Food and Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, October 1998, page 7, #2