

## Steps Outlining Process for Getting GAPs Certified

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### Create a Food Safety Plan:

#### Step 1: Familiarize yourself with Good Agricultural Practices:

Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) are the basic environmental and operational conditions necessary for mitigating the risks associated with producing fruits and vegetables. The purpose of GAPs is to give logical guidance in implementing best management practices that will help by reducing and managing contamination of fruits and vegetables. Examples of GAPs include worker hygiene and health, manure use and water quality throughout the production and harvesting process.

- For more information visit the N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Portal
  - General Website: <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/>
  - Specific: <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/ncfreshproducesafety-good-agricultural-practices/ncfreshproducesafety-gaps-information/gaps-basics/>
  - Fresh Produce Safety Mock Audit Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gry7s-NM9JY&index=8&list=PLEBC9DA174FBC92FF>

#### Step 2: Complete preliminary exercises:

Before attending a GAPs training, it is helpful to be familiar with food safety hazards on your farm. By creating a map of your farm and completing an initial hazard assessment, you will be better prepared to actively participate in training.

- Map your Farm
  - <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/FY/FY96900.pdf>
- Hazard assessment: Cornell Decision Tree
  - [http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Cornell\\_Decision\\_Tree\\_Checklist.pdf](http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Cornell_Decision_Tree_Checklist.pdf)

#### Step 3: Attend a GAPs training:

GAPs trainings are offered throughout the state on an ongoing basis. To find a workshop that will fit your needs please visit the N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Training and Events Calendar or check with your local Extension agent.

- NC Fresh Produce Safety Training and Events Calendar
  - <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/>
- Contact your local Extension office
  - <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/local-county-center/>

#### Step 4: Complete hazard assessment of farm using information learned in training:

Now that you have attended a GAPs training you will be better acquainted with food safety hazards on the farm. Use your new knowledge to complete a more in-depth assessment of your farm. The N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Portal offers a variety of different self-audits so that you may choose the one that best fits your needs.

- Fresh Produce Safety Portal Self-Audits
  - <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/ncfreshproducesafety-good-agricultural-practices/ncfreshproducesafety-audits-and-plans/ncfreshproducesafety-self-audits/>

### **Step 5: Collect your specific GAPs in a food safety plan:**

You've put in the time learning about GAPs and assessing food safety hazards on your farm, now it's time to put your plan in writing. A food safety plan consists of standard operating procedures (SOPs), which describe how you address food safety risks on your farm. Your food safety plan also includes any documentation or records you may have regarding your Good Agricultural Practices. The N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Portal includes food safety plan templates to be modified for your farm as well as information on writing SOPs.

- Food safety plan templates and creating SOPs
  - <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/ncfreshproducesafety-good-agricultural-practices/ncfreshproducesafety-audits-and-plans/ncfreshproducesafety-food-safety-plans/>

### **Get GAPs Certified:**

#### **Step 1: Determine buyer requirements or choose your 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditor:**

If your buyer requires GAPs certification you should determine from them which 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditor to use and which sections of the audit are required. If your market does not require GAPs certification you may choose whichever 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditor you prefer. The N.C. Fresh Produce Safety Portal provides a list of 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditors commonly used in North Carolina.

- List of 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditors and audit questions
  - <http://ncfreshproducesafety.ces.ncsu.edu/ncfreshproducesafety-good-agricultural-practices/ncfreshproducesafety-audits-and-plans/third-party-auditors/>

#### **Step 2: Download audit matrix and check requirements:**

Download the audit matrix and make sure your food safety plan satisfies all the requirements of that particular audit. Ensure you have gathered all of the appropriate records and documentation.

#### **Step 3: Request audit:**

Once you have your food safety plan and are sure it meets the audit requirements you are ready to request an audit. When you submit your audit request you will need to include your farm information, the type of audit you are requesting, and several dates and times when you will be harvesting the crops you wish to have inspected. You will also need to send a copy of your food safety manual for review. The USDA audit request is available on the NCDA&CS website. To request an audit from a different 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditor, contact that company directly.

- NCDA&CS USDA audit request information
  - <http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/NCgradesvc/>

#### **Step 4: Use your audit:**

You've completed your audit and received your score. Whether you passed with flying colors or hit a few roadblocks, now is the time to evaluate and make improvements. Carefully review your audit and determine where you may have lost points. What could you do to improve your management practices and reduce food safety risks? You've invested your time and money into preparing for your audit; make sure you are utilizing the results to benefit your farm.

#### **\*Apply for cost-share**

Funding is sometimes available to provide growers with financial support in improving food safety on their farm. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (<http://www.ncagr.gov/markets/NCgradesvc/>) as well as the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association (<http://www.carolinafarmstewards.org/>) have offered cost-share programs in the past. Check these websites for updates or contact your local Extension office for more information.