

USDA GAP & GHP AUDIT PROGRAM INFORMATION

Dear Vermont Grower,

Thank you for your interest in the USDA GAP & GHP Audit Verification Program. The following information is provided to assist you as you work towards certification.

Your first step may be to visit the USDA website to gather background information on the program. Using a search engine such as *Google*, type in:

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp>.

This selection should open to the page: “*Grading, Certification and Verification – Fresh Produce Audit Verification Program*”. Once here, there are several important references to review. First, in the text dialog about the program is a link to FDA’s “**Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables**”. On the right side under “**Resources**” are links to the “*Audit Checklist*, and the *Audit Score Sheet*”.

The Checklist will show the actual questions that will be covered during an audit for the various parts or “**Scopes**” of the audit. All audits must pass the General Questions. Other scopes audited will often depend on the requirements of your buyer(s). These will have to be determined before the audit is initiated.

In regards to the Checklist, pay particular attention to the bold letters in the “Doc” column. A “D” indicates that a document(s) is required to show conformance to the question. A document may be a combination of standard operating procedures outlining company policy as well as a record indicating that a particular action was taken. An “R” indicates that a record is required to be kept showing an action was taken. A “P” indicates that a policy/standard operating procedure (SOP) must be documented in the food safety plan in order to show conformance to the question. A significant part of the audit program is based on record keeping, up-to-date and accurate log books and documentation of components in your *Farm Food Safety Plan*.

For a general overview of a model farm safety plan see the attached document: “*Justis Farm safety plan 2009*”.

Other attached documents include the USDA “*Notice to the Industry*”, which supplies additional information related to the audit program; and the USDA *Audit Agreement*, which spells out the terms of the agreement between the applicant and the USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Good Agricultural Practices & Good Handling Practices (GAP & GHP) Audit Verification Program.

Currently, there is a \$92/hr charge for the audit program, plus an annual \$50 administrative fee. There also is grant money available to help off-set the cost of the audit. For 2010 up to \$500 per farm is available for successful completion of the initial audit.

There are also additional websites that can supply information. Three excellent sites are at Cornell University, the University of Vermont and Penn State University. Go to: <http://www.gaps.cornell.edu> , <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/foodlinks.html>, and <http://www.foodsafety.psu.edu/GAPs/>.

For additional information or questions, contact Steve Parise, Agriculture Resource Management Specialist with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, 802.828.2436, or e-mail at: steve.parise@state.vt.us.