

Economical impact of food safety certification on diversified farmers in Vermont

GAPs – Good Agricultural Practices – are the USDA's answer to minimizing microbial contamination of produce. While not all farmers are required to be GAPs certified, undergoing a GAPs Audit is becoming a necessity for farmers who want to sell their produce to buyers who require certifications such as major supermarket chains. However, GAPs certification can be a major investment for farmers and a benefit-cost analysis is a crucial step. Economically viable farmers are indispensable partners in the community. In this time of increased public awareness of food safety issues and agricultural renewal we need to support farmers who provide the community with wholesome, healthy and safe food. Little research has been done on the economic cost of implementing GAPs on small and medium sized diversified farms. Our study seeks to understand the need for and potential costs of GAPs certification on Vermont farms.

The research includes two surveys and a series of case studies. The first survey, which will be distributed to growers of fruits and vegetables in Vermont, measures growers' interest in and readiness for GAPs certification. The second survey, distributed to buyers, determines their current and future requirements of GAPs certification for their supplying farmers. Ten case studies of Vermont growers who have passed the USDA GAPs audit will measure the costs of GAPs compliance and impacts on farm profitability on a range of Vermont farms. We will present preliminary results of the surveys and cases, and discuss their implications for public policy and UVM Extension's Center for Sustainable Agriculture's outreach efforts. We conclude with limitations and directions of future research.

This research project fills a research gap and should provide practical answers to both farmers and policy makers.