



Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
Produce Program
116 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620
agriculture.vermont.gov/produceprogram

February 20, 2019

Dear Vermont Produce Grower,

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (Agency or VAAFM) is contacting you to provide updates on produce safety certification and accreditation programs available to Vermont fruit and vegetable growers. There are a number of options for growers who seek a produce safety certification or accreditation to maintain current markets or access new retail and wholesale buyers, including the programs listed below.

Produce Safety Certification & Accreditation Programs

[USDA Good Agricultural Practices \(GAP\) & Good Handling Practices \(GHP\)](#)

USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) are voluntary audits that verify fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored in ways that minimize microbial food safety risks. As of January 2019, VAAFM will no longer offer USDA GAP or GAP & GHP audits. However, growers may still obtain USDA GAP or GAP & GHP audits by contacting USDA:

Website: www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp
Telephone: (202) 720-5021
Email: SCAudits@ams.usda.gov

[USDA Harmonized GAP](#)

Like USDA GAP audits, USDA Harmonized GAP audits verify that produce is grown, packed, handled and stored in ways that minimize food safety hazards. The Harmonized Standard is based on the Harmonization Initiative Harmonized Food Safety Standards and incorporates Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule (PSR) requirements. See “Information about the FSMA Produce Safety Rule” below for more information about the PSR.

USDA is offering **Harmonized GAP Assistance** in 2019 to help fruit and vegetable growers pay for food safety certification. This year, USDA will cover the costs of USDA Harmonized GAP and Harmonized GAP Plus+ audits for growers in several states, including Vermont. Find more information in Questions and Answers about the GAP Assistance Program:
www.ams.usda.gov/publications/content/rma-ams-harmonized-gap-assistance-qa.

Website: www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp/harmonized
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GroupGAP Food Safety Program

GroupGAP allows farmers, food hubs, and marketing organizations to band together and pool resources to achieve USDA GAP certification as a group. Find more information on USDA's GroupGAP webpage.

Website: www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap

Telephone: (202) 720-5021

Email: GroupGAP@ams.usda.gov

Community Accreditation for Produce Safety (CAPS)

CAPS is a program of the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association (VVBGA). A practical approach to documenting on-farm practices that reduce food safety risks, CAPS uses the capsvt.org platform to help growers write produce safety plans, implement their plans, and upload evidence of implementation—including standard operating procedures and pictures. Growers receive CAPS accreditation after a successful peer review of these documents.

CAPS+ Audits

CAPS accredited growers may also opt for a CAPS+ on-farm verification audit, which confirms that required CAPS practices documented on capsvt.org are in place on the farm. VAAFM staff currently conduct these audits in partnership with University of Vermont Extension. Hannaford Supermarkets now accepts CAPS+ accreditation in lieu of USDA GAP certification, and the Agency is conducting outreach to additional retail and wholesale buyers to gauge buyers' willingness to accept CAPS+ audits in 2019 and beyond. The Agency will share updates on this effort as more information becomes available.

For more information about CAPS and CAPS+, contact Hans Estrin at UVM Extension:

Websites: practicalproducesafetyvt.wordpress.com & capsvt.org

Telephone: (802) 257-7967

Email: hestrin@uvm.edu

Information about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule

Some Vermont farms are subject to the Produce Safety Rule (PSR), a federal rule under the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that sets minimum standards for growing, harvesting, packing, and holding fresh produce. Farms covered by the PSR will undergo regulatory inspections, which differ from voluntary audits. Your business size and market channels will determine whether your farm is subject to the PSR. To learn whether your farm is affected by the rule, contact the Produce Program at AGR.FSMA@vermont.gov or (802) 522-3132.





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Produce Safety Rule (PSR) Inspections

Unlike voluntary audits, PSR inspections are regulatory and mandated for growers covered by the rule. The purpose of a PSR inspection is to achieve compliance with the rule, and the inspection does not include a certification or pass/fail result.

On-Farm Readiness Reviews

An On-Farm Readiness Review (OFRR) is a free, non-regulatory assessment to help growers prepare for a Produce Safety Rule inspection and identify areas for produce safety improvements. An OFRR includes a farm walk-through with VAAFAM and University of Vermont Extension produce safety experts to evaluate pre-harvest, harvest, and post-harvest conditions and practices and provide personalized recommendations. To schedule an OFRR for the 2019 growing season, contact the Produce Program at AGR.FSMA@vermont.gov or (802) 522-3132.

The Agency appreciates the contributions that Vermont fruit and vegetable growers make to the state's economy, its working landscape, and to Vermonters' health and well-being. We will continue to work with growers to promote food safety and ensure that growers are able to access retail and wholesale markets.

We invite you to contact us with questions, feedback, or to share information about buyer requests for produce safety certification. You can reach the Vermont Produce Program at AGR.FSMA@vermont.gov or (802) 522-3132.

Sincerely,

The Vermont Produce Program
Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets

