

Economic Impact and Policy Implications of Food Safety Certification on Produce Farms in Vermont

The USDA Fresh Produce Audit Verification Program, commonly referred to as Good Agricultural Practices, GAPs, verifies adherence to 1998 Food and Drug Administration's Guide to minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for fresh produce. While the guidelines were developed over 10 years ago, there is still limited research on the economic impact of the certification. Food safety is critical for the economic success of commercial produce growers as the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) will make GAPs a requirement and as major buyers are already requiring a food safety audit. Our study was conducted utilizing an on-line survey and in-depth interviews. We found that the first year certification cost averaged \$65 per acre and the labor need averaged 322 hours. Extrapolation of the economic analysis showed that it would cost between \$1,851,700 and 3,250,542 to certify all the commercial produce farms in Vermont. Beyond the economic results we will discuss the practical implications of the study for policy makers as they relate to the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Keywords: economic impact – Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) – fresh produce farms – microbial contamination