

116 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05620

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 _____ 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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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 VAAF 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.

