



European Food Safety Certification - The “GlobalGAP” Standard and its Accredited Certification Program¹

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Introduction

Fresh produce, grain, and meat exporters to the European Union, Switzerland and Norway may be asked by their customers to produce a certificate of compliance with the GlobalGAP[®] standard (formerly EurepGAP[®]) which is becoming the international trade norm for all agricultural products. Certification is carried out by licensed third-party professional audit organizations. The objective of this publication is to inform growers in Florida and elsewhere about this standard and refer readers to sources of further information.

“Eurep” was the name of a private-sector association of major retail chains, importers, and suppliers launched in 1999 (1). As of September 2007, the consortium changed its name to “GlobalGAP.” The term *GAPs* stands for Good Agricultural Practices, also known as or similar to Better Management Practices (BMPs).

European Market Requirements

Many European retailers will only buy produce, meat, and grain-based products that come from farms that can prove their compliance with GlobalGAP rules with a certificate issued by an independent audit company. Other buyers may prefer to buy from a grower who complies with the standard rather than from a non-compliant one. A major Japanese supermarket chain has also joined forces with GlobalGAP.

There is no exact equivalent standard in the United States. In several states such as Florida and California, lists of Better Management Practices (BMPs) covering conservation, plant nutrition, and crop protection practices have been developed for individual crops, but these are not part of most certification program criteria. The GlobalGAP rules cover these topics as well as food safety and worker welfare. Several farm certification companies in this country are licensed to conduct farm audits using the GlobalGAP checklist and are authorized to award certificates of compliance where merited (2).

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Overview

GlobalGAP aims to change the attitudes of management and workers from being purely production-oriented to being fully aware of the impacts their operation has on consumers, society, and the environment, and requires growers to follow a minimum performance standard with defined criteria, intended to stop or mitigate any adverse effects of their production processes.

The standard is based on a hazard analysis of the production process from the seed stage to dispatch to customers, covering every process taking place in a single agricultural business. It does not cover independent packinghouses, nor does it cover transport away from the farm.

The GlobalGAP standard is published as modules with slightly different versions for fresh fruit and vegetables, meat products, flowers and ornamentals, and combinable crops (grains and pulses). There is also an Integrated Farm Assurance version for farms with several types of concurrent operations, such as meat, grain, and produce production on the same site.

GlobalGAP requires strong internal controls, intensive employee training, meticulous record keeping, frequent management reassessments of work methods and results, and annual on-farm inspections of work methods and paperwork by external auditors. For fruit and vegetable growers, failure to meet one of 49 Major requirements, or 95% of the 96 Minor requirements will result in certification being denied or suspended. There are also 66 Recommendations, compliance with these is not essential, but a grower must be able to demonstrate that they have been considered during production planning.

Several of the Best Management Practices (3) set for crops by the State of Florida cover some aspects of GlobalGAP. Florida BMPs are primarily focused on the prevention or mitigation of water pollution; GlobalGAP is holistic, covering all phases of a farm operation from land selection and preparation through to harvesting and on-farm processing, all with extensive record keeping.

Principles

Growers must be compliant with all applicable local laws and regulations in the country of production. Failure to fulfill legal requirements automatically makes certification impossible.

The standards only cover what takes place within a farm's legal boundaries — broadly defined to cover situations where a farmer operates separate fields under one central management. On-farm packing operations that do not involve any physical transformations are certifiable, but off-farm packing facilities are not, even when owned and managed by the same grower or group of growers. Processing apart from simple trimming and post-harvest protective treatments is not covered — any transformation such as "Fresh Cut" produce or mixing of different varieties is considered an industrial operation and outside GlobalGAP's scope because of the heightened contamination risks.

The primary focus of GlobalGAP is the prevention of food contamination. It is strong on chemical issues, in line with European consumer perceptions (4). It is much less strict about microbial contamination than the USDA guidelines for produce sold in the US (5).

The secondary focus is on protection of farm workers, visitors and subcontractors from any harm caused by the growing and processing operations, and on fair treatment of workers and compliance with local labor laws. GlobalGAP does not cover other social issues in detail since this would duplicate other existing internationally-accepted standards like the Social Accountability 8000 Standard (6) and the Ethical Trading Initiative (7).

The prevention of environmental contamination and conservation of wildlife and natural flora is another focus, but most of the statements on this topic are classed as recommendations.

History and Organization

GlobalGAP began as the European Retailers Environmental Protocol. A grower standard was first released in 1999, and has since been updated three times. It is owned by a private-sector consortium of

major supermarket chains, fresh produce traders, and producer associations. The group came together to reduce the cost and complication of each retailer issuing separate farm standards and running their own inspection systems, as currently happens in the US. Differing proprietary standards cause great confusion and increased costs for growers, leading to accusations of anti-competitive behavior against the supermarkets (8).

Voting members, retailers or suppliers, control the standard-setting process and certification system. Non-governmental organizations, consultants, agricultural supply companies, and commercial and non-profit certification and inspection bodies may be Associate members, and participate in a consultative forum. There is no governmental participation.

Periodic updating of the standard has been done by a Technical Committee of representatives from both the supply and retail sectors. This committee also serves as an adjudicator of disputes and the final authority on acceptance of other standards as equivalents. Public meetings are held at which comments can be made by Associate members and other interested parties prior to final publication. The latest revision was published late in 2006 and is applicable from April 1st 2007. Growers were required to adapt to the revised rules by December 2007. The next planned revision will be in 2010.

The audit process operates under the ISO 62 and ISO 65 guidelines for certification programs. Auditors, both internal and external, must have undergone training according to the rules for the ISO 9000 Quality Management or ISO 14000 Environmental Management standards. Auditors are required to undergo periodic refreshment training, and are supervised by the national accreditation body in each country. The American National Standards Institute monitors certification bodies based in the US.

The EU legal framework for food safety issues is different from that of the US. Collaboration of European commercial entities at an industry level is legal, and does not violate EU anti-trust laws. Such a joint effort would be legally impossible in the US. There is an EU Food Safety Authority, but this is

primarily an inspection and consultative body, and does not administer any certification programs.

Several pre-existing national and private farm management standards have been adapted to conform to GlobalGAP, and are accepted as equivalents (9), so that farmers do not have to pay for several certifications in order to satisfy customers in different member regions. The adaptive process is known as "benchmarking." These adapted standards may contain additional requirements not covered by the core document, or give some items greater importance, but they have to cover all GlobalGAP obligatory questions.

How it works

Certificates are issued for a specific crop or crops on a specific farm. Any produce not named on the certificate is not covered. Legally constituted farm associations can obtain a group certificate covering all their members, so long as they run an internal inspection system compliant with GlobalGAP regulations. This option reduces the cost of annual audits since, under the ISO 65 rules, only a sample of the membership needs to be externally audited.

The 2007 version of the standard has a checklist in three sections. The first, called "All Farms," is applicable to all kinds of agricultural operations, whether crops, animal husbandry, or agriculture. For a fruit and vegetable grower, the "Crops Base" is comprised of basic questions relevant for different types of agronomy in both field and greenhouse. Questions specifically tailored for growers in certain "sectors," such as fresh fruit and vegetables, combinable crops (grains & pulses), flowers and ornamentals, beverage crops, etc., form the third group. A Florida farm growing citrus and sugarcane, for example, would have to answer questions from the Fruit and Vegetables module and also on the Combinable Crops module in order to participate in the GlobalGAP market.

Questions in each group are graded into three levels of importance: *Majors* which are mandatory, *Minors* which can sometimes be failed so long as 95% of the remainder is complied with, and *Recommendations* which are optional. This means

that a farmer has a little flexibility on some requirements.

Since each crop has its own unique growing conditions, with regional variations, it is impossible for the standard to cover all possible situations. Some questions may be deemed Not Applicable on a specific farm. Others that are considered by GlobalGAP as essential for Food Safety cannot be deemed Not Applicable.

Farms that sell their produce in bulk to a commercial packinghouse without any processing taking place inside the farm boundaries can skip the produce handling requirements. Every farm has to fulfill requirements drawn from the following areas of concern:

- TRACEABILITY
- RECORD KEEPING AND INTERNAL SELF-INSPECTION
- VARIETIES AND ROOTSTOCKS
- SITE HISTORY AND SITE MANAGEMENT
- SOIL AND SUBSTRATE MANAGEMENT
- FERTILIZER USE
- IRRIGATION/FERTIGATION
- CROP PROTECTION
- HARVESTING
- PRODUCE HANDLING (where applicable)
- WASTE AND POLLUTION MANAGEMENT, RECYCLING AND RE-USE
- WORKER HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE
- ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES
- COMPLAINT FORMS

More information, in several languages, can be found on the website maintained by GlobalGAP's Secretariat at www.globalgap.org together with the full text of the Standard itself, the checklists used by

internal and external auditors, and the official compliance criteria for each checklist question.

The General Regulations governing the operation of the GlobalGAP certification system and the authorized audit companies are also obtainable on the website mentioned.

Resources

(1) Information on membership can be found on the GlobalGAP website: <http://www.globalgap.org>

(2) A list of currently licensed certification bodies is also available on the GlobalGAP website: <http://www.globalgap.org>

(3) Information on BMPs for Florida crops can be found on the University of Florida Institute of Food Agricultural Sciences Extension Digital Information Service website (EDIS): <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

(4) See EU Directive 79/117/EEC dated 21 December 1978.

(5) The latest USDA farm checklist, effective April 1st 2007, is available online at: www.ams.usda.gov/fv/fpbgapghp.htm

(6) For details see www.sa-intl.org

(7) For details see www.eti.org

(8) See "The battle between 'good' and 'better': A strategic marketing perspective on codes of conduct for sustainable agriculture." 2006. P. Ingenbleek and T.G. Meulenberg. *Agribusiness* 22(4):451-473.

(9) See GlobalGAP General Regulations.

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