

Food Safety Questions and Answers

Q – What does Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) mean?

A – It is any agricultural management practice or operation that reduces microbial risks or prevents contamination of fruits and vegetables on the farm or in the packinghouse. This does not mean all risks or contamination will be eliminated. The best that can be done now is to reduce the risk.

Q – What is a third party audit?

A – It is an independent person not employed by the farm operation to verify that the food safety program put in place is being followed.

Q – Is the third party audit government regulation?

A – No. Some wholesale buyers of fresh fruits and vegetables are requesting a food safety program and a third party audit of their sellers. The United States Department of Agriculture, working with individual states (NJDA in New Jersey), has put together a third party audit program to help growers comply with this request.

Q – Do I need to use NJDA to do my audit?

A – No. There are private third party audit firms that can carry out the audit for you. In fact, some wholesales may want you to use a private firm. The difference may be in the cost of an audit. NJDA charges \$75.00/hr and an audit takes 4-6 hrs.

Q – How often do I need a third party audit?

A – The audit is good for one year and must be carried out when the farm is in operation. In other words, it cannot be done in the winter.

Q – Is there record keeping involved?

A – Yes. With third party audits, if you did not write it down, it never happened. You can have the cleanest operation in the world, but if you do not record when the floor was cleaned and how often, then, an auditor cannot verify that it was done.

Q – How do I get started?

A – The best way is to attend one of the training sessions that have been held. If you are interested in a training session call Helen at 856-451-2800 to see when the next one is scheduled. If there is no training session scheduled before you need to proceed, get a copy of the third party audit checklist or matrix at the website <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/fpbgapghp.htm> or call Helen at 856-451-2800 or Larry Hardwick at 856-453-3870. Read the audit and see how well you could score. If you have specific questions, call Larry or Wes Kline (856-451-2800) and we will try to provide some assistance.

The next step is to develop your food safety manual which tells the auditors what the farm is doing to implement their food safety program. It tells the auditors what you have been doing; outlines procedures and has examples of all forms used to verify your good agricultural practices.

There is a manual and materials that have been written to help growers develop their manuals. If you are interested in the materials contact Helen at 856-451-2800 for the cost.

Q – Who do I contact to schedule an audit?

A – Call the NJDA office in Bridgeton at 856-453-3870 and ask for Larry Hardwick. Larry does all the scheduling.

Q – I understand there are several parts to the audit. Do I need to take and pass all parts?

A – No. Everyone must pass the General Questions part. After that, the grower determines which parts they want audited. The person the grower sells to may request that other parts be audited, but this is between the grower and buyer. The grower makes the final determination which parts to audit.

Q – What happens to the information from the audit?

A – With the USDA audit, once the audit is completed the audit team reviews it with the grower. If the operation passed, they receive a certificate from USDA to show they passed. In addition, the information will be placed on a USDA website at the grower's request.

Q – What happens if the operation fails all or part of the audit?

A – At the audit review, the auditing team will explain what failed and the need to correct it before a re-audit can take place. If the farm passed some parts and not others, those that passed will be certified. The ones that failed will not be listed on the certificate or the USDA website.

Q – Can parts that failed be re-audited and how long do I need to wait?

A – Yes, the parts that failed can be re-audited as soon as the grower reports to NJDA that the problem has been corrected and requests a new audit. The waiting time depends on how long it takes to make the changes then reschedule with NJDA.