



GroupGAP Program Information

Partners and Purpose

The Northwest Food Hub Network is a collaborative partnership among our region's leading farmer-owned cooperative food hubs:

- Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative (Mount Vernon, WA)
- LINC Foods (Spokane, WA)
- Western Montana Growers Cooperative (Missoula, MT)

Mission West Community Development Partners, the Network's cooperative development services provider, manages a GroupGAP food safety certification program to help farms gain entry into wholesale and institutional markets like K-12 schools, hospitals, and universities.

What is GroupGAP?

Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification is a voluntary USDA audit program that farmers can use to demonstrate produce safety compliance to buyers. GroupGAP reduces financial and technical barriers to certification and provides direct assistance in navigating the audit process. Note that GroupGAP is not a separate standard – it's an alternative *path* to obtaining certification.

How to Get Started

Farms seeking access to reduced-cost auditing and technical assistance may enroll in our GroupGAP program. To get started, reach out to your local GroupGAP Internal Auditor:

- Carolina Reid, Puget Sound Food Hub (marigoldcookingcollective@gmail.com)
- Krysta Froberg, LINC Foods (krysta@happymountainmushrooms.com)
- Sean Mulla, Western Montana Growers Cooperative (sean.mulla@gmail.com)

Our auditor team can audit to both the USDA GAP/GHP and Harmonized GAP Plus+ standards.

Passing an internal audit is sufficient for obtaining certification under your desired standard. If your internal audit reveals any nonconformities, your GroupGAP Internal Auditor will provide you with a corrective action report and arrange a follow-up site visit if needed.

Please note that capacity is limited and services are provided on a first come, first serve basis.

Checking Our Work

GroupGAP enables most farms to get certified without interacting with a state auditor. However, to maintain our status as a USDA-designated GroupGAP program, we're required to accommodate a certain number of follow-up audits by the state to verify the accuracy of our internal reports.

USDA selects a random sample of farms each year for a follow-up visit by an auditor from your state department of agriculture. The number of farms selected is calculated by taking the square root of the total number of GroupGAP members, rounded up to the next highest whole number.

Our GroupGAP program is part of a national network that includes 60+ farms. We anticipate that approximately eight total farms will be selected for a follow-up audit by the state in 2024. If your farm is selected, we'll coordinate with you to schedule the audit which will be provided at no cost.

Annual Membership Fee

After your internal audit is complete, your farm will pay a \$475 annual membership fee to Fresh Systems, our GroupGAP program administrator, to complete your enrollment in the program for the year. This fee covers the costs associated with processing your USDA GAP certificate and facilitating the required follow-up state audits of selected group members as described above.

Questions?

For questions about GroupGAP or getting enrolled in our program, please contact Mission West's Cooperative Development Center Director, Charlie Michel (charlie.michel@missionwestcdp.org).