



AN OVERVIEW OF GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES (GAPs)

* * * * *

In the food supply chain, there can be contamination risks at every step from farm to fork. Preventing microbial contamination is particularly important for fresh produce because there is no heat treatment or “kill step” before it is consumed. When purchasing fresh produce, child nutrition professionals should be aware of key food safety practices that all fruit and vegetable producers should follow. Producers should be aware of key food safety practices that all produce growers should follow.

What are Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)?

Good Agricultural Practices, or **GAPs**, are voluntary science-based guidelines that help to reduce the risk of microbial contamination during growing, harvesting, and packing of fresh fruits and vegetables. The guidelines are based on the **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**’s [Guide to Minimizing Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Produce](#). GAPs help to identify and control potential risks that affect the safety of produce on the farm and in the packinghouse.¹

The main principles of GAPs focus on **water, manure and municipal biosolids, worker health and hygiene, sanitary facilities, field sanitation, packing facility sanitation, transportation, and traceback and recordkeeping**. On a farm, the main sources of contamination are humans, animals, water, and soil. GAPs address how to control these contamination risks. For example, GAPs identify how to:

- Reduce the potential transfer of microbial contaminants from the soil to the crop.
- Ensure water used in various phases of crop production is not a source of contamination.
- Help workers to practice good personal hygiene and ensure that clean facilities are provided for workers and visitors.
- Ensure that there is good sanitation, including surfaces, storage areas, equipment, and transportation vehicles that are properly cleaned and maintained on a regular basis.

There is no Federal requirement for schools to purchase food from farms that have a GAP certification or other third-party food safety certification.

It is recommended that a farm implement GAPs in its food safety plan to ensure the safety of produce grown and harvested during each phase of production. Keep in mind that farms can follow GAPs and have a food safety plan in place without having a formal GAP certification. Schools may purchase food directly from any farm that meets the applicable food safety requirements defined by the school and any existing Federal, State, Tribal, and local regulations. Review the [Verifying On-Farm Food Safety](#) fact sheet for more information on how to address and verify on-farm food safety of food sourced from local producers.²

The **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)** has specific food safety requirements for food supplied through **USDA Foods** and the **USDA Department of Defense (DoD) Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)**. All fresh fruit and vegetables purchased directly by the USDA must come from a vendor that has passed a food safety audit, such as a USDA GAP audit. The **USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)** maintains a database of farms and companies that meet GAP criteria. For more information, or to view the database, visit the [AMS GAP Audits webpage](#).³





You can find more information about GAPs and your produce supply chain partners by visiting the [National Good Agricultural Practices \(GAPs\) Program webpage](#) and contacting your [local and State Cooperative Extension](#) office.^{4,5} Information and resources about farm to school activities can be found on the [USDA Food and Nutrition Service's \(FNS\) Farm to School Program webpage](#).⁶ For information about local foods or school gardens, contact your [USDA FNS Farm to School Regional Specialist](#) or email us at SM.FN.FarmToSchool@usda.gov.⁷ Visit the [USDA Farm to School e-letter webpage](#) and sign up to receive The Dirt, which provides information about a variety of farm to school activities including webinars, relevant news, success stories, resource highlights, and [Farm to School Census](#) facts.⁸ For information about food safety in the Child Nutrition Programs, visit the [USDA FNS Food Safety webpage](#).⁹



References

- (1) *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*
www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/search-fda-guidance-documents/guidance-industry-guide-minimize-microbial-food-safety-hazards-fresh-fruits-and-vegetables
- (2) *USDA FNS Food Safety: Verifying On-Farm Food Safety*
www.fns.usda.gov/ofs/produce-safety-fact-sheets
- (3) *USDA AMS: Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Audits*
www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp
- (4) *National Good Agricultural Practices Program*
cals.cornell.edu/national-good-agricultural-practices-program
- (5) *USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture: College Partners Directory*
nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory
- (6) *USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Farm to School Webpage*
www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/farm-to-school
- (7) *USDA FNS Farm to School Program Staff*
www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/usda-farm-school-staff
- (8) *Farm to School Census*
farmtoschoolcensus.fns.usda.gov/
- (9) *USDA FNS Food Safety: Food Safety at FNS*
www.fns.usda.gov/fs/food-safety

* * * * *

For more information and to sign up for The Dirt, the e-newsletter from the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Program, visit www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/e-letter-archive.

Questions? Email us at SM.FN.FarmToSchool@usda.gov.

