



## Key Performance Indicators

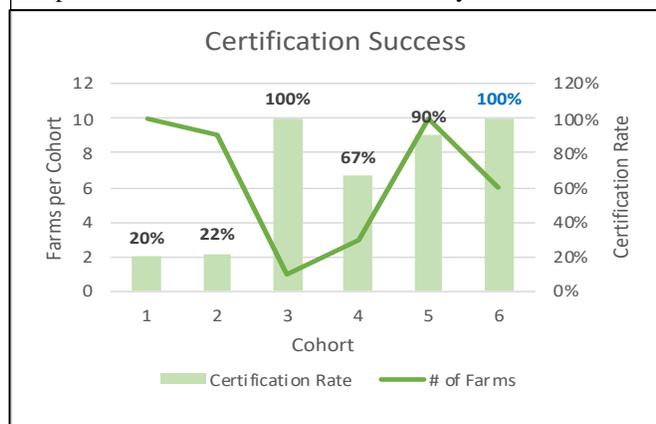
### Hawai'i GroupGAP – July 2022

North Shore EVP received United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) approval for its Hawai'i GroupGAP food safety certification program in June 2018. Hawai'i GroupGAP is the only farm food safety training program in Hawai'i that results in USDA Harmonized GAP certification, the most common standard required by larger commercial and institutional buyers. USDA GroupGAP reduces the cost of food safety certification by spreading the training, technical assistance, and auditing costs between all farms in the group. As the number of farms in the group increases, the cost to each farm is lower as expenses are divided between a larger pool of farms. In March 2022, Hawai'i GroupGAP successfully merged with Fresh Systems LLC, a GroupGAP program managing over 60 producers and food hubs across 8 states. The resulting consortia will continue to lower the costs to producers in Hawai'i GroupGAP. Currently North Shore EVP heavily subsidizes the Hawai'i GroupGAP program through grants and philanthropic support.

The vast majority of the 5,826 farms growing crops in Hawai'i<sup>1</sup> are smaller than 10 acres and because of low volume and inconsistent production, most of these farms sell directly to consumers at farmers' markets, roadside stands or through CSA programs. During the pandemic, Hawai'i lost millions of dollars of direct food aid due to the lack of food safety certification required by suppliers in USDA funded food and nutrition programs. Access to larger, more consistent markets is a significant challenge for small farms, however Hawai'i farmers now have the opportunity to economically attain their USDA Harmonized GAP certification through Hawai'i GroupGAP.

North Shore EVP continues to work to make GAP certification affordable, efficient, and easy to attain. Our pre-screening of candidate farms, adoption of new technology, and hands-on training has dramatically increased the success rate for farms entering the program. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) farm inspections that were suspended in 2019 due to COVID-19 have resumed in 2022 for farms subject to the Food Safety & Modernization Act (FSMA). As a result, there is already increased interest in Hawai'i GroupGAP as farmers work to reposition themselves in the post-COVID 19 marketplace and anticipate increased food safety certification requirements from buyers.

**Figure 1:** Certification success, the number of farms entering Hawai'i GroupGAP and attaining Harmonized GAP certification, has increased in later cohorts due to pre-admission screening of farms and adoption of digital recordkeeping technology. The average success rate since Cohort 3 is 89%. All farms in Cohort 6 are expected to receive their certifications by Fall.



<sup>1</sup> 2017 Census of Agriculture: Hawaii State & Country Data, USDA, April 2019, Volume 1, Geographic Area Series, Part 11, p. 7

## Farm Recruitment & Certification Success

Hawai'i GroupGAP has successfully trained six cohorts of farms on O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Kaua'i islands. Acceptance into the program is based on a rating system that includes basic on-farm infrastructure required to comply with regulations, motivation to adhere to record keeping and food safety practices, and the ability to communicate regularly with North Shore EVP staff. Thirty nine (39) farms have been accepted into the program from the 50 applications received and 17 farms have received USDA GAP Harmonized Certification, a higher-level of the USDA GAP standard that aligns closely with the FDA's FSMA requirements. Success rates for certification (Fig. 1) are rising because of pre-screening applicants and the adoption of digital technology to reduce the administrative burden of record keeping, the single largest point of failure for farms entering the GroupGAP program.

Hawai'i GroupGAP identified HeavyConnect, a smartphone Harmonized GAP data collection app, as a data management catalyst for Hawai'i's fresh produce operations that will provide the needed food safety documentation to buyers and aid in obtaining food safety certification. The app allows farmers to enter food safety data directly into their smartphones instead of using antiquated paper log sheets, checklists, and binders. Three farms in Cohort 4 tested, Heavy Connect and reported a **50% decrease in time spent completing records digitally and a cost savings of almost 80% over the use of paper records!** North Shore EVP has negotiated a **75% discount with HeavyConnect**, making this technology very affordable for small Hawai'i farms. Hawai'i GroupGAP now requires all farms in the program to use this app.

In addition to simplifying the documentation of farm operations, the digital data platform reduces administrative costs, increases staff efficiency, and improves training outcomes. Using electronic records, Hawai'i GroupGAP staff no longer must visit farms to view, collect, and organize paper records because farm records are now accessible online. Staff can now instantly identify gaps in recordkeeping and provide additional training or recommend corrective actions as needed. A recent USDA audit was completed in 90 minutes versus the 4 hours allocated because the digital system simplifies the process of sending documents and records to the auditor, allowing for a comprehensive "desk audit" to be done prior to the on-site farm visit.

## Farm and Farmer Demographics

The diversity of Hawai'i GroupGAP farmers reflects the geographic, financial, and operational differences of farms across the state (Table 1). The vast majority of the Hawai'i GroupGAP farms grow a variety of diversified crops. Since Cohort 3, Hawai'i GroupGAP is engaging neighbor island farms which now make up 21% of the farms in the program. Most of the farms are less than 10 acres and there are now three aqua/hydroponic operations in the program. The average farm size of 15 acres across our cohorts (Table 1) is due to two large farms (100+ acres).

Twenty-one (21) of our GroupGAP participants are considered socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers (SDFR) by the USDA definition<sup>2</sup> that includes Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Asians. These farmers are historically underserved. Across the nation, farms run by SDFR are smaller and less profitable than those run by non-SDFR<sup>3</sup>. Hawai'i GroupGAP serves 26

Table 1:	
Hawai'i GroupGAP Participant Farm Size	
0-5 acres	16
6-10 acres	5
11-15 acres	2
16-20 acres	0
21-25 acres	0
26-50	5
51-100	2
> 100 acres	0
Average Acreage	15.4
Max Acreage	100
Min Acreage	0.5
Aqua/Hydroponic Operations	3

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/socially-disadvantaged-beginning-limited-resource-and-female-farmers-and-ranchers/#:~:text=The%20USDA%20defines%20socially%20disadvantaged,and%20Asian%20or%20Pacific%20Islander.>

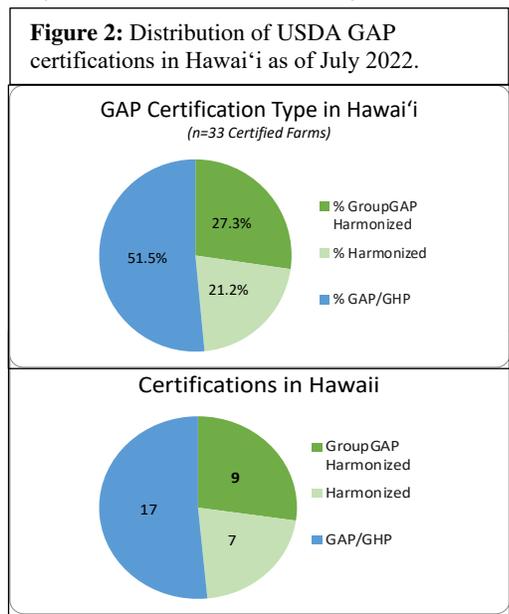
<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (2019) Beginning, Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged, and Female Farmers.

beginning farmers defined by USDA as those who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less either as a sole operator or with others who have operated a farm or ranch for 10 years or less.<sup>4</sup> The program also includes three veteran farmers. North Shore EVP has submitted proposals to USDA to fund engagement of non-English speaking immigrant farmers, some of the state’s most underserved production farmers.

### Statewide Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted every facet of Hawai’i’s economy and illustrated the fragility of our food supply chain. Many farmers were faced with the question whether to shut down or pivot to delivery and direct to consumer sales as their traditional markets, heavily reliant on tourism, shut down. As community feeding programs expanded, local organizations and supplier farms were dismayed to learn that USDA food programs required suppliers to have food safety certification. Nonetheless, demand for locally produced food remains high and new markets created by this Legislature in Acts 175 and 176 (2021) require the Department of Education to purchase 50% of their food from local sources by 2030 and all state

Hawai’i GroupGAP Participant Data	
Island	# of Farms
Hawai’i	3
Kaua’i	6
O’ahu	17
USDA Category	# of Farmers
Beginning Farmer	26
Socially Disadvantaged	21
Veteran	3



agencies by 2050. DOE alone has a \$45M food budget that should incentivize farmers to attain GAP certification and highlights the need for more food safety training and certification across the state.

According to the USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service “Companies That Meet USDA GAP & GHP Acceptance Criteria” website<sup>5</sup> only 33 Hawai’i operations have USDA GAP certification. Only 16 of those farms are certified to the Harmonized GAP standard (Fig. 2), the standard aligned with FSMA and most often required by larger commercial and institutional buyers. Hawai’i GroupGAP’s Cohort 6 farms are currently undergoing audits with one farm already passing, increasing the number of Harmonized GAP farms in the state to seventeen (17) after USDA review. **Hawai’i GroupGAP is now responsible for 10 of the 17 Harmonized GAP certified farms (59%), and 30% of all GAP certified farms in the state!**

### Training and Events

North Shore EVP envisions Hawai’i GroupGAP as a “one stop shop” for local producers' food safety certification needs. The training and technical assistance that producers need have been identified and our staff has received the training and certifications needed to deliver that technical assistance, including USDA Harmonized GAP Auditor Training. To date we have conducted 42 on the ground and virtual workshops across the state, assisting over 725 farmers with understanding of GAP and food

<sup>4</sup> Ahearn, Mary, and Neepton, David (May 20099, Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, USDA Economic Research Service, Economic Information Bulletin No. 53

<sup>5</sup> <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/GAPGHP/reportG05.aspx>

**Table 3:** Summary of North Shore EVP Outreach & Technical Assistance Events

Technical Assistance & Outreach Events		
Year	# of Events	Attendees
2017	1	10
2018	4	32
2019	17	442
2020	11	172
2021	5	43
2022	4	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>726</b>

safety guidelines, on farm water quality needs, Worker Protection Safety (WPS) training, and infrastructure requirements.

To help farmers prepare for food safety certification, we have engaged in ongoing water sampling efforts to help farmers understand their current water quality and the requirements for post-harvest water use. Since 2018 we have provided water sampling and testing for 24 fruit and vegetable farmers on Kaua’i and 34 on O’ahu. These tests help producers build a water quality profile for FSMA water compliance, and further educate farmers about how to best equip their farms to operate safely.

### North Shore EVP Team

**Kevin Kelly, President:** Mr. Kelly founded North Shore EVP in 2015 to lead implementation of a regional food aggregation facility serving all North Shore farmers. To ensure market access for participating farms North Shore EVP started Hawai’i’s only USDA GroupGAP food safety certification program. Previously he served as an advisor to the University of Hawai’i Vice-President of Research and Innovation and has managed large federal research awards for the university for over 15 years. In addition to serving on numerous statewide and community boards he chaired the North Shore Clusters of Opportunity project, an economic analysis focused on integrating existing assets, including people, to generate new jobs and economic opportunities in the North Shore region.

**Lisa Rhoden, Food Safety Director:** Ms. Rhoden is the Food Safety Director for North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership. She is trained in USDA Harmonized GAP and GAP/GHP Auditing, EPA Worker Protection Standards Training, and has attended Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training (FSMA compliance). Ms. Rhoden is a graduate of Ag Leadership Program Hawai’i (Class XIV) and holds a MSc in Environmental Science and Policy from Johns Hopkins University. A long-time farm advocate with experience in Hawai’i in distribution, farm management, and agronomy, she is passionate about expanding markets for locally grown food and on farm food safety. As the manager of the Hawai’i GroupGAP program, she is responsible for the group’s adherence to USDA Harmonized GAP compliance and expanding the program. Ms. Rhoden resides on the west side of Kaua’i with her family.

**Francesca Scola, Food Safety Specialist:** Ms. Scola joined North Shore EVP as an intern in July 2020 and as a full-time specialist in December. She is trained in USDA Harmonized GAP and GAP/GHP Auditing, EPA Worker Protection Standards Training, has attended Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training (FSMA compliance), and is certified to provide training in HeavyConnect (a digital record keeping platform). After completing her final semester of college at University of Hawai’i at Mānoa in May 2020, she received a BA from Oberlin College in environmental studies with concentrations in food systems and sustainable agriculture. Ms. Scola provides hands-on services to O’ahu farms and is leading our transition from paper food safety logs to electronic data gathering. Francesca's love of agriculture began during high school, when she worked summers at Blue Heron Organic Farm in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Ms. Scola resides in Honolulu on O’ahu.