

GroupGAP vs. Independent Certification

What are the main differences between participating in a USDA GroupGAP program vs. working independently to achieve & maintain USDA GAP/GHP or HGAP/+ certification?

USDA GroupGAP

Operations are part of a group working under a shared Quality Management System (QMS).



Independent Certification

Operations work on their own to achieve and maintain certification.

Certification costs are shared among Group members, making it more affordable.

Cost of Certification

Operations bear 100% of the certification cost, including audit fees, technical support, & any consulting

Operations receive ongoing support (e.g., training, technical assistance, documentation reviews, corrective action support) from Group administrators.

Technical Assistance

The operation must handle corrective actions, updates, and training alone or by hiring outside support.

Operations follow the Group's shared QMS, which includes policies, procedures, & record keeping systems.

Documentation Development

Operations develop their own food safety program & documentation systems (e.g., food safety manual, SOPs, records).

Operations apply through a GroupGAP program, which manages the certification process & selects the audit standard(s) supported by their QMS.

Audit Scheduling & Communication

Operations apply directly to USDA or a 3rd party certifier for a GAP/GHP, HarmonizedGAP, or HarmonizedGAP+ audit.

The Group conducts annual internal audits of all member operations to ensure compliance. Follow-up audits may occur to verify corrections.

Ensuring Compliance

Operations are responsible for interpretation of the audit standard & requirements as well as self-monitoring & internal reviews of their food safety system.

The USDA conducts an annual audit of the Group's QMS & audits a sample of the Group's member operations. Follow-up audits may occur to verify corrections.

Annual Audits

Operations undergo a USDA audit annually. Follow-up audits may occur to verify corrections.