GROUPGAP: USDA'S NEW COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO FARMER FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION

February 18, 2016
Presentation Outline

- Technical Orientation

Welcome

Jeff Farbman
Wallace Center at Winrock International

- Why GroupGAP?
- A Snapshot of the Process
- Michigan
- Wisconsin
- Pennsylvania
- Some Funding Resources
- Information Resources and Final Thoughts
- Questions and Answers
- Upcoming Opportunities, etc.
WALLACE CENTER at WINROCK INTERNATIONAL

• Market based solutions to a 21\textsuperscript{st} Century food system
• Work with multiple sectors – business, philanthropy, government
• Healthy, Green, Affordable, Fair Food
• Scaling up Good Food
NATIONAL GOOD FOOD NETWORK: GOALS

Supply Meets Demand
• There is abundant good food (healthy, green, fair and affordable) to meet demands at the regional level.

Information Hub
• The National Good Food Network (NGFN) is the go to place for regional food systems stories, methods and outcomes.

Policy Change
• Policy makers are informed by the Data and Analysis and outcomes of the NGFN and have enacted laws or regulation which further the Network goals.

http://ngfn.org | contact@ngfn.org
NGFN Food Hub Conference 2016

- The ONLY National Food Hub Conference

- March 30 - April 1
  - Pre-conference trainings Mar 29

- Trainings, Tours, Panels, Networking, Curbside Consulting, Workshops, and more!
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  **Steve Warshawer**
  
  *NGFN Food Safety Coordinator*

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A Snapshot of the Process

Donna Burke-Fonda
USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Specialty Crop Inspection Division

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USDA GroupGAP Certification Program

A USDA food safety certification program for producers
GroupGAP Certification Program

- April 3, 2016 – Ready to receive applications from new Groups

  - Updates to program requirements
  - Links to additional resources
GroupGAP Certification Program

➢ Before you apply

✓ Decide if GroupGAP right for you

✓ Form a Group

✓ Choose and implement a food safety audit standard

✓ Create and implement a quality management system

✓ Establish plan for performing internal producer audits
GroupGAP Certification Program

Questions?

GroupGAP@ams.usda.gov

202-720-5021

www.ams.usda.gov/groupgap
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Michigan

Phil Britton
*Cherry Capital Foods*

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GroupGAP in Michigan
Beginnings

- Quality Systems Associate – RTI Surgical
  - Document Control, Labeling, Internal Audits
- Marquette Food Co-op
- UP Ag for Tomorrow Conference
- UP Food Exchange created, brought into pilot

W. Rohner, CC BY-SA 2.0
GroupGAP Pilot 2013-14

- Rural, large geographic area
- Small, diversified farms - 1/3 acre to 5 acres
- 10 growers completed the program
- Good case to stretch the scalability of the program
- Some demand from buyers
Implementation Successes and Challenges

• Foundation laid from prior food safety trainings
• Initial site visits very beneficial
• Opportunity to shadow MDARD auditor
• “What happens if a farm fails an audit?” – we had that happen
• UP Food Exchange chose not to continue administrating a group into 2015
GroupGAP Pilot 2015

- Late 2014 - transition into full-time Food Systems work
Grower Overview

4 acres  Kohlrabi, Fennel, Radishes
20 acres  Various Squash, Cucumbers
5,000 ft²  Hydroponic Leafy Greens
8 acres  Various Fruits and Vegetables (aka Everything)
25 acres  Fresno Peppers, Tomatillos
131 acres  Fall Root Crops
5 acres  Saskatoon Berries
GroupGAP Pilot 2015

- QMS documentation – wiki
- All documents electronic
GroupGAP Pilot 2015

External Costs (distributed to farms)
• MDARD Audits - $1,760
• USDA QMS Audit - $1,472
• Cost per Farm - $538

Internal Costs
• Staff audit time – 72 hours (42 audit/30 paperwork)
• Staff time – 4 Auditors
  • GroupGAP Coordinator, Produce Buyer, Institutional Partnership Manager, Finance Manager
• Staff time – 1 FTE position to develop and manage the program
  • Accounted for ~ 25 hours of staff audit time
• Distance Traveled – 3,884 miles
  • Technically more, but some audits were combined with other trips

Farmer/Auditor training costs were waived for 2015
Implementation Successes and Challenges

• Michigan is big.

• Prior experience extremely helpful, but still a learning curve for everyone.

• Great working relationship with our state-level colleagues.

• Currently developing partnerships with other groups around MI to create a statewide group.
Thanks eh
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**Wisconsin**

**Allison Walent**
*Organic Valley / CROPP*

- Pennsylvania
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Organic Valley

Agenda
- Overview of the Cooperative
- Produce Growers
- Why GroupGAP
- Implementation of the Program
- How did we pay for it?
- Successes/Challenges

As of 2015 Growing Season
Organic Valley

- Farmer-owned Cooperative representing approximately 1800 farmers from Maine to California.
- Founded in 1988 by a group of seven farmers in Southwest Wisconsin
- Originally started as a produce cooperative
- Today: produce, dairy, eggs, meat and soy
- Currently we have over $1 Billion Dollar in sales
Organic Valley Produce Farmers

- 162 Total Produce Members
- Produce Members in Development

As of 2015 Growing Season
80% of the farmer-members in Organic Valley's Produce Pool are Amish. We’re grateful for such good neighbors and always happy to see their buggies parked at headquarters for membership meeting.
Organic Valley
Certified Organic Produce

- Asparagus*
- Beets*
- Brussels sprouts
- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Collard greens*
- Fennel
- Green beans
- Kale
- Onions
- Peppers
- Potatoes*
- Rutabagas
- Summer Squash*
- Swiss chard
- Turnips
- Winter Squash*
• What indicators made us decide we were ready to pursue Group GAP?
• What made Group GAP a good fit for our group?
• What experience did our producers previously have with food safety and other third party audits?
• How was the program received and how did the implementation of the program go?
• How did we fund the implementation?
• Challenges and Successes
• Conclusion
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Pennsylvania

Lindsay Gilmour
*Organic Planet LLC*

Jeff Stoltzfus
*Extension Educator*

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Fair Food Philly
Value Chain Coordinator providing technical assistance to farmers recognized Food Safety as significant barrier
Was asked to pilot USDA Group GAP with growers in PA.
Contracted with consultants:

Jeff Stoltzfus
Long time agricultural educator and consultant in SE PA
Professional relationships with both coops and had worked with them on food safety before the GGP pilot began.

Lindsay Gilmour
Previously worked on value chain coordination for Fair Food – existing relationships with some of the farmers in the pilot
Experience working on basic food safety with small scale farmers while working for Common Market
Self-proclaimed accidental experts on Group GAP
LANCASTER VEGETABLE FARMERS CAA

- Farmer owned coop
- 90-100 farmers (numbers fluctuate from year to year), Amish and Mennonite, located in South East and Central Pennsylvania, each member growing 1-10 acres of crops for the coop
- Managed by a board made up of members who are also growers
- Coop’s primary crop is PA Simply Sweet Onions plus some butternut squash and cauliflower
- Coop operates a packing facility where they aggregate, dry, pack and store crops – the packing house is run by paid staff
- Coop works with a broker to sell to large wholesale buyers – supermarket chains, processors, distributors
SUNNY HARVEST LLC

• All farms are members and the LLC operates like a coop
• 15-20 Amish farmers located in Lancaster Co. Pa
• Supplying diversified crops to wholesale buyers in SE PA and NJ – grocery cooperatives, large retail, distributors, food hubs, buying clubs, and home delivery services
• Managed by a board made up of 4 members who are also growers
• Farmers harvest and pack and then deliver same day to 3 aggregation points on 3 of the farms. Aggregation points also have refrigeration for storing product and one of them has a hydro cooler used for corn and cole crops.
• A third party trucking company delivers product to SH customers 5 days/week
Why Group GAP for These Coops?

Coops and their management structure already established

Jeff and Lindsay had existing professional relationships with group management

Differences in coop size and business model would provide a good contrast

Coops interested in a way to certify as a group that might save time and money,

Liked the idea of having more insight into the food safety practices on member farms,

And attracted to the opportunity for free support and education in food safety
Structure

The mission for each group is simply to aggregate and sell produce for their members.

They are self organized and run by board members who are also growers.

There are no paid admin staff so capacity is limited.
Food Safety History

Both groups previously audited and certified by Equicert – a few farmers had had several annual audits

Most of the farmers had basic food safety training, and some form of food safety plan

Both trained using the Harmonized Food Safety Standards

Range of food safety plan implementation on farms varied from thorough to very casual – typically younger farmers adopted it more easily

Still quite a lot of confusion and misinformation when we began and hopefully less when we finished!
**DIFFERENCES**

**Lancaster Vegetable Farmers**

Size – 100 vs 16 members

Simple farming operations

- 80% of members grow only onions to sell through the coop
- 20% grow squash or cauliflower
- All crops low risk
- No washing and almost no packing on farm (except small amount of cauliflower – field packed into bins)
- Some onion drying but no cold storage on farms

Since all post harvest activities take place at the packing shed they only need to align with Harmonized Field Ops and Harvesting Standard

Possible to cluster farms for audits which saves time and $$

No members growing full time for the coop

**Sunny Harvest**

Size – 16 vs 100 members

More complex farming operations

- Members grow wide variety of vegetables and small fruits to sell through the coop
- Includes high risk crops such as leafy greens and tomatoes
- Some washing, some hydro cooling, and all packing is on farm
- Most farms have cold storage

All farms must align with Harmonized Field Ops and Harvesting Standard and Post-Harvest Standard so...

- Food safety plan and record keeping is more complex
- More training required for each farmer
- Audits are more time consuming

Coop sales are main source of income for most members
IMPLEMENTATION

1st Year
Met with each group to float the Group GAP concept
Group GAP system training for Jeff and Lindsay
QMS’ training for Lindsay
Wrote food safety plans for both groups
Developed first drafts of QMS for each group
Many many meetings with board members to explain, review and approve QMS
Conducted group FS trainings
One on one coaching for all farmers - guided self-audits and issued corrective action reports
Monitored Equicert external audits
QMS internal auditor training for Lindsay

2nd Year
Received further training in harmonized standard
Revised and streamlined FS plans and QMS’
Revised and streamlined logs
Further review and training of board members on QMS
Full implementation of QMS
Group FS trainings with all farmers including revised plans and logs
Developed cluster system for LVF
Conducted internal audit of QMS’
Conducted internal audits of all farms and clusters
Monitored external audits of QMS’ and farms and assisted with follow up
Conducted unannounced audits
Participated in management review meetings
Both coops are now Group GAP certified

One SH farm failed an external audit but the Group GAP internal auditing system allowed us to rectify that without needing a second farm audit.

Trainings, coaching, and internal audits led to much greater familiarity with and implementation of food safety best practices on farms.

We learned a lot from the 1st year so were able to streamline both farm food safety plans and QMS’ dramatically in the 2nd year – less paperwork!

The successful USDA Group GAP audit for LVF meant they will retain relationships with key customers.

We were able to audit the LVF farms in clusters which made the GGP system feasible for that group.

Being able to provide FS training for new farmers accelerated their ability to become full members.

Coaching coaching coaching!!!
CHALLENGES

Developing, understanding and maintaining the QMS is challenging (at least in the first year or two) and time consuming

Level of scrutiny from all the coaching and internal auditing, while beneficial, is costly, time intensive, and can lead to “visit fatigue”

SH really can’t manage the QMS without external support – especially since they don’t use computers – and can’t afford the support

Not enough capacity to coach and internally audit farms in second year – this made it very difficult to separate being a coach and an internal auditor

We believe internal auditing should be another opportunity for coaching
COST

LVF – cost per farmer
Year one - $318
Year two - $250
Year three - $273 (includes food safety coaching and internal auditor)

Sunny Harvest – cost per farmer
Year one - $1045
Year two - $1099
Year three - $915
External audits for individual farms cost $700-$825 in 2015

Final Outcomes
Lancaster Vegetable Farmers will continue with Group GAP
• They need a USDA audit
• It makes sense financially with farm clustering.
• Food Safety Coordinator is tech savvy and feels confident he can manage the administrative load
• Equicert will be provide internal auditors

Sunny Harvest will go back to Equicert audits – USDA Group GAP is too complicated and expensive and they don’t have any customers requiring USDA audits
FUNDING

Year One
The Reinvestment Fund
Local CDFI providing for technical assistance for farmers in Philadelphia Region to enable them to grow their business

Year Two
The Wallace Center
Specifically for Group GAP

Definitely factor in funding for training of farmers, coaches and internal auditors

• Inquire first with cooperative extension
• Specialty Crop Block Grants now very interested in funding food safety education
• Buyers may be interested in subsidizing training and/or external audits – even if it’s just “in kind”
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Some Funding Resources

Garland Robertson
USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Transportation and Marketing

- Information Resources and Final Thoughts
- Questions and Answers
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Grant Programs

- Farmers Market Promotion Program - FMPP
- Local Food Promotion Program - LFPP
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - SCBGP

Eligible entities include:

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<th>Agricultural Businesses</th>
<th>Economic Development Corporations</th>
<th>Producer Associations</th>
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Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program

Purpose

• To increase domestic consumption of and access to locally and regionally produced agricultural products,

and

• to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets
Farmers Market vs.
Local Food Promotion Program

Grant awards support local and regional food systems with up to $100,000 over 1 to 2 years

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<td>DIRECT to consumer</td>
<td>Intermediary / distributor-based (identity preserved)</td>
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<td>Requires 25% match</td>
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Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)

Example:

$100,000 to Delaware State University Agriculture Business Training and Development Initiative to enhance the quality of life, wealth creation, and self-employment opportunities for farmers by providing farm management education and training to community-supported programs in rural Delaware; creating avenues to increase revenue and maximize production through, experiential training on crop rotation and by creating value-added production opportunities; providing national certification training in food safety and handling; providing advertising and/or outreach to assist in marketing farms; and offering training and technical assistance to farmers and farm market managers in developing comprehensive business plans.
Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)

Example:

$95,130 was awarded to the City of Elgin, TX to provide technical assistance to support value-added processing of local fruits and vegetables. The work will support farmers, entrepreneurs, and wholesale and institutional buyers in developing and managing new markets.
Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)

Example:

$99,980 was awarded to HumanLinks DBA 21 Acres of Washington State to address gaps in food storage/safety in regards to basic food processing capabilities; obtain GAP and GHP certification at all partner farm locations; expand distribution of fresh food; and educate and train students, farmers and customers to improve consumption and access to regionally-produced agricultural products.
Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

- Enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops (fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, cut flowers, and other horticulture product)

- Awarded to State departments of agriculture … who then partner with specialty crop stakeholders

- Projects can focus on a wide variety of specialty crop initiatives including food safety, education, marketing, and research

- Award amounts vary by state
Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

Example:

$55,000 was awarded to the North Carolina Department of Agriculture to partner with Carolina Farm Stewardship Association to

- Perform on-farm workshops and one on one consulting on “Tips and Strategies to Reduce Risk and Pass an Audit to specialty crop growers”.
- Develop training videos based on the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) manual.
- Provide cost share assistance to specialty crop growers who participated in the project trainings and passed a USDA GAPs audit.

Twenty three one-on-one program participants obtained USDA GAPs certifications, one on-one trainings included mock audits and/or site visits to identify areas of potential produce contamination and ways to mitigate risk. Twenty one of the one-on-one program participants received cost share assistance, as well as, eight training videos were developed based on the manual Good Agricultural Practices for Small Diversified Farms: Tips and Strategies to Reduce Risk and Pass an Audit.
For Further Information

Grants and Opportunities Web Site:
http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants

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Jeff Farbman
*Wallace Center at Winrock International*

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Final Thoughts

Steve Warshawer
NGFN Food Safety Coordinator

- Questions and Answers
- Upcoming Opportunities, etc.
More Than “Cheaper”

- Expert and peer coaching increases compliance
- Less like “farmer vs. auditor”
- A *system* instead of a *snapshot in time*
- A “Culture of Food Safety” ... and a culture of QUALITY
  - Harvard study compared orgs with and without QMS
  - With QMS: more employees, better paid, **increased profit**
  - “the benefits achieved with implementation of ISO 9001 were statistically **higher in smaller organizations** than in larger organizations”
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Questions and Answers
Webinars are Archived

TOPICS!

http://ngfn.org/webinars
NGFN Webinars

3rd Thursday of each month
3:30p EST (12:30p PST)

http://ngfn.org/webinars

- March – NATIONAL FOOD HUB CONFERENCE
NGFN Food Hub Conference 2016

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