

Rhode Island GAP Grower Certification Program

What does GAP mean?

GAP means **Good Agricultural Practices**. These practices are part of a *voluntary* food safety program developed by FDA and USDA for fruit and vegetable growers. The goal is to help reduce foodborne illness. The GAP program includes key steps that growers can use to reduce or minimize contamination of produce by disease-causing microorganisms. Food safety is everyone's responsibility from the grower to consumers.

What is the RI GAP program?

The voluntary Rhode Island GAP Grower Certification Program is a joint effort of the Division of Agriculture, RI Department of Environmental Management, the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Food Safety Education Program, and RI growers.

The program begins with training for growers and their workers on the application of GAP food safety principles to the growing, harvesting, processing and transporting of fresh fruits and vegetables. Once a grower feels they have met the RI GAP guidelines, a staff person from the RI Division of Agriculture visits the farm. This visit, which includes an audit, confirms that the grower has successfully applied the required GAP practices during growing, harvesting, processing and transporting of fresh fruits and vegetables.

After a successful audit, the grower will be certified as a RI GAP grower. The farm must

be audited every year to maintain their GAP Certification.

What does this mean to a consumer?

The GAP certified grower has reviewed their on-farm food safety practices during growing, harvesting, processing and transporting of fresh produce in relation to:

- Application of manure
- Irrigation water
- Worker hygiene practices
- Sanitation practices

The GAP certified grower has taken the key steps necessary to help control contamination of produce by harmful microorganisms.

These growers are doing the best job they can to include preventive steps that help produce safe fruits and vegetables. However, food safety is still everyone's responsibility. There is no way to guarantee that produce is always free from contamination.

What can I do at home to reduce the risk of harmful microbial contamination of fresh produce?

- ✓ Choose produce that is not bruised or damaged.
- ✓ Refrigerate or chill (40°F or less) perishable produce (e.g. strawberries, lettuce, herbs) immediately after harvest or purchase.
- ✓ Wash hands with warm water and soap before and after handling fresh produce – at home or at pick your own operations.
- ✓ Wash fresh fruits and vegetables under cool running tap water before eating. This includes produce grown conventionally or organically. NEVER use soap or detergents. Air dry or dry with a clean paper towel.
- ✓ Scrub firm produce such as melons and cucumbers with a clean bristle brush under cool running tap water.
- ✓ Cut away any bruised or damaged areas with a clean knife.
- ✓ Don't cross contaminate. Always wash and sanitize cutting boards, counters, utensils and dishes that come in contact with raw meat, fish or poultry before using to prepare fresh produce.

Source: FDA, January 2012

**How can I get more
information about the RI GAP
Grower Certification
Program?**

Division of Agriculture
RI Department of Environmental
Management
401-222-2781
peter.susi@dem.ri.us

URI Cooperative Extension
Food Safety Education Program
Nutrition and Food Sciences
401-874-2972
urifoodsafety@etal.uri.edu

For RI GAP and other food safety
information visit: [http://web.uri.edu/
foodsafety](http://web.uri.edu/foodsafety)

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*University of Rhode Island, US Department of
Agriculture and local governments cooperating,
provides equal opportunities without regard to
race, color, national origin, sex or preference,
creed and disability.*



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CERTIFICATION PROGRAM**

**RI DEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
AND
UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION
PROGRAM**