

FOOD SAFETY

2023 CanadaGAP highlights

HEATHER GALE

Expanded scope for the CanadaGAP Greenhouse program

- In 2023 CanadaGAP released the updated Greenhouse Food Safety Manual (Version 10.0) which covers a significantly expanded scope of crops
- Available as a free download at www.canadagap.ca
- Cooperated with Fruit and Vegetable Growers of Canada to obtain federal funding for this project

Additional tools made available on CanadaGAP website

- Many new FAQs published at www.canadagap.ca
- Updated and new brochures and PowerPoint presentations (topics include unannounced audits, new certification options, main changes to manuals)

More course offerings and greater promotion of Understanding the CanadaGAP Program introductory course

Flooding, wildfires, hail and other adverse weather events becoming more frequent and may introduce new food safety hazards

- CanadaGAP created additional guidance and procedures to deal with flooding, deferral of audits due to wildfires, remote auditing, and extension of certification due to extenuating circumstances

Full digitization of CanadaGAP

Manuals within Provision Analytics software

- An affiliate of the program, Provision Analytics, a third-party software provider, invested in fully digitizing the CanadaGAP Food Safety Manuals
- CanadaGAP worked closely with software developers to ensure integrity of content

Pandemic Fallout: Instability in Certification Body and Auditor Pool

- Auditor recruitment and retention efforts greatly intensified as a result of the effects of the pandemic
 - Increased difficulty of travel
 - Safety concerns especially for older auditors
 - Remote auditing a frustrating experience for auditors and auditees
 - Auditors who were on the cusp of burnout or who were considering retirement were pushed into leaving the profession during the pandemic
- Exacerbated an already existing auditor shortage
- One third of the CanadaGAP auditor pool has turned over since 2021
- CanadaGAP and certification bodies have experienced double the usual number of auditor retirements and new recruits during this period
- Extra time to vet and qualify potential candidates
- Double the number of auditor training courses have been offered

Enhanced efforts have been made to recognize auditors and facilitate auditor career path

- CanadaGAP working closely with certification bodies to identify potential sources of new auditor candidates
- CanadaGAP Award for Auditor Recognition was introduced in memory of Sheri Nielson to recognize auditors who have shown extraordinary heart, dedication and commitment to their role
- The first awards were presented in December 2022 to Isabel Varey and Natalia St-Amand
- Delivery of CanadaGAP Auditor Training program has gone fully virtual and offers increased flexibility in dates
- A new group of auditor trainers was qualified
- CanadaGAP introduced in-house exam proctoring on Zoom

Certification Body Changes

- Unprecedented turnover in certification bodies since the beginning of the pandemic
- Perry Johnson Registrars Food Safety, Inc. joined the program as a service provider in 2020 and decided to stop providing CanadaGAP audits in 2023
- Some certification bodies have seen significant staff turnover during the pandemic
- The largest certification body for CanadaGAP, NSF Canada Ag, has experienced significant service challenges in the last year



Greenhouse peppers. Photo by Marcella DiLonardo



Field cantaloupe. Photo by Michael Abril.

- Staff turnover has put a strain on CanadaGAP administrative and technical expertise within the certification body
- Three certification bodies joined CanadaGAP and became active service providers in 2023:
 - Control Union
 - dicentra
 - TSLC
- Additional audit companies have approached CanadaGAP and are under consideration for licensing

Benchmarking-related activities

- CanadaGAP underwent benchmarking to the SAI Platform Farm Sustainability Assessment (FSA) in cooperation with McCain Foods
- CanadaGAP participated in produce working group to review upcoming changes to GFSI benchmarking requirements (GFSI is working on its 2024 updates)
- CanadaGAP continues to receive complaints from program users about unannounced audits
 - Complaints have been collated for presentation to GFSI
 - CanadaGAP conducted surveys of program participants, auditors and CBs to collect additional data regarding

unannounced audits

Internally, two new databases are under development:

- CanadaGAP Operations and Auditor management databases to be deployed in 2024

What’s ahead for 2024?

- Maintenance of Canadian Government Recognition: 5-year review begins in the last quarter of 2023
- Re-benchmarking next version of GFSI Requirements in 2024-2025
- Correction Notice will be issued for manuals (Version 10.0) in 2024 but no new version will be released
- CanadaGAP will publish updated Audit Checklist for 2024

For more information, visit the CanadaGAP website at: www.canadagap.ca

If you have any questions, write info@canadagap.ca or call 613-829-4711.

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