

Head: **Audit Fatigue**

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Markets are requesting agriculture suppliers to provide more tangible, transparent, and effective food and production base safeguards and protocols to ensure product quality and safety. In fact, nowadays, many of the larger grocery chains and produce markets won't or are reluctant to accept product from suppliers without some form of a food safety program and proof of certification from either an independent third-party verifier or certification body.

Most food-safety certification bodies and third party verifiers provide a range of services, documents, and advice. When developing a food-safety protocol and completing a certification process or audit, it's important for producers to:

- know the certification or audit requirements for a food-safety program;
- fully meet and document or demonstrate that those requirements are regularly met within the supplier's food safety program;
- know whether the certification satisfies the market's requirements;
- understand how often an audit of the food safety program is required by their markets; and
- know if their market requires their food safety program to achieve a certain score or level from the audit.

Neglecting these steps can be costly and a waste of resources.

Most certifications or audits and market requirements cover Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), sanitation, hygiene, food security, pest management, and environmental topics. However, agriculture suppliers may find that different markets require these topics and more. To insure all necessary requirements are met, it is advisable to have documentation from the customers outlining specific requirements.

Perhaps, one of the greatest challenges for agricultural suppliers is meeting different buyers' food safety requirements with a single food safety program and managing the various audits requested by customers.

Without a standardized audit or certification process, suppliers may suffer "Audit Fatigue," from having to devote effort and resources to multiple audits to satisfy the food safety requirements of multiple buyers. Perhaps exacerbating the fatigue is the duplication that can occur from different audits requiring information in different formats. Further, most audits are active documents that will change based on new technologies, and customer demands.

There is hope. The food safety industries are beginning to address the burden of audit fatigue and duplication. In November of 2007, GlobalGAP and the Safe Quality Food Institute, two of the larger certification bodies, agreed to harmonize aspects of their audit certification programs. When complete, entities seeking SQF certification would also satisfy GlobalGAP audit standards and vice versa.

However, there are several food safety certification organizations and more cooperation is needed. Below are the key elements of the certification programs of the most widely used organizations:

Safe Quality Food Institute (SQF), <http://www.sqfi.com/>;

SQF was acquired and supervised by the Food Marketing Institute, www.fmi.com. SQF Institute offers two food safety audit certification programs, (SQF 1000 and SQF 2000).

SQF 1000 is tailored to growers and/or producers. Components of the 1000 audit require the supplier to have site-specific protocols or plans developed for Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), food safety and food quality concerns.

SQF 2000 focuses on food manufacturers and/or distributors. Included in the 2000 audit are Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), food safety and food quality plans specific to the manufacture' and/or distributor's facility.

SQF certification program also includes other audit components including worker welfare, environment, animal care, and food security.

GlobalGAP (previously known as EurepGAP), www.globalgap.org;

EurepGAP was established in 1997 in response to customer concerns about product safety and to replace the cumbersome auditing system that required producers and retailers to complete multiple audits for different markets. GlobalGAP established a standardized GAP system addressing management systems, environmental impacts, chemical applications, worker health and safety, and animal welfare to satisfy market and customer demands.

GlobalGAP certification audit or standards integrates all agricultural products into a single farm audit. To achieve certification, agricultural suppliers should follow the instructions found at its Web site.

GlobalGAP also has a unique complimentary component or scheme called “benchmarking.” If a nation or region has existing GAP or other agriculture systems that comply with GlobalGAP’s benchmarking process, the national or regional system can be recognized as an equivalent to GlobalGAP.

Primus Labs, <http://www.primuslabs.com/>;

Based in California, Primus Labs provides a range of services including pesticide residue testing for microbiological organisms, third party auditing, and development of documents and data management systems, and bilingual educational materials.

Primus Labs’ audit and third-party verification services include the following types of organization and production processes: ranch, harvest crews, packing houses, processing facilities, greenhouses, and cooling/cold storage.

Also, Primus Labs provides on-line food-safety based document/manual development tools. By using these tools, organizations can develop site-specific Good Agriculture Practices (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), monitoring logs, flow charts, standard operating procedures, employee education outlines, and hazard plans.

In researching this article, we used information from each organization’s Web site and are not responsible for information that has changed since publication of this article or

inaccuracy of information obtained from internet website sources. If readers are interested in further and more complete information please contact organizations directly.