



# Meeting Producer Food Safety Needs

through the

# Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

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# Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association

- **Producer initiated and directed organization that began in 1996**
- **Goals:**
  - Serve as the **VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY**
    - Government Relations and Communications
  - Provide **EDUCATION**
  - Offer **MEMBERSHIP SERVICES** to reduce production costs & expand markets



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## **Membership Services**

- **Transportation Program**
- **3<sup>rd</sup> Party Pesticide License**
- **Marketing Program**
- **Donnie H Morris Excellence in Extension**
- **Food Safety Program**
- **Many more...**



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## National Involvement

- **Legislative Involvement**
- **Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance**
- **United Fresh Produce Association**
  - Board of Directors
  - Government Relations Committee
  - Food Safety and Technology Committee



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## National Involvement

- **GAP Harmonization Initiative**
  - Steering Committee & Technical Working Group
- **Food Safety Program and Auditing Protocol for the Fresh Tomato Supply Chain (Tomato Audit Harmonization)**



# Our History



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# Set the Stage...

- **1998 FDA Industry Guidance:**  
“Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable”
- **Food safety industry grew rapidly with little initial education**
  - **It was very expensive and a little “shady”**



# The Beginning...

- **Producers approached the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers (GFVGA) for help with education and prep for audits**
- **After some research and interest, collaboration began.**



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# The Beginning...

- **Georgia GAP Food Safety Committee:**
  - GA Crop Improvement Association
    - auditing firm
  - GFVGA
    - Administration/Consultation/Education
  - GA Dept of Agriculture
    - Regulate and Pesticide Auditing
  - UGA - Food Science & Horticulture
    - Education & Best Practices



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# The Beginning...

- **USDA Block Grant Funds**
  - Seed money for materials, personnel, trainings, etc.
- **UGA Extension**
  - Agents & researchers created train the trainer materials
  - Traveled the state educating agents and producers



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# TOOL DEVELOPMENT

- **Food Safety Manual**
- **Consultation**
- **Education**
- **Training Tools**



# Documentation Development

- **GA GAP Committee created:**
  - SOPs
  - SSOPs
  - Documentation Examples
  - Standards
  - Audits for field, harvest crew & packing facilities



# Program Growth

- **Primus Labs became highly sought after and we were able meet that audit need**
  - Auditors are GA GAP and Primus Labs certified
- **As the need grew, the program grew.**
  - Several part-time coordinators to a full time coordinator and part time field consultant
  - Increased certified auditors from 2 to 5



# Consultation

- **Consult at the farm or packing facility:**
  - **Mock Audit of the field, harvest crew, physical building & equipment**
    - Goal: Find more than the auditor would ever find
  - **Thoroughly cover SOPs and paperwork**
    - Biggest question: “How should I organize the SOPs and documentation?”



# Consultation

- A physical consultation is **INVALUABLE**
- Speak in laymen's terms but educate on **WHY "it" must be done**
  - WHY do I have to keep boxes stored off the floor?
  - WHY do I have to clean the packing line everyday?
  - Analogy: Give them a fish v. teach them to fish



# Handout & Tools

- **GA GAP Food Safety Manual**
  - SOPs, SSOPs, Record Keeping in Checklists and Documentation
- **Training Materials**
  - DVD's, tabletop, etc.
- **GA GAP Website**



# Handout & Tools

- **Pre-Audit Checklists**
  - Field and Packing Facility
- **Workshops**
  - August 2010 – Be Recall Ready
- **Research Funded by Georgia Vegetable Commission**



# Education

- **Producer meetings to educate and debunk food safety myths**
  - UGA Extension Production meeting
  - Grower/Broker group meeting
  - SE Regional Conference
  - National meetings
  - Regional Food Safety meetings



# Diversification

- **Consultation services are not limited to GA GAP or Primus Labs**
  - Several producer organizations contract with GA GAP annually to prepare/consult with their grower members and/or conduct 2<sup>nd</sup> party audits
- **Global GAP, UC Davis**



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# Harvest is Plentiful but the Workers are Few...

- **GA GAP Program is unique**
- **Many state DOAs and state associations have seen/heard the need and are seeking to meet it:**
  - North Carolina      - South Carolina
  - Tennessee                      - Iowa
  - Alabama
  - National Watermelon Association...



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# Future

- **Hire a more part time field consultants**
- **Increase consultations, educational opportunities and resources for producers and shippers**
  - <http://gfvga.org/GAGAP>
    - Online food safety document tool
  - Collaboration with other organizations



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