



Global group says US food safety audit program is OK; fresh produce exports should increase

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Fresh produce growers in the U.S. will have an easier time exporting fruits and vegetables now that an international group has given its stamp of approval to a federal food safety audit program.

The nod from the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) announced Monday grants technical equivalency to the USDA's Harmonized Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Plus+ program for "specialty crops," which include fruits and vegetables. The U.S. Department of Agriculture sought the approval from the international industry group at the request of growers in this country.

“Technical equivalence means producers utilizing this one-stop USDA audit also meet other U.S. and international regulatory and market requirements,” said Greg Ibach, USDA’s Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs.

With the GFSI equivalency status, U.S. produce growers will see increased market acceptance at the international level, providing new export opportunities, according to a statement from United Fresh, a national trade association representing growers and other businesses in the fresh produce supply chain.

Officials at USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service have a similar view.

“The new GFSI certification also assists industry selling in international markets, including distributors in the European Union and Japan where GFSI certification is often required,” according to a USDA news release.

In addition to meeting the technical requirements of GFSI, the USDA program also fulfills requirements of the produce rule that is part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The Food and Drug Administration has jurisdiction for enforcement of the FSMA produce rule.

The approval of the international group is also expected to reduce record keeping and costs of produce businesses.

Food industry leaders created the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) in 2000 to pool companies’ efforts to find solutions for collective concerns including food safety risks and audit costs and to build trust between businesses in the food supply chain.

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