

Michigan Farm to Institution Network—20% by 2020

How do institutional food service professionals know that produce from their suppliers is safe?

Running an institution's food service program is a complex task that requires knowledge of food preparation, budgets, contract negotiation, inventory management, staffing, and in many cases, federal nutrition standards and reimbursement programs. On top of that, there are kitchen licensing requirements, food safety certifications for staff ([ServSafe](#)), and general day-to-day food safety practices of the operation.

Institutional food service buyers rely on their suppliers to provide safe food. How do they know that their suppliers have followed safe food production and handling practices?

The answer to this question varies from institution to institution. Some institutional food service programs require suppliers to conform to a specific food safety certification program, while others will accept a variety of assurances.

The most commonly accepted farm food safety programs are a farm food safety plan or manual and USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standards as USDA GAP/GHP, USDA GroupGAP and USDA Harmonized GAP.

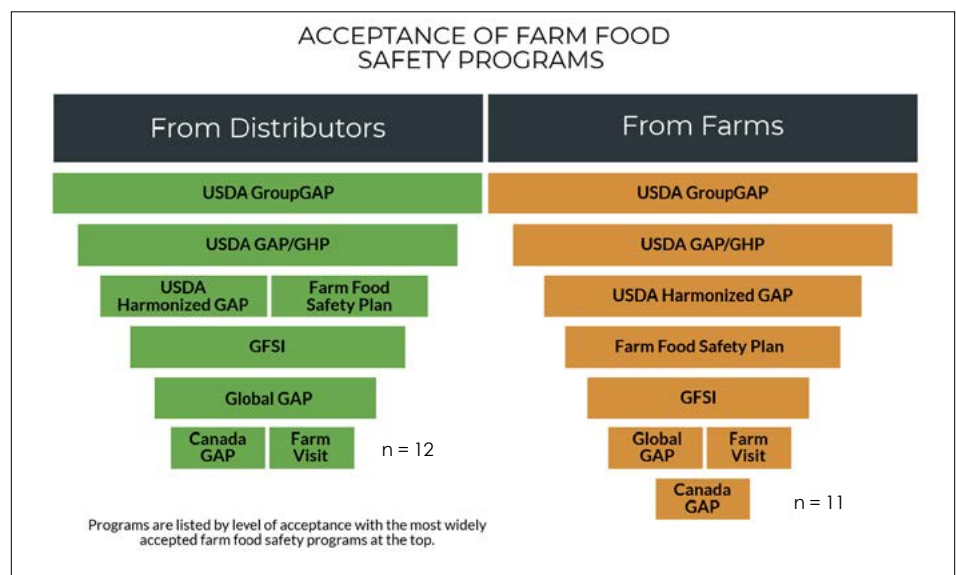
METHODS

Recently, on-farm food safety documentation and communication has evolved with the implementation of the [Food Safety Modernization Act](#) and new ways for farms to demonstrate their safe food practices such as [GroupGAP](#) and the [Michigan Produce Safety Risk Assessment](#).

[Michigan State University \(MSU\) Extension](#) educators, in partnership with the [Michigan Farm to Institution Network \(MFIN\)](#) [Cultivate Michigan](#) campaign, polled institutional food service buyers to gauge current knowledge of farm food safety programs and identify opportunities for further education and training.

Coordinated by the [MSU Center for Regional Food Systems](#) (CRFS) with support from MSU Extension, MFIN is a space for learning, sharing, and working together to help farm to institution programs grow. Cultivate Michigan is its local food purchasing and tracking campaign.

A short anonymous survey was distributed via email in January and February 2018 to the MFIN, and 38 responses were collected. Just over half (58%) of respondents indicated that their institution requires some sort of food safety verification or certification from their fresh produce suppliers, which can include distributors and/or individual farms.



COMMONLY ACCEPTED FARM FOOD SAFETY PROGRAMS

As shown in the graphic on page 1, the most commonly accepted farm food safety programs among the reporting institutions were farm food safety plans/manuals and USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) standards in the forms of USDA GAP/GHP, USDA GroupGAP (which uses the same standard as USDA GAP), and USDA Harmonized GAP.

At the time of the survey's development, acceptance and awareness of the Michigan Produce

Safety Risk Assessment, launched in the spring of 2018, was unable to be measured.

All of the programs listed in the graphic above, with the exception of the farm food safety plan and farm visit, involve third-party certification of the farm's activities. Among the responding institutions, 22% require their suppliers to work with a certain certification provider, while 78% allow for use of any third-party certifier.

FAMILIARITY WITH FARM FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

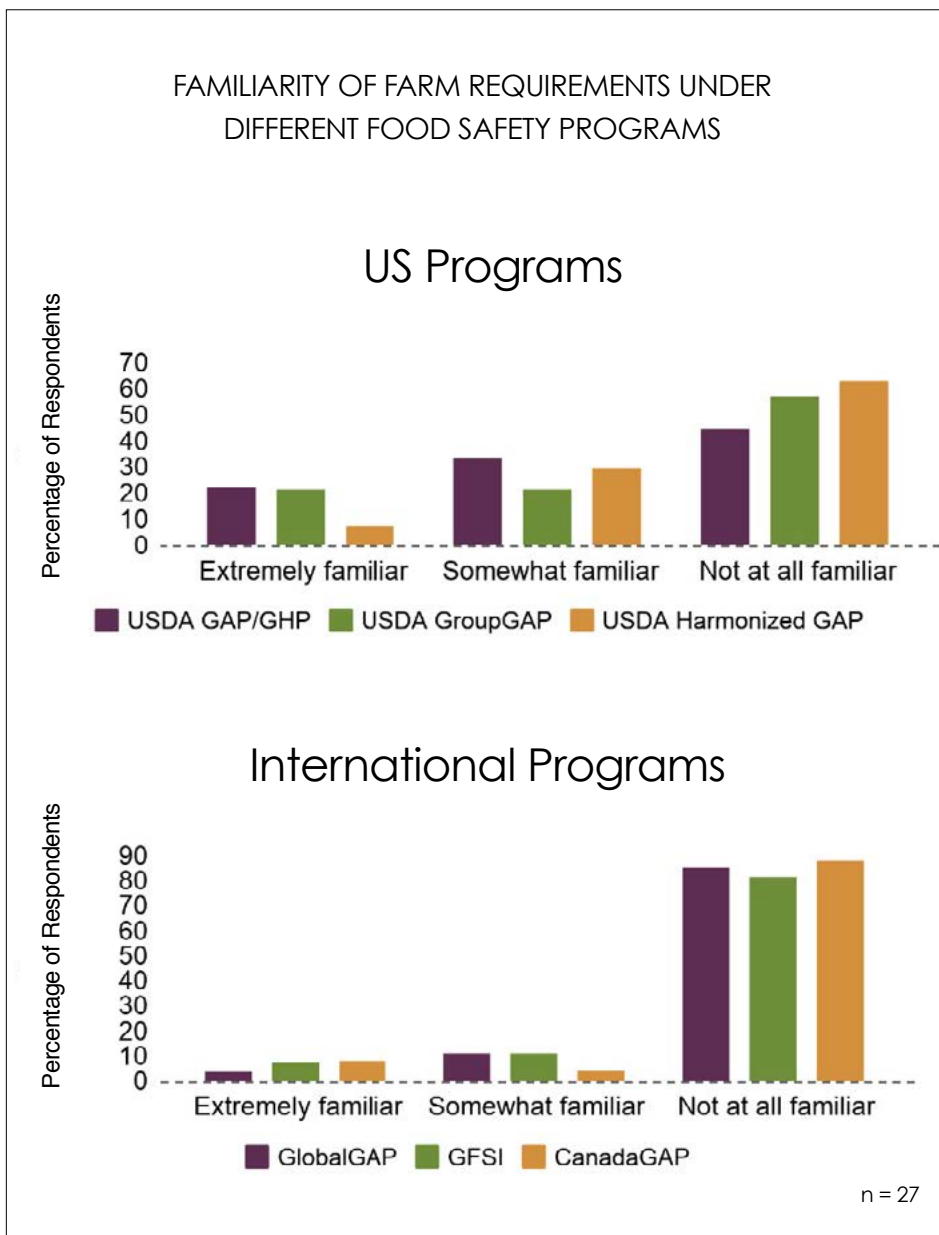
Additionally, the survey asked participating institutions to self-report their level of familiarity with the requirements farms are subject to under different farm food safety certifications. Institutions were overall more familiar with the certification programs offered through the USDA than international certifications. USDA GAP/GHP and USDA GroupGAP were found to be the most familiar programs, though only about one fifth (22.22% and 21.43%, respectively) of respondents indicated that they were extremely familiar with these programs' requirements.

58% of institutions require some sort of food safety verification or certification from their fresh produce suppliers.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SAFE PRODUCE PRODUCTION

When asked who is responsible for verifying that a farm is producing and handling fresh produce safely, there was quite a bit of variation among institutions. As shown in the graphic at left, the most frequent response was that all three parties—farm, distributor, and food service operation—should be accountable for verifying that fresh produce was grown and handled safely by the farm.

86% of food service buyers showed interest in educational opportunities to explore produce safety program options.



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR VERIFYING THAT A FARM IS PRODUCING AND HANDLING FRESH PRODUCE SAFELY?



n = 35

BUYER CONFIDENCE IN PRODUCE SAFETY

Whether or not they require a food safety program from their fresh produce suppliers, all participating institutions reported at least some level of confidence in the safety of the fresh produce they are currently buying.

Over half (57%) are extremely confident that the produce they are buying is safe and 43% reported that they are somewhat confident. While all institutions reported being

at least somewhat satisfied (43% are extremely satisfied and 57% are somewhat satisfied) with the produce safety assurance programs they are currently using, 86% had at least some interest in educational opportunities to explore other produce safety program options.

The MFIN will use the results of this survey and further insights provided by network members to develop further educational offerings for

institutional food service staff to learn more about on-farm food safety programs.

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The Michigan Farm to Institution Network is coordinated by the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, with support from MSU Extension. For more information about the network, visit mifarmtoinstitution.org or contact info@cultivatemichigan.org.

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