

# MICHIGAN PROCESSING APPLE GROWERS DIVISION OF MACMA

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## USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Training for Asparagus, Cherry, Peach and Apple Growers

### Project Summary

Recent food scares across the nation have made food safety a top priority for Michigan fruit and vegetable producers. In an effort to market asparagus, tart cherry, peach, and apple crops competitively, it is imperative for producers to successfully complete a USDA GAP audit on their farms. Michigan markets a large portion of these commodities to USDA through domestic feeding programs. Producers are now required to be USDA GAP certified for any fresh produce (including fresh cut apple slices). Because of the mandated USDA requirement, it is imperative to educate and train producers and help them prepare for the audit with proper recordkeeping documents.

### Project Approach

The project approach was to mail a questionnaire to growers asking for input on how to improve upcoming classes. A minimum of four and maximum of eight grower educational meetings (depending on the number of participants) would be scheduled during the months of January-May. Growers will be provided with materials including a USDA GAP manual with templates of policies and procedures as well as a 15-minute DVD covering worker health & hygiene.

### Goals & Outcomes Achieved

A GAP questionnaire was mailed to 1,361 growers on December 6, 2010 which included a postage-paid business reply envelopes. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get input on how to better the program for 2011. 103 surveys were returned. Overall, growers were complimentary of the program.

Seven classes were held in the apple producing regions and approximately 150 growers were in attendance. Several other producers received the manuals either in person at the MACMA office or by mail.

Dawn Drake and Phil Pitts conducted the meetings with a USDA inspector present at each meeting. The inspector has proven invaluable as it allows growers to ask questions

pertaining to their individual farms. It also allowed for discussion and clarification on the previous year audits and questions that arose from those audits.

### Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of this project were asparagus, cherries, peach, and apple growers. Additional beneficiaries include Michigan processors who strongly encouraged growers to complete the program or who now require USDA GAP for their deliveries.

### Lessons Learned

Although the number of attendees was down compared to 2010, many growers had already been through the training the two previous years and also had successfully completed on-farm audits. As of November 1, 2011, 283 audits were successfully completed versus 244 audits in 2010. There are additional audits scheduled but have not been completed yet because of weather events and the late harvest.

The preparation for the manual and the time and travel cost are the same whether you train 100 people or 400 people. Printing costs were directly attributed to the number of participants as we didn't want to have an excess of manuals in inventory. Additional items provided to growers this year included a certificate stating they were in attendance at the meeting as well as a CD which included all of the policies/procedures in the manual. The CD allowed them to "customize" the manual for their specific operation.

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