



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**2022 GAP Connections Assessments and
GAP Connections Certification Monitoring Visits**

From

**GAP Connections
2450 E.J. Chapman Drive
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Date

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1. Summary and Background

GAP Connections (GAPC) is currently accepting proposals from auditing firms to conduct GAP Connections Assessments and GAP Connections Certification Monitoring Visits. GAPC has been conducting on-farm assessments since 2014 to assess growers' compliance with the GAPC Standards. In 2018, GAP Connections launched a Certification program involves on-farm monitoring visits for participating operations. The GAPC Certification Program is a voluntary program designed by the industry to distinguish those growers who comply with the GAPC Certification Standards. Certification Monitoring Visits will provide a score to the grower(s) which determines if they have achieved Certification.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to solicit proposals from various candidate organizations, conduct a fair and extensive evaluation based on criteria listed herein, and select the candidates who best represents the direction GAPC and industry wishes to go.

GAPC is a 501 (c) (5), nonprofit agricultural membership organization working to promote good agricultural practices between growers and the companies associated with the purchasing of their crops. Founded in 2013, GAP provides training, resources, and monitoring to promote good agricultural practices which produce a quality crop while protecting, sustaining or enhancing the environment with regard to soil, water, air, animal and plant life as well as protecting and ensuring the rights of farm laborers.

GAP Connections:

- Serves as a clearinghouse between producers and purchasers
- Coordinates and facilitates industry initiatives including the adoption and implementation of one set of agricultural standards
- Streamlines processes for farmers and the companies that purchase their products
- Connects farmers with training and resources to ensure compliance
- Administrates the GAP Connections Certification Program

2. Proposal Guidelines

This Request for Proposal represents the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until October 29, 2021. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative of the company submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, all costs included in proposals must be all-inclusive to include any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposals which call for outsourcing or contracting work must include a name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs and fees must include an explanation and/or description.

Contract terms and conditions will be negotiated upon selection of approved firms for this RFP. All contractual terms and conditions will be subject to review by GAPC and will include scope, budget, schedule, and other necessary items pertaining to the project.

3. Purpose and Description

Purpose

GAPC is seeking to approve multiple monitoring firms to (1) conduct an estimated 100 or less GAPC assessments and (2) be listed as approved monitoring firms for GAPC Certification Monitoring Visits, from which GAPC Grower Members will select their firm, and pay for a GAPC Certification Monitoring Visit. Only those firms listed on the GAPC approved list will be able to conduct a GAPC Certification Monitoring Visit.

The GAPC Assessments' purpose is to provide an accurate assessment of practices on each individual farm to be reported to member companies. The 2022 assessment program will be a continuation of the previous eight year's efforts.

The GAPC Certification Audits' purpose is to provide a thorough audit of the farming operation's crop, environmental, and labor management practices verifying if practices adhere to the GAPC Certification Standards. The Audit will be scored, and the score will determine if the grower(s) have achieved Certification. There are currently 350+ GAPC Certified Growers that will be continuing their Certification Cycle with an Audit in 2022, as well as new growers that will be applying to the program.

The GAPC Certification Site Visits' purpose is to provide a revisit to verify that the critical crop, environmental, and labor standards are still be followed by a Certified grower and to revisit items that may have been remediated in 2021. The Site Visit will be scored, and the score will determine if the grower(s) has maintained Certification. There are currently 1,300+ GAPC Certified Growers that will need to be visited through a Site Visit in 2022.

Description

The table below shows the details of each type of on-farm visits.

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification Audit and Site Visit
Cost to Audit Firm	\$0	\$600 per auditor (for firms that conduct 100 or less monitoring visits) \$800 per auditor (for firms that conduct 101-200 monitoring visits) \$1,000 per auditor (for firms that conduct 201+ monitoring visits)
Number of Visits	1,700-2,000	Unknown at this time but an estimated 400+ Certification Audits (new applications and those continuing their Certification Cycle), there are 1,300+ Certified Growers that will need a Site Visit in 2022. The GAPC Certification Program is a 2-year program with monitoring each year. We predict to have at least 3,000 – 4,000 growers involved by 2025.
Grower List	Provided by GAPC by April 30	Growers will be selecting their audit firm at time of application. GAPC will provide the monitoring firms a list of their growers by April 30 After April 30 growers who contact an audit firm are at the discretion of the monitoring firm (i.e. scheduling and costs).
Payment	Audit firm will invoice GAPC and receive payment based on contract terms	Monitoring firm will invoice grower and receive payment directly from grower
Notification	GAPC will notify growers of assessment via letter and provide the grower with the assigned assessor's name and number	Growers will self-select to participate in the Certification Program and will select their monitoring firm at time of application. GAPC will share each monitoring firms list with them by April 30 to notify the monitoring firm the grower would like to have a Certification visit.
Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit firm will contact growers and schedule the assessments • All scheduling will allow for at least a one (1) week (two (2) weeks preferred) notice to growers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring firm will be notified by GAPC that the grower has chosen to have a Certification visit, monitoring firm will contact the grower, tentatively schedule the monitoring visit and then confirm the schedule date • All scheduling notices are decided by the monitoring firm terms and conditions

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification Audit and Site Visit
Verification Methods	<p>Document Review Visual Inspection Grower Interview Worker Interview Picture</p>	<p>Document Review Visual Inspection Grower Interview Worker Interview Picture</p>
Worker Interviews	<p>If workers are available, assessor will complete worker interviews of 20% of the total workforce reported by grower. Minimum of two worker interviews and maximum of 10 worker interviews for those operations with more than one worker hired.</p>	<p>Certification Audits (for growers who are not currently Certified but wish to become Certified and are beginning Year 1 of the Certification program, or those continuing their Certification Cycle): Monitoring staff will complete worker interviews of 20% of the total workforce reported by grower if grower wishes to achieve Certification. For those operations with more than one hired worker, there is a minimum of two (2) worker interviews and maximum of ten (10) worker interviews. Workers are to be chosen by the auditor at random.</p> <p>The only exception that allows a Certification Audit to not include worker interviews is if the GAPC Grower Member uses immediate family labor AND completes the Immediate Family Labor Conformation in the Terms and Conditions, the employee interviews are waived. This will be indicated in GAPC's scheduling tool for monitoring staff.</p> <p>Certification Site Visits (for growers who already Certified and are in Year 2 of the Certification program): Will not require worker interviews unless there was an issue in the previous year that requires worker interviews to be conducted, the grower hires indirect labor, or if the grower requests interviews at time of application.</p>
Remediation	<p>Remediation will be directed by GAPC and paid for by GAPC or member companies</p>	<p>Remediation will be done according to Certification Remediation Protocols, paid for by the grower, and must be completed within 30 days of the monitoring visit report submission date.</p>

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification Audit and Site Visit
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduling will be reported through GAPC's Auditor Schedule Tool (accessible with a login and password). GAPC will share scheduling with member companies There will be weekly, if not daily, coordination with GAPC staff and GAPC Member representatives regarding scheduling issues Auditors will report daily any changes or updates to scheduling and provide any notes for GAPC and companies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Staff will login into GAPC Systems and report these two touch points. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Date of Initial Contact Monitoring Visit Date GAPC will report the following form and worker interview statuses to monitoring staff through GAPC system: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Not Complete GAPC will report the following Certification statuses to auditors through GAPC system: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Certified Not Certified In Remediation
Platforms	Questionnaire will be completed on an iOS mobile device (iPad).	Questionnaire will be completed on an iOS mobile device (iPad).
Deliverables for Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled assessment at least two weeks prior to date. Completed grower assessment forms for each farm visited, submitted electronically according to GAPC protocol. Completed worker interviews when workers are present and worker interviews are requested by GAPC, submitted electronically according to GAPC protocol. A summary report, with summaries of results of all assessment questions, by tobacco type and overall to be signed by grower and assessor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed Audit or Site Visit questionnaire for each farm visited, submitted electronically within 72 hours of the date of the visit. Completed worker interviews when worker interviews are required, submitted electronically within 72 hours of the date of the visit. Completed remediation form submitted within 72 hours of visit or receipt of documents from grower. Remediation must be completed within 30 days from date audit or site visit report was submitted.

4. Requirements of Monitoring Staff

- **In-person training:** All assessors and auditors will attend in-person training to take place at GAP Connections offices. The training will consist of three days of classroom training discussing the monitoring tool, monitoring visit scenarios, GAP Connections auditor monitoring visit protocols, and utilizing the scheduling tool. Trainers and materials will be provided by GAPC. All other arrangements and cost of in-person training will be at the expense of the monitoring firm.
- **Technology:** All assessors and monitoring staff must have an iPad or other similar tablet with iOS operating systems to conduct assessments or monitoring visits and must have a hot-spot or access to internet nightly while conducting assessments or monitoring visits.
- **GAPC Protocols:** Monitoring firm and all the monitoring firm's employees and contractors will be asked for strict adherence to protocols provided by GAPC for assessments, monitoring visits, and worker interviews. If there is an assessor or auditor who does not follow protocol GAPC will notify the auditor and monitoring firm. A Corrective Action Plan (CAP) must be provided to explain how the auditor will remedy the error. GAPC will provide two notifications and then will ask that the auditor be removed and replaced with another qualified individual. The replacement assessor or auditor attend training with GAPC staff. GAPC protocols can be found in the GAP Connections Certification Monitoring Protocols document or the GAPC Certification Assessment Protocols document.
- **Auditor Conduct:** Assessor or auditor must agree to and sign GAPC's Auditor Code of Conduct. (See attached document) If assessor or auditor violates Auditor Code of Conduct, they can be removed from the approved list. Violations or non-compliance with Code of Conduct or Monitoring Protocols will be handled in the following manner:
 - Auditor is issued a written notification detailing violations and non-compliance. Monitoring firm will be required to provide Corrective Action Plan (CAP) outlining violation and how it will be corrected in the future.
 - Auditor is placed on probation and is issued a final written warning detailing violations and non-compliance that states any further violations or non-compliance will result in the auditor being removed from the approved list of GAPC Certification auditors. A meeting/conference will be scheduled with GAPC staff, auditor, and auditor supervisor if needed. Monitoring firm will be required to provide Corrective Action Plan (CAP) outlining violation and how it will be corrected in the future.
 - Auditor will be removed from GAPC approved auditor list.
- **Confidentiality:** Monitoring firm and all the monitoring firm's employees and contractors will be asked to follow GAPC's confidentiality agreement and maintain any and all documents containing personal or financial information of growers or employees confidential.
- **Scheduling tool:** Auditors must use the GAPC scheduling tool to indicate contact date and monitoring visit date with GAPC. The tool will also be used to store comments surrounding the scheduling of visits to indicate if there are any issues reaching the grower or with the visit itself. **GAPC will require strict use of this tool.** If auditors do not use tool GAPC will provide three notifications and then will ask that the auditor be removed and replaced with another qualified individual. The replacement assessor or auditor must attend training with GAPC staff.

- **Worker Interviews:** It is the assessor or auditor's responsibility to notify the grower if worker interviews are required and to ensure that workers will be accessible at time of visit. Visits should not be scheduled if worker interviews are required, and workers are not present.
- **Remediation:** Remediation for Monitoring Visits will be a mixture of document review and on farm visits dependent upon what questions the grower missed during the initial visit. All remediation will be completed by the monitoring firm, which includes but is not limited to scheduling, knowledge of what is to be remediated, and completion of the visit or document review in a reasonable timeframe specified by GAPC (30 days from the date the monitoring visit report was submitted). Monitoring Firms will be required to have a designated individual whose sole role is to manage remediation if the firm has more than 250 monitoring visits.

5. Request for Proposal and Project Timeline

Request for Proposal Timeline:

All proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than October 29, 2021. If additional information or discussions are needed with any proposing firms during this time period, the firm(s) will be notified.

Upon notification, the contract negotiation with the approved firm(s) will begin immediately.

Project Timeline:

- In-person training will be held in July prior to assessments and monitoring visits starting in July.
- All auditors must coordinate with GAP Connections staff to arrange shadow visits be completed prior to starting solo audits.
- On farm assessments and monitoring visits will begin in July and be completed by October 31.
- Monitoring visits will be assigned after firms have been approved and growers have chosen their audit firms (after April 30).

6. Costs

All proposals must include proposed costs to complete the tasks described in the project description. All costs and fees must be clearly described in each proposal. Costs should include the cost of conducting assessments and monitoring visits, training assessors/auditors, preparing reports and clearly explain any fees or other costs associated with assessments and/or monitoring visits.

Assessments

Costs of assessments should be submitted on a per assessment basis, and unless otherwise specified will be assumed to include all costs of scheduling and visiting the farms. Payment will only be made for completed assessments (defined as completed grower assessment and worker interviews (if conducted), reviewed, and approved in GAPC's database), unless otherwise stated in the provider proposal.

Certification Audits and Site Visits

Costs of audits and site visits should be submitted in these categories:

- Grower selects firm prior to April 30:
 - Certification Audit with worker interviews
 - Certification Audit without worker interviews
 - Site Visit with worker interviews
 - Site Visit without worker interviews
 - Remediation through document review (no on-farm visit)
 - Remediation through an on-farm visit
 - Cost when included with other certification programs that may be offered by firm (i.e. organic certification)
- Grower selects firm after April 30:
 - Certification Audit with worker interviews
 - Certification Audit without worker interviews
 - Site Visit with worker interviews
 - Site Visit without worker interviews

7. Bidder Qualifications

Firms should provide the following items as part of their proposal for consideration:

- Description of experience in developing, administering, and facilitating on-farm and/or Good Agricultural Practices assessments and Certification Programs
- Examples of GAP assessments or certification monitoring visits conducted by or with your organization.
- Testimonials or references from past clients
- Anticipated resources you will assign to this project (total number, role, title, experience)
- Project management methodology
- List of assessors/auditors that will be conducting monitoring visits on behalf of GAP Connections, along with their resume/past experience.
- Customer service aspects that the monitoring firm offers such as advance scheduling and pre-visit reminders or calls to prepare

Qualifications of assessors/auditors:

- Familiarity with commercial U.S. agricultural practices required. Familiarity with tobacco production very desirable.
- Bilingual in Spanish, or translation available if conducting worker interviews
- Experience as auditor/assessor of agricultural and labor practices
- Auditors must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older to be considered.

8. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

GAPC will evaluate all proposals based on the following criteria. To ensure consideration for this Request for Proposal, your proposal should be complete and include all of the following criteria:

- *Overall proposal suitability:* Proposed solution(s) must meet the scope and needs included herein and be presented in a clear and organized manner
- *Organizational Experience:* Bidders will be evaluated on their experience and the experience of their auditors as it pertains to the scope of this project
- *Previous work:* Bidders will be evaluated on examples of their work pertaining to certification and remediation programs as well as client testimonials and references. In addition, any previous work done for GAPC and the customer service provided will also be taken into consideration
- *Value and cost:* Bidders will be evaluated on the cost of their solution(s) based on the work to be performed in accordance with the scope of this project
- **Technical expertise and experience: Bidders must provide descriptions and documentation of staff technical expertise and experience**

9. Required Information

(If exact costs cannot be listed, please list as “costs not to exceed \$XXX”)

	All expenses included pricing	Cost plus expenses (if applicable)	Combination pricing (if applicable)
GAPC Assessment			
Certification Audit with worker interviews			
Certification Audit without worker interviews			
Certification Site Visit with worker interviews			
Certification Site Visit without worker interviews			
Remediation through documentation review (no on-farm visit)			
Remediation through an on-farm visit			

If there are to be other pricing options offered, please include them in the proposal.

In addition to what is asked in this requesting document please include your answers to the following within your proposal:

1. How and who will be handling the phone calls from growers who have questions or concerns about their Monitoring Visit? What will be the hours of operation that someone will be available to take calls and how does your firm plan to handle voicemails from growers?
2. How and who will be handling the scheduling of monitoring visits to ensure at least a two weeks' notice is given to growers?
3. How will your firm handle remediation through document review within 30 days of the date the monitoring visit report is submitted?
4. How will your firm handle remediation through an on-site visit within 30 days of the date the monitoring visit report is submitted?
5. How will auditors be addressed when GAPC provides notification of violations against GAPC Policies and Procedures?
6. Will there be replacement auditors available to replace auditors that have violated auditor protocols?

Each firm must submit their proposal to the address below by October 29, 2021 at 5pm EST:

GAP Connections
2450 E.J. Chapman Drive
Knoxville, TN 37996

Or

lwalker@gapconnections.com