



# ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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# FROM THE DIRECTOR

2020 marked the seventh year of operation for GAP Connections (GAPC) and much like the rest of the country and world GAPC learned to adapt to the twists and turns of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the challenging year of navigating Covid-19 restrictions and requirements, GAPC was able to train over 4,000 growers and certify over 1,200 operations. These successes are attributable to the staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Committees, stakeholders and the thousands of growers and farmworkers who continued to persevere and face the unique challenges of 2020.

GAPC looks forward to improving and expanding its GAPC Certification Program and offerings for growers and farmworkers in 2021 and wants to again, thank everyone who helped make a challenging year a successful year for GAP Connections.

**“Individual commitment to a group effort-that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work”. -Vince Lombardi**

Jane Chadwell  
President and Executive Director  
January 2021

**GAP Connections (GAPC)** was established in 2013 as a nonprofit agricultural membership organization to work with growers and stakeholders to raise standards in the tobacco industry through good agricultural practices focused on three main management areas: Crop, Environmental, and Labor. GAPC provides leadership for the adoption of agricultural standards and practices that produce a quality crop while protecting, sustaining or enhancing the environment, ensures the safety and rights of farm laborers and recognizes those producers who are committed to a higher standard. GAPC believes every decision matters from how you grow to how you work.

## MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

GAPC has more than 13,000 grower members across 20 states and is governed by a Board of Directors that consists of companies, growers, and grower associations.

### GAPC Board of Directors

Frank Geovannello, Altria

Eric Walker, Burley Stabilization Corporation

Haoqing “Viggo” Wang, China Tobacco

International (North America)

Jennie Salyer, Gallatin Redrying & Storage

Brent Leggett, Grower

Donald Mitchell, Grower

Dale Seay, Grower

Linda McMurtry, Hail & Cotton

John Radcliff, JTI

Lily Bland, Pyxus

Mamie Sutphin, R. J. Reynolds

Robbie Parker, R.J. Reynolds (Chairperson)

Randy Henderson, Swisher International

Al Pedigo, The Council for Burley Tobacco

Tim Yarbrough, Tobacco Growers Assoc. of NC

Declan Curran, U.S. Tobacco Coop. Inc.

Christian Clifton, United Tobacco Company

Hunter Mason, Universal Leaf

GAPC Board and administration is counseled and informed by several advisory and working committees. These committees provide input on GAPC policies and procedures affecting growers, workers, and other important stakeholders. They bring awareness of concerns and questions to the GAPC Board and suggest ways in which GAPC can better assist in fulfilling its mission.

Working Committees such as the Grower Advisory Committee and Farm Worker Advisory Committee are critical in understanding the needs or concerns of the grower and farmworker community involved in GAPC member farming operations. A full list of working committees can be found on GAPC's website.

### Grower Advisory Committee

Craig Armstrong, Ohio

Andy Miller, Pennsylvania

Donald Mitchell, Kentucky

William Shipley, Tennessee

Dale Seay, Kentucky

Joanna Carraway, Kentucky

Jason Clary, Virginia

Archie Griffin, North Carolina

Brent Leggett, North Carolina

Reid Turner, Georgia

Neal Baxley, South Carolina

Al Pedigo, Kentucky

Tim Yarbrough, North Carolina

### Farm Worker Advisory Committee

Rick Alexander, Agriculture Workforce  
Management Association

Deborah Bourland, KY Migrant Education  
Program

Luis Cruz, NC Cooperative Extension

Frank Geovannello, Altria

Nancy Hagan, NC Project NO Rest

Robbie Parker, RJ Reynolds

Jennifer Poole, VA Agriculture Grower  
Association

Beth Rodman, NC Department of Labor

Lee Wicker, NC Growers Association

Lynn Whitehouse, KY OSHA

*Technical Advisory Role Only:*

Richard Blaylock, US DOL Wage & Hour

Miguel Perez, US DOL Wage & Hour

## TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Training and the dissemination of information to our Grower Members remains one of the largest endeavors of GAPC. In partnership with Cooperative Extension Services in several states, GAPC coordinates annual training where growers learn from experts about the latest crop, environmental and labor best management practices. Through training, GAPC helps growers understand and maintain compliance with best agricultural and management practices and critical labor laws and regulations.

Between 2014 and 2020, GAPC has coordinated more than 750 training meetings in 11 states. In 2020, GAPC trained over 4,880 growers.

In 2020, to meet the training needs of growers amid the Covid-19 pandemic GAPC had a hybrid approach to training. By March 2020, in-person training was halted and the remaining growers who needed training were offered on-line and mail training options. GAPC launched the on-line training platform in April through the grower dashboard on the GAPC website. The on-line training consisted of crop, environment, and labor management topics and a quiz for verification. In May, GAPC launched another option, utilizing the mail for growers who did not have access to the technology needed for on-line training. Information on crop, environment, and labor management topics was compiled into the 2020 Tobacco Information Booklet and quiz. Growers review the information in the booklet and return the quiz for training credit.

#### Number of Growers Trained in 2020 by Training Method

In-person	Video	On-line	Mail
4,001	115	340	431

In addition to training, GAPC distributed over 8,000 copies of the newly revised Labor Management Resources Guide compiled by the Farm Labor Practices Group (FLPG) to help farmers and farmworkers in production of labor-intensive crops better understand and comply with applicable labor laws and regulations, and to foster improved farm labor practices, where needed, that shape a worker's experience on the farm. The Labor Management Resource Guide (English and Spanish) was also posted on the GAP Connections website.

GAPC appreciates the valuable partnerships that help provide expert content and education to growers and farmworkers at training events. Each year GAPC partners with over 60 Specialists and County Agents in the Cooperative Extension Service at Clemson University, North Carolina State University, Ohio State University, Penn State University, Purdue University, University of Kentucky, University of Maryland, University of Missouri, University of Tennessee, and Virginia Tech University to provide annual grower training. The US Department of Labor, state Departments of Labor, state Departments of Commerce, Mexican Consulates, state Farm Bureaus, State Advocate Monitors, and Migrant Education programs assist with labor management, farm safety, and health training, and act as a resource for growers and their workforce throughout the year.

# GAPC CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Utilizing approved 3<sup>rd</sup> party auditors, GAPC also provides verification of practices at the farm level through farm visits and worker interviews. In the early days, GAPC coordinated assessments on behalf of member companies that elected to assess their growers' compliance with the GAPC standards using the following verification methods: grower interviews, document review, visual inspection or observation, and worker interviews.

**GAPC has conducted more than 5,500 on-farm visits and more than 8,700 worker interviews to assess and verify adoption and compliance.**

These verification efforts culminated in the creation of the GAPC Certification Program in 2018. The GAPC Certification Program is a continuous three-year cycle of annual requirements, training, self-assessments and monitoring activities. Growers in the GAPC Certification Program begin by successfully completing a full Certification Audit that includes worker interviews. The following year the monitoring activity is a Certification Site Visit that focuses on the GAPC Critical Standards. The final year in the three-year cycle, is a Certification Desktop Review that can be done on-farm or virtually. Throughout the continuous three-year cycle, growers must achieve and maintain 100 percent compliance with Critical Standards.



GAPC Certified growers demonstrate that they care about both producing a quality crop with industry best practices and creating a safe and compliant working environment for everyone on the farm.



**1,821**  
Certified Grower  
Members



**1,225**  
Certified  
Operations



**112,656**  
Tobacco Acres  
on Certified  
Operations



**13,069**  
Farm Workers on  
Certified Operations

## WORKER CONCERN HELPLINE

The GAPC Worker Concern Helpline (Helpline) is designed to provide assistance in English and Spanish to workers and growers on GAPC Member operations. The Helpline was successfully piloted for two years before being expanded in 2018 to the entire GAPC Grower Membership which includes thousands of growers and workers in 20 states. The primary objective of the Helpline is to provide a confidential channel for farm workers on GAPC Member farms to ask for information about workplace compliance issues and express concerns or report instances of suspected workplace noncompliance through a fair and trusted process.



**Between June 2018 and December 2020, the GAPC Helpline received 43 worker concerns, in addition to concerns raised by workers during GAPC Monitoring Activities.**

Of those 43 worker concerns, 63 percent were in scope and resolved, 21 percent did not provide sufficient information or credible evidence, and 16 percent were out of scope and sent to an alternative resource. The number of concerns include both issues received via phone, text, or email by workers or from a third party on their behalf. Also, a single concern may involve communication with multiple workers on a single farm and/or multiple calls/texts with the same individuals over the time it takes to investigate and/or resolve the issue.

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

As with many organizations across the agricultural community, GAPC searched for ways to help during the pandemic. GAPC quickly published information sheets, Q&A documents, printable posters, training videos for growers and workers, webpages, newsletters, and posts with Covid-19 information and resources. GAPC was also able to distribute over 44,000 face masks to growers and farmworkers with the help of generous company members. We hope these efforts helped growers and farmworkers continue to maintain a safe and compliant working environment amidst the challenges.