

Annual Report 2021



GAP
CONNECTIONS

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

GAPC continued with the country and globe to remain flexible and prepared in 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause challenges for “business as usual.” However challenging, GAPC continued to provide Annual GAP Training and administer the GAPC Certification Program, training over 3,600 GAPC Grower Members and Certifying over 1,500 growers in 2021. GAPC also created opportunities to see growth in other commodities and areas of focus in 2021. GAPC had its first GAPC Hemp Certification Pilot and prepared for the launch of a new Farmworker Training Program available to any grower in a labor-intensive crop in 2022.

These successes and new offerings are attributable to the staff, Board of Directors, Advisory Committees, stakeholders and the thousands of growers and farmworkers who continued to persevere and adapt to the ever-changing societal and business landscape.

GAPC looks forward to expanding new offerings and introducing new sectors within agriculture to the ideas, resources, and programs that have been successful in the tobacco industry. We thank everyone who helped make another challenging year a successful year for GAP Connections.

Jane Chadwell

President and Executive Director

February 2022

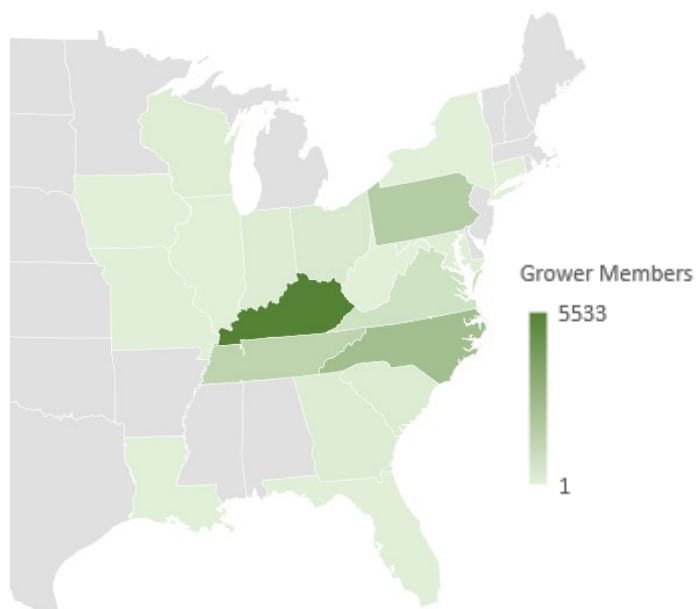
GAP Connections (GAPC) was established in 2013 as a nonprofit agricultural membership organization to work with growers and stakeholders to raise standards in the tobacco industry through good agricultural practices focused on three main management areas: Crop, Environmental, and Labor. GAPC provides 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 the eastern U.S. and is governed by a Board of Directors that consists of companies, growers, and grower associations.

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.

GAPC engages with stakeholders continuously throughout the year through meetings, conferences, and advisory committees that contain stakeholders such as regulatory agencies and other non-profit organizations. 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.



TRAINING

Training and the dissemination of information to our Grower Members remains one of the cornerstones of offerings of GAPC. In partnership with Cooperative Extension Services in several states, GAPC facilitates 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 included in the GAPC Certification Program.

Between 2014 and 2021, GAPC has facilitated over 840 GAP Annual Training events across the eastern United States.

In 2021, to meet the training needs of growers amid the COVID-19 pandemic GAPC continued with a variety of training methods.

GAPC offered mail and on-line training that allowed growers to complete training from their home. The on-line training, accessed from their grower dashboard on the GAPC website, consisted of crop, environment, and labor management topics and a quiz for verification.

The mail training also consisted of information on crop, environment, and labor management topics compiled into the 2021 Tobacco Information Booklet and quiz. Growers review the information in the booklet and return the quiz for training credit.



In 2021, there were over 3,602 GAPC Grower Members across 13 states who completed Annual GAP Training.

The labor management section of the 2021 GAP Annual Training consisted of topics related to COVID-19 and keeping farmworkers and farm families safe and informed. The topics were provided and presented by the NC Farmworker Health Program, NC Department of Health & Human Services, NC Department of Labor and NC Agromedicine Institute.

- Prevent, Identify, Care, Isolate: Farmworkers and COVID-19
- Responding to a COVID-19 Outbreak on the Farm
- Farmworkers and the 2019 Novel Coronavirus

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.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

In 2021, GAPC launched two new partnerships the Grower Training Sponsorship and the Consultant Partnership. GAPC hopes these two new partnership programs will allow more organizations and individuals to be involved in supporting GAPC’s mission and activities for growers and farmworkers. The Grower Training Sponsorship supports GAPC offering of free training on best practices and supporting materials like record templates and posters to Grower Members. The Consultant Partnership allows consultants who work with and help Grower Members to learn more about the GAPC Certification Program, helping them to assist growers who wish to become compliant with GAPC Certification Standards and create a safe and productive working environment for workers. To learn more about these partnerships visit www.gapconnections.com.



GAPC CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Utilizing approved 3rd party auditors, GAPC also provides verification of practices at the farm level through the GAPC Certification Program and company assessments which include grower interviews, document review, visual inspection or observation, and worker interviews. Company assessments are purchased by a GAPC Company Member and results are given and reviewed by that GAPC Member Company. GAPC Certification monitoring visits are paid for by GAPC Grower Members who apply to participate in the GAPC Certification Program and the results are reviewed and scored by GAPC and shared with GAPC Member Companies who have a data release with the participating GAPC Grower Member. The GAPC Certification Program had been a continuous three-year cycle but in 2021 was changed by the Board of Directors to a two-year cycle beginning in 2022 to simplify the program and requirements and to reduce redundant data collection efforts by aligning with the Sustainable Tobacco Program (STP) which several GAPC Company Members participate in annually.

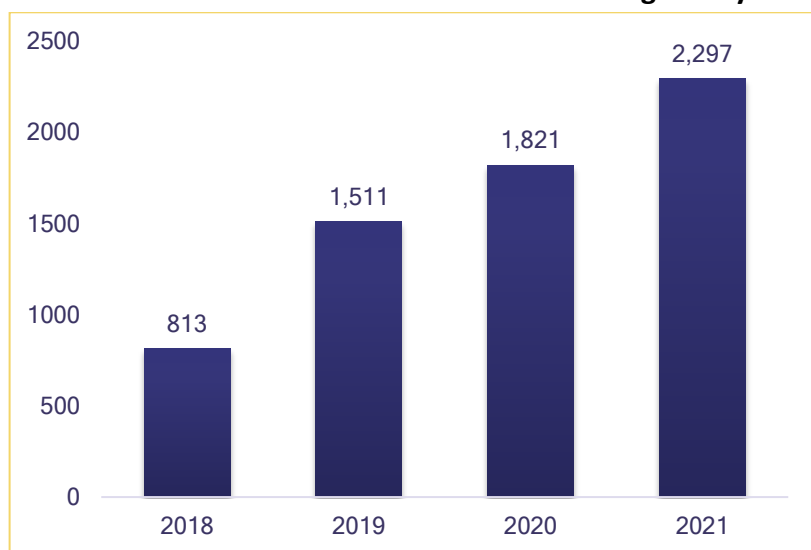
Since 2014, GAPC has conducted over 7,200 monitoring visits and interviewed over 11,400 farmworkers to assess and verify adoption and compliance with best practices in crop, environment, and labor management.

As with previous years, GAPC Grower Members who participate in the GAPC Certification Program have annual requirements that begin by applying for the program, followed by attending GAP Training, completing the self-assessment, and participating in either a full Certification Audit or Certification Site Visit. The Certification Audit covers both the GAPC Critical and Additional Standards and requires worker interviews of all hired labor. The Certification Site Visit focuses only on the GAPC Critical Standards and requires worker interviews if grower hires labor indirectly (i.e. uses a Farm

Labor Contractor (FLC or H-2ALC)), changes from family labor to hiring labor, or had a worker issue in the previous year. Growers can also request worker interviews be conducted. Growers must keep and maintain the records listed in the GAPC Certification Compliance Guide and Required Record Checklist found on our website, www.gapconnections.com. These records will be reviewed by the auditor during the monitoring visit.

Throughout the continuous two-year cycle of the Certification Program, growers must achieve and maintain 100 percent compliance with GAPC Critical Certification Standards and adhere to the Monitoring Activity Code of Conduct and all other Terms and Conditions of GAPC Certification. Since the program’s inception, the GAPC Certification Program has grown each year. In 2018, we had 813 GAPC Certified growers. In 2021, we completed the year with 2,297 GAPC Certified growers.

Chart 1: Number of GAPC Certified Growers Program by Year



Establishing a higher standard across the industry requires accountability and collaboration at every step. GAPC Certification Program increases transparency and fosters an environment that promotes sustainability, profitability, fairness, and competition. GAPC Certified Growers demonstrate their commitment to producing a quality crop with industry best practices and creating a safe and compliant working environment for everyone on the farm.



2,297
Certified Grower Members



1,592
Certified Operations



151,496
Tobacco Acres on Certified Operations



15,298
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 across the eastern United 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.



In 2021, The Helpline was expanded to include the role of an Administrator housed at The Cahn Group which allowed GAPC to move the decision-making processes and determinations of next steps from GAPC to The Cahn Group. The GAPC Board felt that this would allow for more separation from GAPC and more transparency into how a concern is addressed and when it is considered resolved. The Board and The Cahn Group also collaborated in creating an approved list of criteria for investigators, mediators, and arbitrators which would be approved and put into action by the Administrator.

Between June 2018 and December 2021, the GAPC Helpline received 45 worker concerns, in addition to concerns raised and resolved by workers during GAPC Monitoring Activities.

Of those 45 worker concerns, 64 percent were in scope and resolved, 20 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.

RESOURCES

GAPC has always strived to provide resources to growers that help them achieve compliance with laws and regulations and help them adopt best practices included in the GAPC Certification Program. Recordkeeping helps provide a clear understanding of past practices and outcomes in the hopes growers can make more informed decisions in the future about growing their crop and managing their operation. HR and payroll records must be kept in compliance with laws and regulations but also provide a resource if workers, accountants, or regulatory agency representatives have questions about employee payments and expenses. Since 2013, GAPC has provided free recordkeeping and

policy templates to GAPC Grower Members. These templates can be picked up at GAP Annual Training or can be found online for free by download or for purchase by mail at www.gapconnections.com.

GAPC also provides information and resources from partners and other organizations that help GAPC Grower Members stay informed of labor laws and regulations and assist them in training their workers on important safety topics. These include Worker Training Guides, Labor Management Guides, Farm Labor Contractor Guides, worker safety training videos, tailgate training kits, and various posters. Many of these resources are free for download on the GAPC website or for purchase in the GAPC store.

In 2021, GAPC took one step further in efforts to help the agricultural industry provide a safe and compliant work environment for farm workers. GAPC started a Farmworker Training Program which will provide an experienced, bilingual GAPC staff member to train workers on the farm. The training can be customized to the needs of the operation and can include topics beyond GAPC required safety training such as food safety and other OSHA requirements. This training will be available to growers of all sectors of agriculture. GAPC recognizes that agriculture ranks among the most hazardous industries in the U.S. and training is valuable resource to avoid health and safety risks on farms which are involved in any labor-intensive crop. The safety and well-being of farmworkers is an agricultural endeavor that should be supported and shared amongst all crops and sectors. The Farmworker Training Program will be launched at GAP Annual trainings in 2022. GAPC is excited to add this new program as a compliment to the Farm Safety, Health and Compliance Training Events that have been held in previous years prior to restrictions with COVID-19.



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

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
- Richard Blaylock, US DOL Wage & Hour *(Technical Advisory Role Only)*
- Miguel Perez, US DOL Wage & Hour *(Technical Advisory Role Only)*

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