



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **GAP Connections Announces New Certification for Tobacco Growers**

*Program Will Recognize Growers Committed to Best Practices*

**KNOXVILLE, Tenn.—January 8, 2018**—GAP Connections (GAPC) is proud to announce a new certification program that distinguishes tobacco growers in the marketplace who adhere to GAPC’s standards for socially responsible agronomic, environmental and labor practices.

Tobacco farmers, like other agricultural producers, are increasingly expected to provide buyers with assurance that their products were grown in compliance with industry best practices and applicable regulations. Recognizing the demand for a comprehensive, and transparent tool to verify compliance with best practice implementation, GAPC developed the certification program with extensive input from its member companies, member-growers, and third-party experts. GAPC’s certification program will increase transparency and foster an environment that promotes sustainability, profitability, fairness, and competition.

“Establishing a benchmark of higher standards across the industry requires accountability and collaboration every step of the way,” said Jane Chadwell, GAPC executive director. “We’re pleased to offer this new certification program that will recognize growers for their commitment to industry best practices and a working environment that promotes safety and worker rights.”

Participating growers will receive training and resources to help produce healthier crops, sustain the ecosystem in which they grow, and implement labor management practices that protect the rights of workers and promote a safe working environment. The certification program also provides monitoring programs, such as on-farm audits, that identify areas in need of improvement, along with a clear remediation plan that makes improving or fixing areas of deficiency easier.

In addition, participating growers will receive guidance in implementing a worker concern process including an industry worker concern helpline that provides an avenue for workers to express concerns.

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To become GAPC Certified, growers must successfully complete a Certification audit in year one. Certification status will be maintained if no verified issues of non-compliance are found from monitoring activities over the following two years including a site visit and desktop review in years two and three. In addition to the monitoring activities, GAPC Certified Growers participate annually in training and a self-assessment of their crop, environment, and labor practices used on the farm.

For more information on the GAPC certification program or to begin the certification process, visit [gapconnections.com](http://gapconnections.com) or call (865) 622-4606.

### **About GAP Connections**

GAP Connections (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 and consisting of Company Members, Associate Members, and Grower Members, GAP Connections 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.

For more information about GAP Connections, please call 865-622-4606 or visit [gapconnections.com](http://gapconnections.com).

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