

SC Farm to School

...connecting farms to the community

At it's core, Farm to School is about building relationships between local foods, school children, and the community.



A few benefits of Farm to School:

- New markets for farmers
- Healthier and fresher meals for children
- Increases community awareness about the importance of agriculture
- Increases food security by reducing the distance between producer and consumer

visit www.scfarmtoschool.com



Find out more!

SC Farm to School regional agriculture coordinators are trained to assist farmers in the GAP certification process. If you choose to participate in the Farm to School program, you will be eligible to receive a full reimbursement for the cost of the GAP certification audit. The offer ends September 30th, 2012.

Regional Coordinators:

Upstate: Judy Bridwell
(804) 903-2099

Midlands: Weatherly Thomas
(803) 730-5937

Low Country: Hannah Miller
(803) 553-7244



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Markets.
Community.



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A spotlight on...

Hickory Bluff Nursery and Berry Farm

GAP Certification made it possible to sell produce directly to local schools and grocery stores. It has also increased the farm's credibility and food safety.

Originally, Walter and Cathy Earley did not plan on becoming GAP certified. When they heard about a GAP certification workshop to be held in Charleston County, they decided to attend. The workshop connected them with SCDA regional coordinator Hannah Mikell who convinced him that selling his strawberries to local schools could become a reality. Over the next few weeks, the Earley's partnered with two Department of Agriculture employees to become GAP certified and sell fresh produce to the Berkeley County Schools. According to Walter Earley, the changes that the farm made were "minor" and, "well worth the effort".

During the GAP certification process, the Earley's began communicating with Linda Fairchild, Berkeley County School District Child Nutrition Director. Together, they found a mutually beneficial way for the farm to put fresh, local strawberries directly into the hands of the students at Berkeley County Schools. Less than a month and a half after that initial GAP certification workshop, Hickory Bluff Farms sold fresh strawberries to the local school district for the first time.

Walter Earley says that he has "enjoyed selling to the schools" and "hopes to continue selling". He has also recently been approached by Piggly Wiggly to see if he is interested in selling his produce to the local grocery store. He hopes to add more acreage to expand his family business.

GAP Certification... what is it?

Good Agricultural Practices(GAP) was developed by the USDA in 1998 as a set of standards and practices to minimize microbial hazards during the growing, harvesting, and packing of fresh produce.

Each GAP certification audit is different depending on the farm. GAP audits are performed by a USDA auditor and are based on a checklist that can be found on the web at www.ams.usda.gov. The farm checklist covers:

1. general selection
2. farm review
3. field harvesting
4. packing house
5. storage and transportation

80% compliance is required in per section in order to pass the audit.

GAP lowers the risk of lawsuits and increases market opportunities.

What others are saying:

"I enjoy the challenge of keeping up the standard. Once you do it and get into the feel of it, it's part of everyday life. When I come out in the morning to pull an order, I know what process I have to go through, so I just go ahead and do it and everything works out fine" – *Al Williams, Al Williams Enterprise Inc.*

"Even if you are unsure about whether you want to supply schools, get GAP certified so you can explore the opportunity" – *Beth Crocker, Attorney and Director of Legal Affairs for the SC Dept. of Agriculture*

"It's never been easier to implement a farm food safety plan than right now because we are here to help" - *Weatherly Thomas, SC Dept. of Agriculture*

