

In Depth: Global Animal Partnership



GAP Case Studies

This section provides background on Global Animal Partnership (GAP) and an overview of GAP's:

- Standards
- Certification process
- Audit process
- Label use guidelines
- Marketing support
- Costs

GAP Background

Mission. Global Animal Partnership (GAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Austin, Texas, dedicated to “working collaboratively to facilitate and encourage continuous improvement and higher welfare in animal agriculture.” GAP maintains multi-tiered certification standards (“Levels” 1-5+) for each species. The more rigorous an operation’s welfare standards, the higher the level it may receive. Notably, GAP neither audits nor certifies farm businesses; it simply sets standards. It accredits independent certification companies to conduct audits and award GAP certifications on its behalf.

History. GAP began as the Animal Compassion Foundation, a program of Whole Foods Market® (WFM) created in 2005. In 2008, WFM renamed the program and spun off GAP as its own independent non-profit entity so that GAP could partner with other retailers and foodservice outlets. Notably, WFM and GAP are still significantly intertwined. First, they continue to share some management personnel, though GAP is looking to develop its next generation of leadership from outside WFM’s ranks. Second, in 2011, WFM established a procurement policy of buying only GAP-certified fresh meats. As a result, according to GAP, the vast majority of current GAP-certified farm and ranch businesses maintain GAP certification in order to sell (or continue to sell) fresh meats into the WFM supply chain. GAP is currently working to build relationships with other retailers and foodservice outlets nationally and internationally.



For a Range of Farm Businesses. GAP certifies individual farm businesses, producer groups and marketing groups. Notably, GAP provides certifications to “multi-tier operations” (where the entire operation is GAP-certified but holds different levels at the same time), “split operations” (where only part of the operation is GAP-certified) and “shared operations” (where two or more suppliers share one operation). GAP defines “operation” as a “farm, ranch, or other location that raises animals.” Ultimately, every “operation” along the supply chain of a GAP-certified product must be audited and certified.

Standards. Distinctively, GAP establishes standards but does not conduct audits or issue certifications. Farmers must apply to GAP-accredited independent verification companies for GAP-certification. Further, GAP maintains multi-tiered standards for each covered species, allowing farm operations to become certified at six different tiers, forthcoming (1-5 or 5+), depending on which species-specific tier of GAP standards their operations meet. For example, according to GAP:

Pigs raised in level 1 systems typically live in a permanent housing structure and are provided the space to express natural behavior. In level 2, they live in an enriched indoor environment. Pigs in level 3 systems have access to the outdoors. In level 4, they live continuously on pasture, with access to housing. In level 5 and level 5+, pigs live continuously outdoors on pasture and may only be housed during extreme weather conditions. At level 5+, pigs spend their lives on a single farm, and are processed at a mobile or on-farm slaughter facility.

Animals covered. GAP currently covers the following animals:

- Bison
- Beef cattle (not dairy)
- Broiler chickens
- Laying hens
- Meat goats (not dairy)
- Pigs
- Meat sheep
- Turkeys

Where Sold. As mentioned, WFM supported the development of GAP for its own producers and now purchases only GAP-certified fresh meats. As a result, the vast majority of farm businesses maintaining or seeking GAP-certification are doing so to participate in the WFM supply chain (directly or indirectly). GAP is actively developing new retail and foodservice partners, most recently announcing a partnership with Compass Group USA. To see a full list of where GAP products are sold, visit globalanimalpartnership.org.

Looking Forward. GAP will publish new standards for broiler chickens and beef cattle. Additionally, according to GAP, it will continue to broaden its relationships beyond WFM. Specifically, GAP intends to develop its next generation of leadership from non-WFM personnel and continue building new partnerships (beyond WFM) in the retail and foodservice industries.

GAP STANDARDS

Each certification program covered in this guide requires compliance with standards covering various aspects of farm animal husbandry. Below is an overview of how GAP develops its standards; which stages of life its standards cover; and its record-keeping requirements. To review all GAP standards, visit globalanimalpartnership.org/standards.

Standards Development

GAP uses a multi-stakeholder approach in developing (or revising) its standards. GAP seeks guidance and input from species-specific working groups, including producers and industry experts. Next, GAP creates draft standards, posts them for public comment; acknowledges comments and responds where appropriate; reviews comments and re-drafts where necessary; and submits draft standards to the Board of Directors for final review and approval. Once GAP finalizes a set of standards, it issues a Certification Manual to the accredited certification companies with audit-specific details for the new standards. Recently, GAP added a “field testing” component to their standard development process, where standards are trialed in the field prior to being finalized.

Stages of Life Covered

GAP’s standards cover breeding, hatching, weaning, on-farm life, transport and slaughter. GAP has its own standards for slaughter, based on American Meat Institute (AMI) guidelines and industry audit norms. However, GAP does not require that slaughter facilities undergo an additional audit showing compliance with GAP slaughter standards if the facility has a current third-party animal welfare audit that meets its criteria (NOTE: Not all third-party animal welfare audits of slaughter facilities are acceptable, so farms should check in with GAP to confirm a company would be accepted). Currently, GAP does not have slaughter standards for beef cattle, but is launching v2.0 of the beef standard later this year, which will include slaughter requirements.



Record-Keeping Requirements

GAP's record-keeping requirements are in place to allow auditors to review what has occurred on the farm in between audits and vary slightly across species. However, GAP generally requires:

A FARM PLAN REGARDING:

- Feeding and water
- Animal health (including preventative measures) and care of sick/injured animals)
- Routine husbandry practices
- Management of outdoor areas and pasture (if applicable)
- Emergency procedures (natural disasters, fire, water shut off, power failure, etc.)
- On-farm euthanasia
- Biosecurity policies for bringing animals onsite and for employees and visitors
- Environmental management (extreme weather, excessive humidity, etc.)

A RECORD OF:

- Traceability of animals from birth to slaughter; movement on and off farm
- Daily flock/herd incidences
- Any medication and treatment of animals
- Any mortality, morbidity and culling (including reason if known)
- All employee training
- Species specific animal measures (lameness, body condition, lesion scoring etc.)

Most of GAP's record-keeping requirements include things many farmers will already be doing, such as recording the dates of animal births, tracking medication use, and noting all animal sales or transfers. In addition to providing a record for auditors to review, record-keeping helps producers spot trends on their farms and operate their businesses effectively by measuring key outcomes. GAP accepts records in multiple formats, including but not limited to, recording sheets and cards, calendars, notebook and computer documents. They also have [species-specific templates](#) (both paper and electronic for use on tablets and smartphones) for farmers to help them get started.

Note: Requests for Deviation

A farm may apply to carry out a practice or use a substance that GAP standards generally do not permit. To do so, they submit a Deviation Request Form to GAP and the certifier. (While GAP-accredited certifiers make certification decisions, GAP must evaluate all deviation requests.)

GAP CERTIFICATION PROCESS

GAP certifies individual farms, producer groups and marketing groups. Every individual farm within the supply chain of a product must be certified in order for the final product to be marketed as GAP-certified. The certification process described below applies to individual farms. For more information about the certification process for individual farms and other entities, review the GAP Policy Manual.

STEP ONE

Review GAP Standards & Policies

- Read GAP standards, standard clarifications and the GAP Policy Manual to confirm your farm will comply with relevant standards and policies.
- Formally confirm that your slaughter facilities comply with relevant GAP and industry association standards and audit norms by supplying a copy of the third-party industry audit.

STEP TWO

Submit Application

- Contact a GAP-accredited certifier for a quote on audit costs, to schedule an audit and to inquire about the audit process.
- Submit an application for certification to the certifier.
- **Note:** Certifiers and GAP treat your business information as confidential.

STEP THREE

Facilitate an Audit

- Your GAP-accredited certifier will conduct an audit in accordance with GAP standards.
- Generally, an audit consists of one auditor spending one day on-site examining your facilities, animals and records.
- **Note:** Certifiers and GAP treat observations and information collected during the course of the audit as confidential.
- For more information on the audit process, see [next page](#).

STEP FOUR

Obtain Certification & Use Label

- The certifier will make a certification determination.
- Your operation will be rated at the highest tier on the scale (1-5+) for which all aspects of it qualify.
- Certification status is good for 15 months.
- **Note:** You may appeal certification decisions and submit formal complaints regarding other program concerns.

STEP FIVE

Recertification & Changes to Certification

- Every 15 months, you must apply for recertification and undertake a recertification audit.
- At any time, you may seek a level upgrade by providing the certifier relevant evidence (documents, photographs, statements).
- During the certification cycle, you are responsible for reporting to the certifier any changes that may potentially impact your certification. You must report these changes prior to the change going into effect; failure to report changes can result in suspension or revocation of certification.
- **Note:** Your certification may be suspended or terminated for various reasons, as set forth in the GAP Policy Manual Chapter 6.

GAP AUDIT PROCESS



Step 1
Facilities



Step 2
Animals



Step 3
Records

GAP-accredited certifiers conduct audits of facilities, animals and records to assess and potentially certify your operation's conformance with GAP standards and policies.

When Are Audits Required?

- **Initially:** A GAP-accredited certifier conducts an audit as part of the initial certification application process.
- **For recertification:** To maintain certification, you must undertake an audit between the 13th and 15th months of your certification periods. This 15-month time frame allows GAP-accredited auditors to audit farms in different seasons.
- **Unannounced:** GAP-certifiers do not conduct unannounced audits.

Who Conducts Audits?

- **Generally:** GAP does not conduct GAP-certification audits. Instead, it requires that farmers and ranchers seeking GAP certification apply to one of three independent, GAP-accredited certification companies to be audited and certified:

GLOBAL ANIMAL PARTNERSHIP CERTIFIERS



IMI Global
(USA & Canada)



Earth Claims, LLC
(USA & Canada)



AUS-Meat Limited
(Australia & New Zealand
– beef & sheep only)

- **Background & Training:** Certifiers must apply to GAP's Certifier Accreditation Program and become accredited by GAP before conducting any audits. Certifiers must submit an annual application for each species they perform audits for, which includes:
 - **Proof of an auditor and reviewer training program specific to the GAP program**
 - **Proof of an administrative team training specific to the GAP program**
 - **A list of auditors and reviewers that will be conducting GAP audits, complete with a description of each individuals relevant education and experience**
 - **All of their audit forms and related certification documentation for approval prior to use**

- **Impartiality:** According to GAP, the fact that they work with independent certifiers means that “farmers, consumers, and retailers alike can be confident that certifications are fair, accurate, and free of any conflict of interest.”

What Happens During an Audit?

The audit process varies somewhat depending on the type of entity being audited. However, all audits are based on GAP standards and GAP-approved audit forms. Generally, the audit process involves the following steps. (For more information about the audit and certification process for specific kinds of business entities, review GAP Policy Manual Chapters 4-6.)

Pre-audit: *Off-farm Activity*

- **First contact.** After you submit your application to the GAP-accredited certifier, an auditor will contact you to schedule a time for the audit. During that call, the auditor will explain the audit process and answer your related questions.
- **Note: Two choices.** If you are in the United States, you currently have two choices for GAP-accredited certifiers/auditors: EarthClaims LLC and IMI Global. These companies have similar audit processes but different fee structures, as discussed on page 47. Contact both companies to seek quotes before applying to one:

EarthClaims LLC: info@earthclaims.com or 202-596-5592

IMI Global: info@imiglobal.com or 303-895-3002

Audit: *On-farm Activity*

- **Discussion.** The auditor will meet with the individual responsible for the farm’s day-to-day management to discuss what the audit will entail and to address questions. The auditor may also meet with employees, transporters and catching crew members, depending upon the operation.
- **Observation of Facilities and Animals.** The auditor will observe the facilities and animals for compliance with relevant GAP standards.
- **Review of Records.** The auditor will review relevant records, examining farm policies and processes; ensuring a traceable “chain of custody” demonstrating that each species was born, raised on and transported between only GAP-certified operations; medical treatments; incidences of lameness; and other records listed on [page 51](#).
- **Exit Interview.** At the end of the audit, the auditor will meet with you to summarize his or her findings and provide you with an overview of observed nonconformances, if any. During this meeting, you have the opportunity to provide corrections, clarifications and additional information.
- **Overall Length.** The length of the audit varies depending on the size and complexity of the operation. According to GAP, most audits of individual operations take one day or less.



- **Note: Video & Technology Alternative.** In place of on-site observation by an auditor, a farm or ranch may submit video or other “electronic monitoring records” to enable certification review of limited, specific operational procedures, including:
 - **Catching (broiler chickens)** – **Herding (turkeys)**
 - **Crating (broiler chickens)** – **Loading (turkeys, pigs, beef cattle)**

For more information on video & technology, review GAP Policy Manual Chapter 4.

Post-Audit: *Follow-Up & Corrective Action*

- **Determination.** After the exit interview, the auditor submits the audit form to a separate reviewer, who makes one of three determinations:
 - 1) Your operation complies with GAP standards for a specific level and is certified accordingly;
 - 2) Your operation has correctable (non-“critical”) nonconformances;
 - 3) Your operation fails the audit because the auditor was denied entry to areas of the operation, there is a “critical” nonconformance or there are significant animal welfare concerns.
- **Corrective Action.** If the certifier deems that your operation has correctable nonconformances, it will provide you with a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) form identifying and describing them. You must complete and return the CAP within three weeks (to avoid the certification period being shortened), describing the steps you have taken or will take to correct the non-compliances and a schedule for doing so. The certifier will not grant certification until all compliance concerns identified on the CAP are corrected.
- **Denial.** If your farm is denied certification, you may reapply at any time.

Do GAP-Certifiers Audit Slaughter Facilities?

Generally, no, but some slaughter facilities will need to undergo an audit for GAP producers to use them. GAP’s standards allow GAP farms to use any slaughter facility so long as it has passed a third-party animal welfare audit that covers all the areas listed in GAP’s slaughter standards. GAP’s slaughter standards generally follow industry humane handling guidelines and industry-specific audit norms. For example, for pigs and “red meat species” at all levels, the animals must be:

- Stunned and rendered insensible prior to slaughter
- Slaughtered at a facility that has passed and holds a current annual third-party animal welfare audit using the American Meat Institute’s *Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines and Audit Guide (July 2013 edition)*, where the plant must pass all the core criteria and all secondary criteria, have an overall minimum score of 90%, and an effective stun/kill rate of at least 95% on the first attempt

For broiler chickens and turkeys at all levels, the birds must be:

- Stunned and rendered insensible prior to slaughter
- Slaughtered at a facility that has passed and holds a current third-party animal welfare audit, where the plant must pass all core criteria and have an overall minimum score of 90%

Core criteria include:

- At least 99% of the chickens must be properly stunned (on a sample of 500)
- No more than 1% may have broken or dislocated wings
- If hung live, both legs must be shackled (1 in 500 is a failure)
- No birds may have broken legs (1 in 500 is a failure)
- No more than 1% bruised thighs and drumsticks; and
- No birds may enter the scalding live

If the slaughter facility already has a third-party animal welfare audit, GAP accredited certifiers conduct a desk audit of those findings to ensure the facility is in line with GAP slaughter standards. All slaughter facilities used by GAP certified producers must be audited once every 15 months. Slaughter facilities must also provide a copy of their written in-plant segregation and traceability protocol outlining how GAP certified animals are kept segregated from non-certified animals and product.

Currently, GAP has no slaughter requirements for beef cattle operations. However, GAP has stated that it plans to publish v2.0 of their beef standard later this year, and that the standards will take a similar approach to those for pigs described above.

Additional Inspection Information

For additional information on the GAP audit process, review GAP Policy Manual Chapters 4-6, including the following figures:

Audit Process Flowchart	Chapter 4, Figure 1
Certification Process Overview	Chapter 4, Figure 2

GAP LABEL USE GUIDELINES



In 2019, GAP released brand new labels for use by GAP certified producers and businesses. GAP also released a brand book for partners and will be releasing a detailed labeling guide in fall of 2019.

Labeled Product Authorization Program – Approval Needed

GAP permits makers of retail-ready packaged items containing GAP-certified ingredients to join a Labeled Product Authorization (LPA) Program in which they pay a \$0.05 licensing fee (per case) to utilize the relevant GAP 5-tier certification seal. The party that will ultimately be marketing the product is the party responsible for the fee. The licensing fee is only charged to the end product, not at every point in a given supply chain. LPA program participants need to complete an application and receive program approval prior to using the GAP seal. The application is available online and includes the following information:

- Identification of retail-ready items
- Animal product ingredients in items
- Sources of animal product ingredients
- Manufacturers of items
- Chain of custody
- Sample labels for approval

To use the relevant GAP tier label on a bulk product—any product that is not retail-ready—the entire supply chain used to produce the bulk product must be GAP certified. There is no fee to use the GAP label on bulk products, but approval is required by GAP prior to submission to USDA-FSIS.

USDA-FSIS Label Approval

As described in the [USDA-FSIS](#) section, prior to use of the GAP label, approval by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) is required.

GAP MARKETING SUPPORT

Marketing Your Products

In order to build awareness for GAP certified products and the GAP label, GAP promotes producers, manufacturers, brands, retailers and foodservice partners currently labeling and selling GAP certified products on its website and through social networking platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn). GAP offers additional information for farms to include in sales presentations and will also attend sales calls with farmers as requested. In addition, GAP provides its partners with customized supply chain support. GAP's marketing focuses on the program's comprehensive approach to enforcement, requiring audits of every farm, every 15 months through different seasons, their GAP partner brands and farms, and the GAP certified products they produce.

Next Steps: Support to Producers

In 2020, GAP will support GAP certified partners by:

- Offering dedicated social media support and promotional activity. GAP is hoping to feature producer partners and market partner products through its website blog, monthly e-newsletters, and on all of its social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. GAP also encourage consumers to #MakeItGAP when they are shopping for products in the grocery store and frequently uses the hashtag on social media.
- Offering specific marketing features in its new "GAP Farm Life" program launched in 2019. This video, photo and blog series on Instagram and the GAP website provides consumers with a real-world view of GAP animal welfare standards in action on partner farms. GAP is actively looking to highlight farm and ranch partners and encourages its farmers and business partners to participate in the ongoing social media and blog marketing platform: #GAPFarmLife. Farms interested in more information can contact GAP at info@globalanimalpartnership.org.
- Providing partners with marketing collateral files for use on websites, at conferences/shows, social communication platforms etc. Farmers can request these marketing materials at info@globalanimalpartnership.org
- Providing supply chain and carcass utilization support for processors and raw material providers. GAP's business team offers to connect farmers to different parts of the supply chain, depending on their needs.
- Providing critical Producer Resources and Audit Prep tools on the GAP website. GAP recently launched tracking "smart sheets" with video webinars of how to use them in order to help producers successfully plan for their audits and continually stay in adherence to GAP standards. See the species-specific pages on <https://globalanimalpartnership.org/> for details.
- Providing a more comprehensive list of GAP certified products and participating retail outlets on GAP's new website.
- Providing partners with a password-protected information and application portal within which to communicate important updates with partners as well as a library of necessary documents for reference in one easy-to-access place (from the GAP website).

GAP COSTS

Just the Audit. Applicants pay the costs of the certification audit (initially and again every 15 months as part of recertification) directly to the certifier. The certifier pays \$100 from every audit to GAP. The applicant does not pay GAP any fees directly.

Fees Vary per Certifier. In the United States, there are two GAP-accredited independent verification companies you may apply to for GAP certification and auditing. Each company has its own fee structure:

	IMI GLOBAL	EARTHCLAIMS, LLC
Cost	Depends on species and complexity of operations. Example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beef: Initial audit of single operation = \$1750 (plus travel). Recertification audit = \$1,500 (plus travel).• Chicken with integrator: Initial audit of single operation = \$1450 (plus travel). Recertification audit = \$1000 (plus travel).	\$1,650 flat fee
Auditor Travel Costs Extra?	Yes	No
Group/Integrator Discounts Negotiable?	Yes	Yes

Transition Costs. Additionally, there may be costs associated with transitioning a farm to meet GAP standards in preparation for an application for certification.



COLD SPRING RANCH

North New Portland, Maine



Owner Gabe Clark and his herd of Angus cattle on Cold Spring Ranch.

Operation Profile: ~150 Angus stockers/year and ~100 pigs/year

Certification: GAP Tier 4

Background

Gabe Clark started Cold Spring Ranch in 2005, when he purchased a 240-acre former dairy farm in Maine to raise Angus stockers. In his first year, Gabe processed 24 calves. Today he and his wife, Molly, process around 150 cattle per year. A significant portion of their sales are to Whole Foods Market® (WFM) and other markets in the Portland/Freeport area. They also sell to restaurants, Bates College, Colby College and directly to the public. Gabe raises his cattle free-range throughout the year and provides a 100% grass diet. Pigs are pastured when weather permits and are supplemented with a non-GMO grain diet.

Getting Certified

Currently, Cold Spring Ranch beef and pork products are rated as Global Animal Partnership Tier 4, GAP's "pasture-centered" level. In 2007, WFM bought Wild Oats, where Gabe was selling his products. When WFM required that fresh meats be GAP-certified, Gabe sought and maintained GAP certification so that he could continue to sell to WFM.

Gabe said, "I didn't have to change a thing about my operation to participate." He just had to tweak methods of record keeping to formally document what he was already doing.

Gabe pays certification costs for his farm, the three farms from which he purchases calves, and his processor. He covers the other operations' costs because, as he sees it, he is "asking them to do more," in terms of GAP's record-keeping requirements. Currently, he pays his GAP certifiers and processor certifiers over \$10,000 per year.



A stunning panoramic view of Cold Spring Ranch.

GAP Certification Outcomes

Product Differentiation. In Gabe's view, America's agricultural economy has evolved in such a way that the beef cattle farmer has two business models to choose from and/or work toward: (1) high-volume (low-cost) production with low profit margins, or (2) low-volume (higher-cost) production with high profit margins. According to Gabe, the price premiums that drive the higher profit margins in the latter model have to be justified by some meaningful product differentiation.

He points to GAP standards as giving him negotiating power. "As GAP adds more requirements," he explains, "it gives me more safety in the markets that request them." Each new animal welfare standard is another hurdle that a competitor might not work to surmount.

Market Access. WFM is Cold Spring Ranch's single largest customer. Gabe appreciates the reliable sales outlet, though he notes that his ability to benefit from this market access is limited by the number of cattle he can produce given his land base.

10%+ Premiums. Gabe contracts with three Maine cow-calf operations for his GAP-certified cattle. He states that he pays them at least a 10% premium, part of which is to compensate them for their efforts complying with GAP's requirements. Over time, he has been able to transfer those costs to WFM. (Note: Farms that do not sell directly to WFM may still sell animals to farms that do, and benefit from related premiums. With that in mind, Gabe advises farms to contact their closest WFM to ask about which local farms sell directly to the store).

Supporting Local Economies. Gabe and his three calf providers "essentially joined forces to have enough acres to make enough animals to meet a market." As a result, he looks at WFM, GAP, and GAP premiums as mechanisms for supporting the local farmers he works with.

Improved Animal Welfare. According to Gabe, strict welfare standards—like early castration and late weaning—are "just good management" in that they reduce stress and trauma that can contribute to illness. Cold Spring Ranch was created with the belief that high-quality animal care, including a stress-free environment, natural diet and natural habitat, is crucial to success. GAP helps communicate these values to the customer.

Why Certify with GAP?

"You want to have your product be worth something? Differentiate it," advises Gabe. For producers who are already close to meeting GAP standards and could potentially develop a relationship with WFM or another farm that sells into WFM, "the barrier is just knowledge of opportunities and the potential benefits."

MARY'S FREE RANGE CHICKEN

PITMAN FARMS

Sanger, California



Operation Profile:

- Processes 500,000+ chickens per week
- Produces and processes non-certified turkeys & ducks

Certification: GAP Tiers 3, 4 & 5

Background

Mary's Free Range Chicken ("Mary's") is produced by Pitman Farms, a family-owned business in Sanger, California, that has been raising poultry for three generations. One generation ago, Pitman Farms was a traditional poultry operation. According to David Pitman, the family turned to higher welfare practices based on an interest in the links between animal welfare and food safety, increasing discomfort with the welfare of conventionally raised animals and rising consumer demand for higher welfare alternatives.

About 90% of the 500,000 chickens processed each week under the brand are GAP tier 3 certified. The remaining 10% are certified at Step levels 4 and 5. Chickens are sourced from Pitman Farms and other California-based GAP-certified farms, as well.

Getting Certified

Mary's received GAP certification in 2008. According to David, Mary's pursued certification because customers had started asking, "What certification are you using?", and David suspected that "the days were numbered" of companies confirming operational information to customers "by affidavit on company letterhead." The trend was arcing toward the need to "verify."

Mary's had already been selling its products to Whole Foods Market® (WFM) prior to GAP's launch, and was required to obtain GAP certification in order to continue doing so. David said that GAP's flat fee approach to audits made program participation palatable.

According to David, in order to become GAP-certified, Mary's had to make some changes to its operation. For example, it had to add hay bales and eucalyptus branches as enrichments to its chicken-houses. Mary's also had to create more infrastructure to supply shade and water outside. Finally, to comply with GAP's record-keeping requirements, Mary's had to start administering more detailed and varied paperwork.

David explains that Mary's also had to "gently" bring suppliers on board with GAP by (1) discussing the pros and cons of participation; (2) paying for retrofits and improvements needed to meet GAP standards (like adding enrichments and doors for outdoor access); (3) paying for initial and annual certification costs (Mary's pays approximately \$1,750 per audit per farm); and (4) offering them a premium. According to David, Mary's helps supplier farms prepare for audits on a continuing basis. Specifically, Mary's farm supervisors visit the farms to help ensure proper audit preparation and also conducts "pre-audits" to "give them a taste of it" before the official audit.

GAP Certification Outcomes

Increased Sales. Mary's started producing pasture-raised chicken in 2005 and had trouble selling the product. In 2008, they sought and received tier 5 certification, and sales doubled. It did so, David thinks, "because there was a simple scorecard system. Looking at a quick 5 or a quick 3, [consumers] can quickly understand the difference."

Product Differentiation. Mary's leverages its GAP certification in marketing. It uses the GAP logo on its products. Additionally, its website contains an "Animal Welfare" section dedicated to describing "What Makes Our Chicken Different?" The website includes a chart of select GAP standards for tier levels 3 through 5.

Premiums. David reports that Mary's Chicken pays a 10% premium to its GAP-certified supplier farms. This is, in part, to cover the increased effort and costs of record keeping, enrichments, and "free-range" conditions.

Trickle Down Animal Welfare. Mary's Chicken has expanded its operations and sources from multiple farms which then must be GAP-certified.

Why Certify with GAP?

David recalls feeling slightly overwhelmed the first time he read through all of GAP's welfare standards. However, he points to the following as what he believes to be benefits of pursuing GAP certification:

- Consumers are demanding more humane treatment of farm animals and “being third-party verified brings confidence to the consumer.”
- It is required by Whole Foods Market®.
- The audit has a flat fee per farm (Mary's certifier is EarthClaims LLC).
- “What I like about GAP is the fact that it's a scorecard.” In David's experience, the step levels help consumers differentiate among products and even between GAP-certified products.
- David suggests GAP may be increasingly relevant outside the WFM context. Two other retailers have purchased chicken from Mary's on the basis of it being GAP-certified.
- Finally, David speculates that even smaller farms targeting local markets (like those in California processing 500 pasture-raised chickens per week) might benefit from GAP certification to differentiate their products and explain their higher prices to consumers.



Owner David Pitman and his family on Pitman Farms.

RANCHO LLANO SECO

Chico, California



The Rancho's pigs next to their hoop barns.

Operation Profile:

- ≈ 4,500 pigs per year

Certification: GAP Tier 2

Background

Charles Thieriot (Charlie) is the Director of Operations for Llano Seco Meats and the sixth-generation owner of Rancho Llano Seco, a 17,000-acre Spanish-era land grant ranch established in 1841 and purchased by his ancestors in 1861. Rancho Llano Seco currently produces organic and conventional walnuts and almonds, organic and conventional row crops such as heirloom beans and ancient grains, grass-fed cattle, and responsibly raised pigs. The Rancho's pigs have been GAP-certified since 2013.

When Charlie was a child, his family engaged in intensive pig farming and sold their hogs into the commodity market but had little success competing against larger industrial hog farms. Twenty years later, hearing the requests of their chef friends for higher-quality pork produced in California, Charlie's parents made the decision to raise pigs with a focus on the quality of the pork and quality of life for the pigs. A few years after the project started, Charlie came home to California and began to help with the meat business, eventually taking it over with the help and consultation of his friend, Max Stepanian. Max had previously worked for Niman Ranch and understood the particularities of marketing humanely raised meat.



“GAP clearly differentiates Rancho Llano Seco in the marketplace, so consumers understand the added value of its products.”

At the time of Charlie's return, the farm was USDA Organic certified. Rancho Llano Seco's pigs struggled with parasites because of their open access to pasture, but USDA Organic standards prohibit the use of parasiticides. Charlie felt it was inhumane to raise pigs on natural footing without the administration of a parasiticide. With some hesitation, the family decided to let go of the Organic certification so they could continue to raise their pigs without confinement and with continual access to the outdoors.

Getting Certified

Charlie learned from Max that the further consumers get from the farm, the more important it is to provide assurances with verification that the company is keeping its promises. After letting go of its Organic certification, the Rancho still wanted to participate in a third-party audit program, as well as to maintain a certification for its pork that reflected its commitment to a high level of animal husbandry. Since Rancho Llano Seco was also raising GAP-certified cattle at the time of the transition, it was able to switch over its pork line to GAP-certified quickly and efficiently. (Despite giving its pigs outdoor access, Rancho Llano Seco is certified to GAP Tier 2. Charlie cites GAP's weaning and outdoor vegetative cover standards as the Rancho's key barriers to achieving a higher level).

As a result of the GAP certification, business thrived, ultimately causing the Rancho to grow out of its existing facility. To expand affordably while retaining many of the features intended to make the pigs comfortable, the family refurbished century-old barns on the property while adding some additional features and modern technologies like heat lamps, misters and fans. The goal is to let the animals root and socialize while keeping them warm when it's cold and cool when it's hot. In the process, they also stumbled on some old, forgotten husbandry practices that perform well in a confinement-free system.

Rancho Llano Seco maintains custody of its pigs at all times except when they are slaughtered in a small-scale abattoir approximately 20 minutes from the Rancho. The abattoir is small compared to a national scale, but much larger than what the ranch itself could maintain. This scale allows for more humane CO2 stunning before the animals are slaughtered.

GAP Certification Outcomes

Improved Animal Welfare. Rancho Llano Seco was able to continue being acknowledged for raising pigs more humanely after letting go of its USDA Organic certification. The farm is committed to raising its pigs in a manner that preserves and restores the Rancho's land. GAP certification allows the company to verify these commitments to consumers.

Market Access. Rancho Llano Seco markets its pork as certified by the Global Animal Partnership on its website, in promotional materials, on packaging and when dealing with purchasers. As a result, the company has been able to differentiate its products and sell to well-recognized restaurants and establishments while also maintaining an online market presence. Charlie attributes much of the Rancho's success to its GAP certification. Important customers are starting to make GAP certification a prerequisite for doing business with a vendor, and more retailers are also seeking it out.

Secure Pricing. Even though there are always internal and external forces trying to drive prices down, Charlie feels GAP certification garners him the premiums he needs to maintain the standards he and his family believe are necessary for humane animal husbandry. GAP clearly differentiates Rancho Llano Seco in the marketplace, so consumers understand the added value of its products.

Why Certify with GAP?

Rancho Llano Seco certified with Global Animal Partnership to reflect their strong commitment to raising pigs humanely while holistically stewarding their land.