



ANNUAL **REPORT** 2023

www.gapconnections.com





TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Director.....	3
Membership.....	4
Grower Training.....	5
Farmworker Training.....	11
GAPC Certification.....	14
Tools and Resources.....	18
Board of Directors.....	22
Financials.....	23

FROM THE DIRECTOR



In 2023, GAP Connections (GAPC) continued to look for opportunities to expand its reach. GAP Connections was able to continue to grow its GAPC Customized Farmworker Training program with a new cost-share program from the tobacco industry and received a grant from the Southern Risk Management Education Center with the University of Tennessee to offer labor workshops across the state of Tennessee to any farmer with labor-intensive crops. This work gave us a launch pad into other sectors and partnerships that we look forward to growing in 2024.

GAPC Customized Farmworker Training program continued to grow, training almost 800 farmworkers with interactive activities that provided hands-on training. We are most proud of the fact that all the participants in the training stated they enjoyed it and would like to go through it again. We look forward to reaching more farmworkers within other sectors in 2024.

GAPC continued to look for efficiencies in training, offering both online and in-person options with partners such as the Cooperative Extension Programs at land grant Universities and Labor Compliance Consultants. GAPC also offered additional webinars on topics such as workers' compensation and human trafficking available to members and non-members.

As GAPC looks to help other sectors in agriculture, we will continue to look for partnerships and opportunities that help target some of the known challenges within labor-intensive agricultural supply chains such as the programs we look to continue to pilot that encourage advanced labor management and worker housing practices.

As always, GAPC's successes are attributable to the staff, board of directors, advisory committees, stakeholders, and the thousands of growers and farmworkers who continue to adapt to the ever-changing societal and challenging agricultural landscape. We look forward to continuing to serve the agricultural community in 2024.



Jane Chadwell
President and Executive Director

MEMBERSHIP

YEAR 2023

GAP Connections (GAPC) is governed by a board of directors that consists of companies, growers, and grower associations. GAPC membership includes company, associate, and grower memberships. In 2023, GAPC had twelve regular company members, three associate members, and thousands of grower members. The GAPC Board of Directors decided to focus its grower membership on those GAPC Grower Members who had participated in a GAPC program or event within the last three years. GAPC defined these GAPC Grower Members as “active” members.

GAPC grower membership is open to all growers of labor-intensive crops. Active GAPC Grower Members from across the U.S. represent a variety of farm enterprises, both crops and livestock. The majority of our active GAPC Grower Member operations report multiple farm enterprises with the most common being tobacco, corn, soybeans, and wheat. Beyond the most common enterprises, twenty-one percent (21%) of GAPC Grower Member operations reported producing fruits and vegetables such as pumpkins, cucumbers, strawberries, watermelons, squash, and sweet potatoes.

The variety of enterprises represented on GAPC Grower Member operations allows GAPC programs, services, and impact to have a larger reach within agriculture. GAPC strives to be inclusive by collaborating with stakeholders throughout the supply chain to evolve and refine programs that serve all agriculture. GAPC welcomes collaboration with other organizations and sectors of agriculture that want to improve crop, environmental, and labor management practices, strive for sustainability, and respect the rights of farm laborers in their supported supply chain.

State	Active Growers
Florida	13
Georgia	85
Illinois	9
Indiana	37
Kentucky	1,835
Maryland	2
Missouri	6
North Carolina	1,267
Ohio	46
Pennsylvania	252
South Carolina	128
Tennessee	532
Virginia	278
West Virginia	1
Wisconsin	11
	4,502





GROWER TRAINING

One of the cornerstones of GAP Connections activities is providing educational opportunities for GAPC Grower Members to learn about laws and regulations, best practices, and other topics to help them be successful farm operators and managers. GAPC training events are throughout the year and combine both virtual and in-person opportunities.

GAPC Grower Members earn training credits for crop, environmental, and labor topics as they attend events. All training is recorded within the GAPC Grower System and can be viewed on the GAPC Grower Member's training report.



GAPC ANNUAL TRAINING

GAPC Annual Training provides growers the opportunity to learn from content experts such as Cooperative Extension Agronomists and Specialists and the U.S. Department of Labor, on crop, environmental, and labor best management practices. In 2023, 2,839 growers completed GAPC Annual Training by either attending an in-person training event or completing online training through the GAPC Grower System Dashboard. There were 46 GAPC Annual Training in-person events at Cooperative Extension offices, company meetings, and industry events in 2023 with a variety of crop, environmental, and labor topics presented by Cooperative Extension Specialists and GAPC Staff.

2023 GAPC Annual Training Participation by State

State	Total	In Person	Online
FL	9	6	3
GA	65	59	6
IL	3	3	0
IN	21	20	1
KY	1,056	838	218
MO	4	0	4
NC	926	738	188
OH	22	21	1
PA	140	139	1
SC	90	89	1
TN	328	261	67
VA	169	162	7
WVA	1	0	1
WI	5	5	0
Total	2,839	2,341	498

Extension Partners and Presenters:

- Dr. Andy Bailey, University of Kentucky
- Jeffrey Graybill, Penn State University
- William Hardee III, Clemson University
- Dr. J. Michael Moore, University of Georgia
- Dr. Robert Pearce, University of Kentucky
- Dr. T. David Reed, Virginia Tech
- Dr. Mitchell Richmond, University of Tennessee
- Dr. Matthew Vann, North Carolina State University



Dr. J Michael Moore, University of Georgia

“**2,839** growers across **14** states completed GAPC Annual Training in 2023

GAPC ANNUAL TRAINING CONTINUES TO GROW THE ONLINE TRAINING PLATFORM



GAPC provided grower members the opportunity to complete GAPC Annual Training online at their convenience through the GAPC Grower System Dashboard. Online training required choosing their topics from a series of crop, environmental, and labor courses and successfully completing a knowledge assessment. GAPC, working with Cooperative Extension Service, Labor Compliance Consultants, North Carolina Agriculture & Resource Economics, North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services - Emergency Programs Division, and Kentucky Safe - OSHA, was able to offer 59 training modules for GAPC Grower Members.

The most viewed online training topics included Cover Crops for Tobacco Production, Soil Test Interpretation and Fertilizer Reporting, Disposal of CPAs and CPA Containers, Farm Succession Basics, Tobacco Growers and Stress, and Field Sanitation. A complete list of online courses available to growers can be found on our website.

Thanks to the support from GAPC Company Members, GAPC Associate Members, and annual sponsors, GAPC Annual Training is offered each year at no cost to the growers. GAPC Annual Training provides a unique opportunity for sponsors to connect and engage with growers who are invested in the tobacco industry and are interested in producing a quality tobacco crop while protecting, sustaining, or enhancing the environment and ensuring the safety and rights of farm laborers.



2023 Annual Training Sponsors



LABOR MANAGEMENT WEBINARS

GAP Connections hosted two labor management webinars in 2023. The focus of the labor management webinars is to provide information and education on labor-related topics that are generally critical and current issues.

In April, GAPC hosted **“Understanding Workers’ Compensation”** for growers in Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The goal of the webinars was to help growers gain an understanding and acquire knowledge of Workers’ Compensation coverage under the Migrant and Season Worker Protection Act and Employee Rights under the H-2A program. Growers learned what to do before, when, and after an accident occurs on the farm. The relevant state departments of labor partnered with GAPC to provide content and resources.

In July, GAPC hosted the second labor management webinar titled **“Human Trafficking and Farmworkers: What does it Mean to a Grower?”** with presenters from the Polaris Project, the North Carolina Human Trafficking Commission, and the US Department of Labor. This webinar provided an in-depth look at Human Trafficking amongst the farmworker population.

Participants gained knowledge and understanding on:

- the legal and practical definitions of human trafficking, both sex and labor,
- how human trafficking looks amongst the farmworker population,
- how to recognize and report signs of Human Trafficking,
- the 3 P’s – prevention, protection, and partnerships, and
- what can a grower do?



LABOR CONSIDERATIONS FOR TENNESSEE FARMERS: STRATEGIES FOR SECURING AND MANAGING AGRICULTURAL LABOR

GAP Connections and the University of Tennessee Agricultural and Resource Economics partnered together on a project to address financial, legal, and human risks facing farmers and agribusinesses that have labor-intensive enterprises requiring hired agricultural labor. In February 2023, the project proposal was approved and \$49,000 in grant funds were awarded from the Southern Risk Management Education Center.

The goal of the project was to educate participants on the options available for sourcing agricultural labor, the costs associated with those options, the legal and regulatory requirements of those options, and best practices for managing labor and maintaining compliance with applicable agricultural labor laws and regulations.

The training curriculum focused on:

- Labor sourcing options and costs
- Agricultural laws and regulations
- H-2A Visa program: overview, cost, and legal entities
- Farm Labor Contractors (FLC's and H-2ACL's)
- Best practices for recordkeeping, communication, training, and housing
- Workplace injuries and workers' compensation considerations

Presenters included: the US Department of Labor, Wage & Hour Division, TN Department of Labor & Workforce Development, University of Tennessee Extension, and GAP Connections.



Pictured from left to right: Amy Rochkes, GAPC, Dr. Margarita Velandia, UT Extension, Jane Chadwell, GAPC, Lance Butler, TN Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Lisa Kelly, US Department of Labor Wage & Hour Division, and Kimberly McGahey, US Department of Labor Wage & Hour Division.

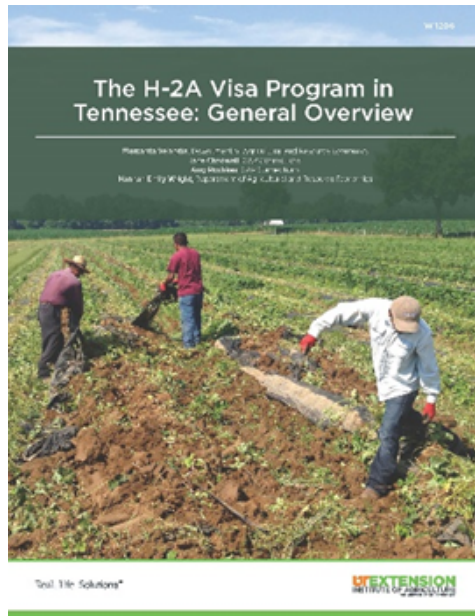
The highlight of each workshop was the grower panel. A panel of growers was assembled to share their experiences with hiring labor through either the H-2A visa program, migrant, local, or other channels. The panelists shared their success stories when hiring labor and honest feedback on what worked or didn't work. Attendees were able to ask questions of the panel to gain a better understanding of what to consider when hiring labor for the farm operation or agribusiness.

Grower panelists included:

- George McDonald, Catesa Farms
- Bart Gilmer, Falcon Ridge Farm
- Willis Jepson, Jepson Farms
- Donald Mitchell, Woodford Burley, LLC
- Darrell Varner, Woodford Burley, LLC
- Dianna Rosa, Tosh Farms



Workshops were held in Jonesboro, TN, Clarksville, TN, and Murfreesboro, TN in November. Lunch was sponsored at the workshops by the Tennessee Farm Bureau Federation.



As a part of the project, “The H-2A Visa Program in Tennessee: General Overview” publication was developed and published to provide a general overview of the H-2A visa program in Tennessee, specifically the use of the program in terms of certified workers; the geographic distribution of these workers; the certification process, businesses or firms that could help with the certification process; and program costs for employers of H-2A workers.



National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



FARMWORKER TRAINING

GAP Connections offers farmworker training for GAPC Grower Members and non-members. Training can be offered to individual farms and their workforce or a group of farms and their collective workforce. Training is customized to the operation and is offered in both English and Spanish.

Training includes a pre-consultation (number of workers, type of workers, machinery used, etc.), an individualized training card for each worker listing topics covered and date of training for each worker, and post-evaluation.



The choice of training topics is numerous and varied to offer a full and complete package for operations that may be looking for safety and compliance training to meet different requirements. Topics range from general farm safety, worker rights and expectations, laws and regulations, to specific topics such as food safety and crop integrity. The GAPC Farmworker Training is interactive, flexible, and complete. GAPC farmworker trainers are bilingual, bicultural, and experienced in dealing with different types of farm labor and operations. Trainers located in North Carolina, Tennessee, and California can travel to other states.

Standard Training Topics Include:

- General Farm Safety
- Safe Operation of Farm Equipment & Machinery
- Basic CPR and First Aid
- Heat Stress – Symptoms & Treatments
- Storage, Handling, Application & Disposal of Agrichemicals
- Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Recognition of Restricted Entry Interval (REI)
- Farm Emergency Plan & Emergency Response
- Sexual Harassment
- Human Trafficking Awareness & Prevention
- Food Safety
 - Health and Hygiene
- GAPC Certification
 - Worker Rights & Responsibilities
 - Worker Concern Helpline
- Prevention of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning (Fire-Cured Only)
- Green Tobacco Sickness – Symptoms & Treatments

“
778 farmworkers completed training across 5 states in 2023



NEW COST SHARE PROGRAM

GAPC began offering GAPC Grower Members who grow tobacco a unique opportunity to have GAPC Customized Farmworker Training at their farm through a new cost-share program. The cost-share program allows tobacco growers to schedule and have farmworker training on their farm at a fifty percent (50%) discount using sponsorship funds from the tobacco industry in 2023. Thanks to the generous sponsors from the tobacco industry (listed to the right) training was able to be offered to more farmworkers at a reduced cost to the growers. This was appreciated by both growers and workers on those farms who participated in the cost-share program.

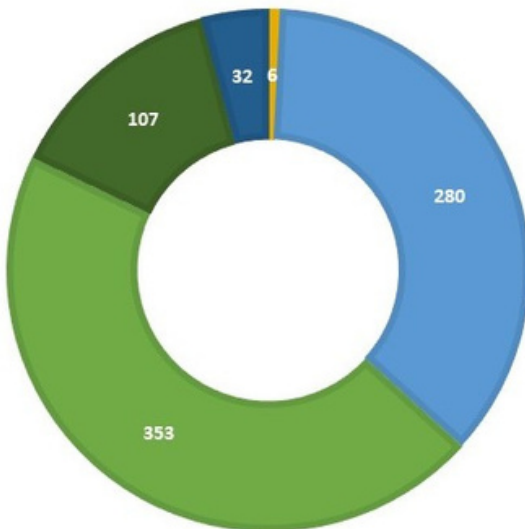


“I liked the way the training was presented. It was very entertaining and informative.”

-Farmworker in Kentucky

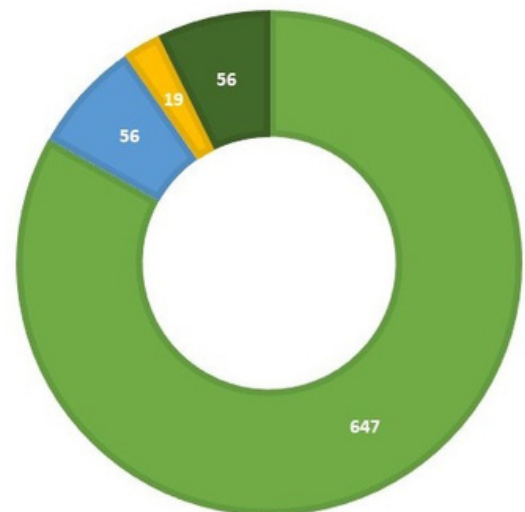
FARMWORKER TRAINING BY STATE

■ Georgia ■ Kentucky ■ North Carolina ■ Tennessee ■ Virginia



CLASSIFICATION OF WORKER TRAINED

■ H-2A Direct ■ H-2A Indirect ■ Local Direct ■ Owner or Direct Employer





GAPC CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Establishing a higher standard across the industry requires accountability and collaboration at every step. GAPC Certification Programs increase transparency and foster an environment that promotes sustainability, safety, 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.

In 2023 GAPC continued to offer Tobacco and Hemp Certifications to GAPC Grower Members. Participants have annual requirements that begin by applying, followed by obtaining GAPC Annual Training, completing the associated self-assessment, and participating in either a GAPC Certification Audit (Audit) or Certification Site Visit (Site Visit). Monitoring visits are paid for by the participant and are conducted by approved third party verification staff that have attended GAPC Verification Staff Training.





GAPC provides verification of Certification Standards at the farm level through a repeated two-year cycle for U.S. and/or International Tobacco Certification with a Certification Audit followed by a Site Visit in the next year and an annual Certification Audit for U.S. and/or International Hemp Certification.

An Audit covers all Critical and Additional Standards and includes worker interviews. A Site Visit covers all the Critical Standards and only includes worker interviews if labor is hired indirectly (i.e. use of a Farm Labor Contractor (FLC)), there were worker concerns in the previous year, or the grower requests them to be completed. To be GAPC Certified, growers must achieve and maintain 100 percent compliance with GAPC Critical Certification Standards, 75 percent of the GAPC Certification Additional Standards and adhere to the Monitoring Activity Code of Conduct and all other Terms and Conditions of GAPC Certification. Growers must keep and maintain the records listed in the GAPC Certification Compliance Guide and Required Record Checklist found on our website. These records will be reviewed by verification staff during the Monitoring visit.

Looking to highlight the efforts of GAPC Grower Members, GAPC developed two voluntary Pilot Programs - the GAPC Advanced Labor Certification and the GAPC Elevated Housing Classification. The GAPC Advanced Labor Certification allows growers who are participating in either the GAPC Tobacco or Hemp Certification Programs to demonstrate their compliance and adoption of Advanced Labor Practices. The GAPC Elevated Housing Classification helps to distinguish growers for their efforts in providing housing that goes above and beyond the legal requirements for employer-provided housing and is available to all GAPC Grower Members.



EVERY DECISION MATTERS

HOW YOU GROW MATTERS

When a grower chooses to become a GAPC Certified Grower they receive information from University Extension Specialists and Researchers that help produce healthier crops and sustain the ecosystem in which they grow.

HOW YOU WORK MATTERS

GAPC Certification helps growers understand and maintain compliance with critical labor laws and regulations, contributing to their sustainability as an operation by reducing the risks of citations, violations, and US DOL investigations. Workers on GAPC Certified Farms benefit from annual worker training on critical safety and worker rights topics, access to a GAPC Worker Concern Helpline that ensures they have a process to report concerns or grievances to, and employers who are informed and committed to following the legally required and best practices in payroll processes, worker housing, field sanitation, and safety.

ACCURATE DATA MATTERS

GAPC Certification provides third-party verified data and quantifiable results that allow companies to report on social responsibility and ESG goals, identify opportunities for improvement, and help share the story of how agriculture can provide for healthier soils, richer environments for wildlife, improved water quality, increased biodiversity and more to address national and global concerns.

HOW YOU SOURCE MATTERS

No longer is corporate responsibility limited to a corporation's manufacturing and organization walls. Buying from GAPC Certified Growers means confidently buying from growers who continually strive for a higher standard.



2023 GAPC TOBACCO CERTIFICATION BY NUMBERS



2,008

GAPC Certified Growers



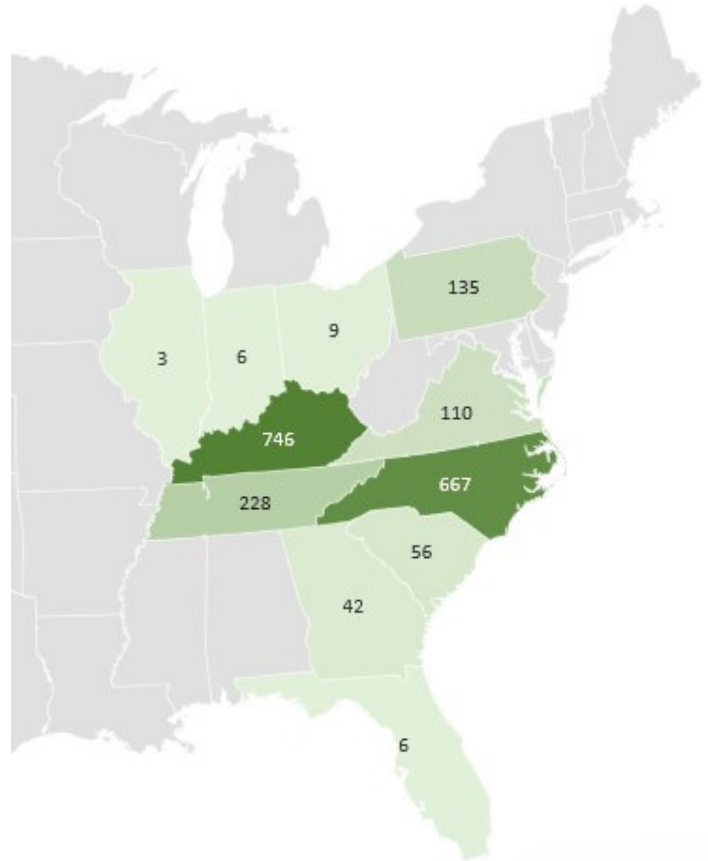
1,352

**Farming Operations with
GAPC Certified Growers**



2,800

Farmworkers Interviewed



“ **162,676** acres of tobacco grown by a GAPC Certified Tobacco Grower in 2023, which is **85%** of the tobacco grown that was harvested (USDA NASS)



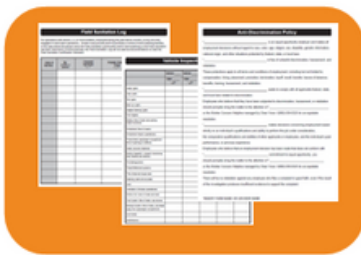
GAPC TOOLS AND RESOURCES

GAP Connections pursues simplicity, ease, and efficiency, to achieve maximum adoption of practices that improve agricultural products, better the conditions of those individuals engaged in agriculture, and sustain or enhance the environment agriculture, depends on and operates in. In this pursuit, GAPC is constantly evaluating and developing tools and resources to assist GAPC Grower Members in meeting the challenge of cultivating high-quality crops while keeping informed of the newest regulations and best practices.



GAPC Tools and Resources include:

- record templates to ease recordkeeping and policy creation,
- links and resources on laws and regulations including recent or proposed changes that may affect how they operate currently or in the future,
- posters and signs that are required or suggested for posting on agricultural operations,
- certification resources including guides that list all the required questions, verification methods, and requirements for GAPC Certification,
- training aids in English and Spanish such as DVDs, YouTube videos, tailgate training kits, etc. all designed to make training workers more efficient,
- free HR Legal Helpline through a partnership with Jackson Lewis to provide growers with a comprehensive risk management helpline service carefully designed to help manage workforce employment issues and reduce exposure to employment-related liability, and
- the GAPC Worker Concern Helpline is managed by ClearVoice a project of The Cahn Group which provides a way for farmworkers on a GAPC Grower Member's farm to ask for information or express concerns.



Records and
Templates



Labor Laws and
Regulations



GAPC Certification
Resources



Farmworker
Training Material



HR Grower
Helpline



Worker Concern
Helpline

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.

Between June 2018 and December 2023, the GAPC Helpline received 67 worker concerns, in addition to concerns raised by workers during GAPC Monitoring Activities.

Of those 67 worker concerns, 72 percent were in scope and resolved, 13 percent did not provide sufficient information or credible evidence, and 15 percent were out of scope and sent to an alternative resource. The number of concerns includes 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.

Types of Concerns Resolved:

- Request for information related to labor laws, medical resources, health insurance, etc.)
- Workplace accidents and workers' compensation
- Communication challenges (translation)
- Treatment
- Illegal fees
- Poor housing
- Payroll discrepancies
- Job abandonment

EDUCATING GROWERS ON DANGERS OF ILLEGAL FEES

Based on our experience this year with the complex issue of illegal fees, GAPC has created a training module on the topic to help growers understand what can be done to reduce the risk of illegal fees being collected from workers. All the cases that GAPC has been involved with involve workers charging workers which creates a challenge to growers as there is generally no evidence or documentation that can be provided, and it may have happened in their home country and not in the U.S. GAPC engaged with the H-2A labor associations commonly used by GAPC Members and the U.S. Department of Labor to discuss the issue and collect best practices and information for the training.

The training is available with online and in-person GAPC Annual Training. The training guide, templates, and other resource materials are available online to download or through the GAPC Store for purchase.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The GAPC Board of Directors 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 and suggest ways in which GAPC can better assist in fulfilling its mission. A full list of working committees can be found on GAPC's website.

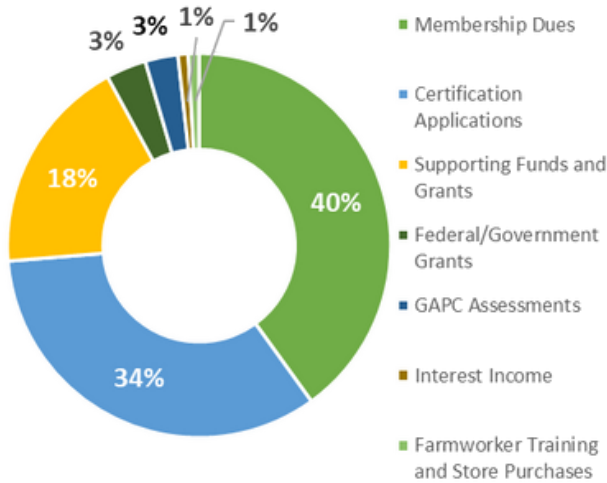
- Lily Bland, Pyxus Agriculture USA, LLC
- Christian Clifton, United Tobacco Company
- Jake Dunevant, JTI
- Frank Geovannello, Altria
- Abbi Graves, Hail and Cotton
- Randy Henderson, Swisher International
- Madison Hilton, R.J. Reynolds
- Brent Leggett, Flue Tobacco Grower
- Hunter Mason, Universal Leaf
- Donald Mitchell, Burley Tobacco Grower
- Robbie Parker, U.S. Tobacco Cooperative (Chairman)
- Al Pedigo, Council for Burley Tobacco (Vice Chairman)
- Jennie Salyer, Gallatin Redrying and Storage
- Dale Seay, Dark Tobacco Grower
- Yutai Stanley Tang, China Tobacco International (North America)
- Eric Walker, Burley Stabilization Cooperative
- Tim Yarbrough, Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina



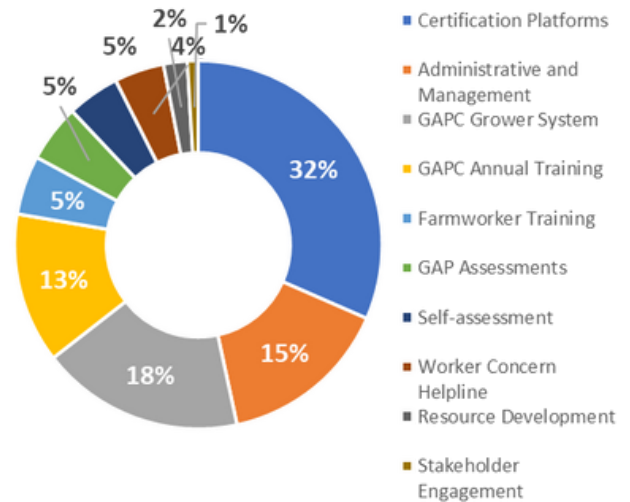
FINANCIALS

This summarized financial information is drawn from end of year financial statements for 2023 (audited financials are not complete). GAP Connections is a 501 (c) (5), non-profit agricultural membership organization which provides leadership for the adoption of agricultural standards and practices which produce a quality crop while protecting, sustaining, or enhancing the environment, ensure the safety and rights of farm laborers, and recognize those producers who are committed to a higher standard.

Income



Expenses



Income	
Membership Dues	380,496
Certification Applications	320,032
Supporting Funds and Grants	174,500
Federal/Government Grants	32,205
GAPC Assessments	26,300
Interest Income	8,135
Farmworker Training	5,386
Store Purchases	3,258
Total Income	\$950,312
Expenditures	
Certification Platforms	308,552
Administrative and Management	147,487
GAPC Grower System	174,698
GAPC Annual Training	129,210
Farmworker Training	50,871
GAP Assessments	49,491
Self-assessment	45,243
Worker Concern Helpline	42,814
Resource Development	20,277
Stakeholder Engagement	9,496
Total Expenditures	\$978,140



THANK YOU

As GAP Connections moves forward, our commitment to excellence remains strong. GAPC will continue to strive for excellence with our cycle of continuous evaluation, refinement, and improvement – finding balance and delivering the change needed for every stakeholder to succeed. We express our gratitude to our sponsors and stakeholders for their support.

CONTACT US



865.622.4606



info@gapconnections.com



www.gapconnections.com



2450 E.J. Chapman Drive Knoxville, TN 37996