



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

**2024 GAP Connections Assessments and
GAP Connections Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visits**

From

**GAP Connections
2450 E.J. Chapman Drive
Knoxville, TN 37996**

Date

August 22, 2023

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1. Summary and Background

GAP Connections (GAPC) is currently accepting proposals from monitoring firms to conduct GAP Connections Assessments and GAP Connections Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visits. GAPC has been conducting on-farm assessments since 2014 to assess growers' compliance with the GAPC Standards. In 2018, GAP Connections launched a Certification program for tobacco growers which involves on-farm monitoring visits for participating operations. In 2022, GAPC launched a Certification Program for hemp growers and in 2024, GAPC will launch a Housing Classification program open to any agricultural operation that houses farmworkers. All of GAPC's Programs are voluntary and are designed to distinguish those growers who are committed to a higher standard. Each monitoring visit will provide a score to the grower(s) which determines if they have achieved Certification for their operation and/or Classification for their housing.

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to solicit proposals from various candidate organizations, conduct a fair and extensive evaluation based on criteria listed herein, and select the candidates who best represents the direction GAPC and industry wishes to go.

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, GAP 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.

GAP Connections:

- Serves as a clearinghouse between producers and purchasers
- Coordinates and facilitates industry initiatives including the adoption and implementation of one set of agricultural standards
- Streamlines processes for farmers and the companies that purchase their products
- Connects farmers with training and resources to ensure compliance
- Administrates the GAP Connections Certification Program

2. Proposal Guidelines

This Request for Proposal represents the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until **October 27, 2023**. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative of the company submitting the proposal.

If the organization submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, all costs included in the proposals must be all-inclusive to include any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposals which call for outsourcing or contracting work must include the name and description of the organizations being contracted.

All costs and fees must include an explanation and/or description.

Contract terms and conditions will be as set forth in GAPC's Standard License & Auditor Participation Agreement. A copy the GAPC Standard License & Auditor Participation is available upon request. Monitoring firms will not be able to participate in training or monitoring activities without a fully executed GAPC Standard License & Auditor Participation agreement on file for the current year.

Those interested in proposing should review the following documents found online at www.gapconnections.com.

- GAPC Approval and Oversight for Monitoring Firms
- GAPC Monitoring Protocols and Policies
- GAPC Code of Conduct for GAPC Approved Verification Staff

3. Purpose and Description

Purpose

GAPC is seeking to approve multiple monitoring firms to (1) conduct an estimated 100 or less GAPC assessments and (2) be listed as approved monitoring firms for GAPC Certification and Classification Monitoring Visits, from which GAPC Grower Members will select their firm, and pay for a GAPC Certification or Classification Monitoring Visit. Only those firms listed on the GAPC approved list will be able to conduct a GAPC Certification or Classification Monitoring Visit.

The GAPC Assessments' purpose is to provide an accurate assessment of practices on each individual farm to be reported to member companies. The 2024 assessment program will be a continuation of the previous ten year's efforts.

The GAPC Certification Audits' purpose is to provide a thorough audit of the farming operation's crop, environmental, and labor management practices verifying if practices adhere to the GAPC Certification Standards. The Audit will be scored, and the score will determine if the grower(s) have achieved Certification. There are currently 400+ GAPC Certified Growers that will be continuing their Certification Cycle with an Audit in 2024, as well as new growers that will be applying to the program.

The GAPC Certification Site Visits' purpose is to provide a revisit to verify that the critical crop, environmental, and labor standards are still being followed by a Certified grower and to revisit items that may have been remediated in 2023. The Site Visit will be scored, and the score will determine if the grower(s) has maintained Certification. There are currently 950+ GAPC Certified Growers that will need to be visited through a Site Visit in 2024.

The GAPC Advanced Labor Certifications' purpose is to verify objective evidence, records, and procedures of those GAPC Grower Members who have applied and been approved to participate in the GAPC Advanced Labor Certification Program. A grower becomes eligible for this add-on option if they have achieved one of the following: GAPC Tobacco International Certification with 100% of Additional Labor Standards or GAPC Hemp International Certification with 100% of Additional Labor Standards.

The Elevated Housing Classifications’ purpose is to measure compliance with GAPC Elevated Housing Standards by reviewing objective evidence, records, and procedures of those GAPC Grower Members who have applied and been approved to participate in the GAPC Elevated Housing Program. This classification can be completed as a standalone visit by an operation providing housing or as an add-on to GAPC Tobacco or Hemp Certification Monitoring Visit.

Description

The table below shows the details of each type of on-farm visits.

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visit
Cost to Monitoring Firm	\$0	\$600 per user (for firms that conduct 100 or less monitoring visits) \$800 per user (for firms that conduct 101-200 monitoring visits) \$1,000 per user (for firms that conduct 201+ monitoring visits)
Number of Visits	< 100	Unknown at this time but an estimated 400+ Certification Audits (new applications and those continuing their Certification Cycle), there are 950+ Certified Growers that will need a Site Visit in 2024. The GAPC Certification Program is a 2-year program with monitoring each year. The GAPC Housing Classification Program will require a visit every other year. We predict to have at least 3,000 growers involved across GAPC Programs by 2025.
Grower List	Provided by GAPC by April 30	Growers will be selecting their monitoring firm at time of application. A finalized list of growers will be available on the GAPC Scheduling tool by April 30. After April 30 growers who contact a monitoring firm are at the discretion of the monitoring firm (i.e. scheduling and costs).
Payment	Monitoring firm will invoice GAPC and receive payment based on contract terms.	Monitoring firm will invoice grower and receive payment directly from grower.
Notification	GAPC will notify growers of assessment via letter and provide the grower with the assigned assessor’s name and number.	Growers will self-select to participate in a GAPC Program and will select their monitoring firm at time of application. GAPC will share each monitoring firm’s list with them by April 30.

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visit
Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring firm will contact growers and schedule the assessments. All scheduling will allow for at least a one (1) week (two (2) weeks preferred) notice to growers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring firm will be notified by GAPC that the grower has chosen to have a Certification or Classification visit, monitoring firm will contact the grower, tentatively schedule the monitoring visit, and then confirm the schedule date. All scheduling notices are decided by the monitoring firm terms and conditions.
Verification Methods	Record Review Visual Inspection Grower Interview Worker Interview Picture	Record Review Visual Inspection Grower Interview Worker Interview Picture
Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduling will be reported through GAPC's Auditor Schedule Tool (accessible with a login and password). GAPC will share scheduling with member companies There will be weekly, if not daily, coordination with GAPC staff and GAPC Member representatives regarding scheduling issues Auditors will report daily any changes or updates to scheduling and provide any notes for GAPC and companies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring Staff will login into GAPC Systems and report these two touch points. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Date of Initial Contact Monitoring Visit Date Monitoring Staff will login into GAPC Systems and report the status of the visit. * <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Scheduled In Remediation Completed Only GAPC should mark a grower as Cancelled. * GAPC will report the following form and worker interview statuses to monitoring staff through GAPC system: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Not Complete GAPC will report the following Certification or Classification statuses to auditors through GAPC system: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Certified/Classified Not Certified In Remediation

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visit
Worker Interviews	<p>If workers are available, verification staff will complete worker interviews of 20% of the total workforce reported by grower. Minimum of two worker interviews and maximum of 10 worker interviews for those operations with more than one worker hired.</p>	<p>The protocols for worker interviews conducted during a GAPC Certification or Classification Monitoring Visit can be found in the GAPC Monitoring Protocols and Policies (available online). An overview is provided in Section 4 of this document.</p> <p>Certification Audits: Worker interviews are required. The only exception that allows a Certification Audit to not include worker interviews is if the GAPC Grower Member uses immediate family labor AND completes the Immediate Family Labor Confirmation in the Terms and Conditions, the employee interviews are waived. This will be indicated in GAPC’s scheduling tool for monitoring staff.</p> <p>Certification Site Visits: Worker interviews are not conducted unless (1) there was an issue in the previous year that requires worker interviews to be conducted, (2) the grower hires indirect labor, or (3) if the grower requests interviews at time of application. This will be indicated in GAPC’s scheduling tool for monitoring staff.</p> <p>Advanced Labor Add On: Worker interviews are required.</p> <p>Elevated Housing: Worker interviews are required.</p>
Remediation	<p>Remediation will be directed by GAPC and paid for by GAPC or member companies</p>	<p>Remediation will be done according to GAPC Certification remediation protocols found in the GAPC Monitoring Protocols and Policies (available online). Remediation is paid for by the grower and must be completed within 30 days of the monitoring visit report submission date.</p>
Platforms	<p>Questionnaire will be completed on an iOS mobile device (iPad).</p>	<p>Questionnaire will be completed on an iOS mobile device (iPad).</p>

	GAPC Assessment	GAPC Certification and/or Classification Monitoring Visit
Deliverables for Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled assessment at least two weeks prior to date. • Completed grower assessment forms for each farm visited, submitted electronically according to GAPC protocol. • Completed worker interviews when workers are present and worker interviews are requested by GAPC, submitted electronically according to GAPC protocol. • A summary report, with summaries of results to be signed by grower and assessor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed Monitoring Visit Confirmation form that is to be left on the farm, signed by the grower and auditor. • Completed Monitoring Visit questionnaire for each farm visited, submitted electronically to GAPC for review within 72 hours of the date of the visit. • Completed worker interviews when worker interviews are required, submitted electronically to GAPC for review within 72 hours of the date of the visit. • Completed remediation form submitted within 72 hours of visit or receipt of documents from grower. Remediation must be completed within 30 days from date the audit or site visit report was submitted.

4. Requirements of Monitoring Staff

- **In-person training:** All verification staff and reviewers will attend in-person training to take place at GAP Connections offices or nearby meeting locations in Knoxville, TN. The training will consist of two to three days of classroom training discussing the monitoring tools, monitoring visit scenarios, monitoring visit protocols and policies, and utilizing the scheduling tool. There will be an exit exam at the end of the training. Length of required training is dependent on experience. Trainers and materials will be provided by GAPC. All other arrangements and cost of in-person training will be at the expense of the monitoring firm.
- **Technology:** All verification staff must have an iPad or other similar tablet with iOS operating systems to conduct assessments or monitoring visits and must have a hot-spot or access to internet nightly while conducting assessments or monitoring visits.
- **GAPC Protocols:** Monitoring firm and all the monitoring firm's employees and contractors working in GAPC monitoring activities will be asked for strict adherence to protocols, processes, and procedures found in the GAPC Monitoring Protocols and Policies and GAPC Monitoring Processes and Procedures available online and discussed during training. If there is a verification staff member who does not follow GAPC protocols and/or the Code of Conduct, they will be addressed through the Review and Dismissal Policy. GAPC will provide two notifications and then will ask that the verification staff member be removed and replaced with another qualified individual. The replacement verification staff must attend training with GAPC staff.
- **Auditor Conduct:** Verification staff must agree to and sign GAPC's Verification Staff Code of Conduct. (See attached document) If verification staff violates Verification Staff Code of Conduct, they can be removed from the approved list. Violations or non-compliance with Code of Conduct or Monitoring Protocols will be handled in the following manner:

- **First notice:** Verification Staff is issued a written notification detailing violations and non-compliance. Monitoring Firm will be required to provide Corrective Action Plan (CAP) within five business days of notification outlining violation and how it will be corrected in the future.
- **Second notice:** Verification Staff is placed on probation and is issued a final written warning detailing violations and non-compliance that states any further violations or non-compliance will result in the verification staff being removed from the approved list of GAPC Certification auditors. A meeting/conference will be scheduled with GAPC staff, the verification staff, and monitoring firm supervisor if needed. Monitoring Firm will be required to provide Corrective Action Plan (CAP) within three business days of notification outlining violation and how it will be corrected in the future.
- **Third notice:** Verification Staff will be reviewed by the Monitoring Advisory Committee. The verification staff, monitoring firm supervisor, GAPC staff, and Monitoring Advisory Committee will meet and discuss violations. Committee will discuss and decide on the removal of the auditor from GAPC approved auditor list.
- **Confidentiality:** Monitoring firm and all the monitoring firm's employees and contractors will be asked to follow GAPC's confidentiality agreement and maintain any and all documents containing personal or financial information of growers or employees confidential.
- **Scheduling tool:** Verification staff must use the GAPC scheduling tool to indicate contact date and monitoring visit date with GAPC. The tool will also be used to store comments surrounding the scheduling of visits to indicate if there are any issues reaching the grower or with the visit itself. **GAPC will require strict use of this tool.** If auditors do not use tool GAPC will provide three notifications and then will ask that the verification staff be removed and replaced with another qualified individual. The replacement verification staff must attend training with GAPC staff.
- **Worker Interviews:** It is the verification staff's responsibility to notify the grower if worker interviews are required and to ensure that workers will be accessible at time of visit. Visits should not be scheduled if worker interviews are required, and workers are not present. Below is a description of the protocols for worker interviews conducted during a GAPC Certification or Classification Monitoring Visit (for further guidance please review the GAPC Certification and Classification Monitoring Protocols and Policies available online at www.gapconnections.com).
 - Interview, at minimum, twenty percent (20%) of the grower's hired workforce in commodity chosen for Certification (excluding immediate family), with a minimum of two worker interviews for those operations with more than one worker and a maximum of ten worker interviews for those operations with 50 or more workers.
 - Ensure that workers interviews are representative of ALL labor sources used on the farm, even if conducting additional interviews to provide interviews from all sources (i.e. local, migrant, H-2A, FLC, etc.)
 - Select workers randomly and in such a way to keep their identity confidential from grower.
 - Ensure the grower is not present (visible or within a distance that would allow them to overhear the conversation) for worker interviews.
 - Conduct more interviews if deemed necessary to verify practices, clarify information, or collect more evidence on concerns or allegations raised by workers. If any of the answers are answered negatively or if there are allegations made by workers that result in concerns for the health,

safety, or working environment and conditions of farmworkers additional workers should be interviewed to ascertain the validity of the allegations.

- **Remediation:** Remediation for Monitoring Visits will be a mixture of document review and on farm visits dependent upon what questions the grower missed during the initial visit. All remediation will be completed by the monitoring firm, which includes but is not limited to scheduling, knowledge of what is to be remediated, and completion of the visit or document review in a reasonable timeframe specified by GAPC (30 days from the date the monitoring visit report was submitted). Monitoring Firms will be required to have a designated individual whose sole role is to manage remediation if the firm has more than 250 monitoring visits.

5. Request for Proposal and Project Timeline

Request for Proposal Timeline:

All proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than **October 27, 2023**. If additional information or discussions are needed with any proposing firms during this time period, the firm(s) will be notified.

The approved firm(s) will be expected to sign GAPC's Standard License of Auditor Participation Agreement within fifteen (15) days after notification from GAPC.

Project Timeline:

- GAPC will notify all monitoring firms of the Board's decision to approve or not by December 1st. In the case of the Board not approving a monitoring firm's proposal, feedback on the decision will be provided.
- All verification staff and reviewers will attend in-person GAPC Monitoring Staff training to take place at GAPC offices or nearby meeting locations in Knoxville, TN. GAPC Monitoring Staff Training will be offered once during late June or early July. Reviewers will be required to attend an in-person training specific for reviewers in conjunction with the monitoring firm starting on-farm visits. All verification staff and reviewers must complete training prior to being considered an approved verification staff or reviewer and work commencing on GAPC monitoring activities. Training dates will be announced at least 30 days in advance. Each training will consist of two (2) days with an additional third (3) day of training for verification staff who have not previously conducted GAPC monitoring activities.
- All verification staff must coordinate with GAPC staff to arrange shadow visits be completed if requested through the season.
- On-farm assessments and monitoring visits will begin in late June or early July and all initial visits must be completed by October 1. Finalized reports including remediation must be completed by October 31.
- Monitoring visits will be scheduled in accordance with the crop season, coastal flue areas should be conducted first then moving into burley and dark regions.
- Monitoring visits will be assigned after firms have been approved and growers have chosen their monitoring firms (after April 30).

6. Costs

All proposals must include proposed costs to complete the tasks described in the project description. All costs and fees must be clearly described in each proposal. If pricing is not all-inclusive, there must be a limit (i.e. cap) on any additional fees. Costs should include the cost of conducting assessments and monitoring visits, training verification staff and reviewers, preparing reports and clearly explain any fees or other costs associated with assessments and/or monitoring visits.

Assessments

Costs of assessments should be submitted on a per assessment basis, and unless otherwise specified will be assumed to include all costs of scheduling and visiting the farms. Payment will only be made for completed assessments (defined as completed grower assessment and worker interviews (if conducted), reviewed, and approved in GAPC's database), unless otherwise stated in the provider proposal.

Certification and Classification Monitoring Visits

Costs of monitoring visits should be submitted for these categories:

Grower selects firm PRIOR to April 30	Grower selects firm AFTER April 30
Tobacco Audit with worker interviews	Tobacco Audit with worker interviews
Tobacco Audit without worker interviews	Tobacco Audit without worker interviews
Tobacco Site Visit with worker interviews	Tobacco Site Visit with worker interviews
Tobacco Site Visit without worker interviews	Tobacco Site Visit without worker interviews
Hemp Audit with worker interviews	Hemp Audit with worker interviews
Hemp Audit without worker interviews	Hemp Audit without worker interviews
Advanced Labor Add-On	Advanced Labor Add-On
Elevated Housing Classification	Elevated Housing Classification
Elevated Housing Classification Add-On	Elevated Housing Classification Add-On
Remediation through document review (no on-farm visit)	Remediation through document review (no on-farm visit)
Remediation through an on-farm visit	Remediation through an on-farm visit
Cost when included with other certification programs that may be offered by firm (i.e. organic certification, Global GAP, etc.)	Cost when included with other certification programs that may be offered by firm (i.e. organic certification, Global GAP, etc.)
CAP on expenses if price is not all-inclusive	CAP on expenses if price is not all-inclusive

7. Bidder Qualifications

Firms should provide the following items as part of their proposal for consideration:

- Description of experience in developing, administering, and facilitating on-farm and/or Good Agricultural Practices assessments and Certification Programs.
- Examples of GAP assessments or certification monitoring visits conducted by or with your organization.
- Testimonials or references from past clients

- Anticipated resources you will assign to this project (total number, role, title, experience)
- Project management methodology
- List of verification staff that will be conducting monitoring visits on behalf of GAP Connections, along with their resume/past experience.
- List of reviewers that will be reviewing reports submitted by verification staff along with their resume and relevant past experience.
- Customer service aspects that the monitoring firm offers such as advance scheduling and pre-visit reminders or calls to prepare
- Contingency plan and alternate persons identified should monitoring firm manager or verification staff should become ill or otherwise become unable or ineligible to perform duties for GAPC.

Qualifications of verification staff:

- Familiarity with commercial U.S. agricultural practices required. Familiarity with tobacco, hemp, and/or farmworker housing very desirable.
- Bilingual in Spanish, or in-person translation available if conducting worker interviews.
- Experience as verification staff of agricultural and labor practices.
- Verification Staff must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older to be considered.

Qualifications of reviewers:

- Attention to detail.
- Ability to multi-task and meet deadlines.
- Familiarity with agriculture, familiarity with tobacco production very desirable.
- Strong communication skills.
- Reviewers must be at least eighteen (18) years of age or older to be considered.

8. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

GAPC will evaluate all proposals based on the following criteria. To ensure consideration for this Request for Proposal, your proposal should be complete and include all of the following criteria:

- *Overall proposal suitability:* Proposed solution(s) must meet the scope and needs included herein and be presented in a clear and organized manner
- *Organizational Experience:* Bidders will be evaluated on their experience and the experience of their auditors as it pertains to the scope of this project
- *Previous work:* Bidders will be evaluated on examples of their work pertaining to certification and remediation programs as well as client testimonials and references. In addition, any previous work done for GAPC and the customer service provided will also be taken into consideration
- *Value and cost:* Bidders will be evaluated on the cost of their solution(s) based on the work to be performed in accordance with the scope of this project
- ***Technical expertise and experience:* Bidders must provide descriptions and documentation of staff technical expertise and experience**

9. Required Information

(If exact costs cannot be listed, please list as “costs not to exceed \$XXX”)

	All expenses included pricing	Cost plus expenses (if applicable)	Combination pricing (if applicable)
GAPC Assessment			
Certification Tobacco Audit with worker interviews			
Certification Tobacco Audit without worker interviews			
Certification Tobacco Site Visit with worker interviews			
Certification Tobacco Site Visit without worker interviews			
Certification Hemp Audit with worker interviews			
Certification Hemp Audit without worker interviews			
Advanced Labor Add-On to Hemp or Tobacco Visit			
Elevated Housing Classification with worker interviews			
Elevated Housing Classification Add-On to Hemp or Tobacco Visit			
Remediation through documentation review (no on-farm visit)			
Remediation through an on-farm visit			

If there are to be other pricing options offered, please include them in the proposal.

In addition to what is asked in this requesting document please include your answers to the following within your proposal:

1. How and who will be handling the phone calls from growers who have questions or concerns about their Monitoring Visit? What will be the hours of operation that someone will be available to take calls and how does your firm plan to handle voicemails from growers?
2. How and who will be handling the scheduling of monitoring visits to ensure at least a two weeks' notice is given to growers?
3. How will your firm handle remediation through document review within 30 days of the date the monitoring visit report is submitted?
4. How will your firm handle remediation through an on-site visit within 30 days of the date the monitoring visit report is submitted?
5. How will your firm handle invoicing growers? Pre or post visit, how will they receive a copy of the invoice, (mail, email, copy at time of audit, etc.) and the process of updating the schedule tool to mark monitoring visits as paid?
6. How will verification staff be addressed when GAPC provides notification of violations against GAPC Policies and Procedures?
7. Will there be replacement verification staff available to replace verification staff that have violated auditor protocols?

Each firm must submit their proposal to the address below by **October 27, 2023, at 5 p.m. EST:**

GAP Connections
2450 E.J. Chapman Drive
Knoxville, TN 37996

Or

lwalker@gapconnections.com