

Meeting Export Requirements for the NY Apple Industry through EUREPGAP Certification Training

Project Leader(s):

Juliet Carroll, NYS IPM Program, Cornell University, Geneva
Deborah Breth, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), Lake Ontario Fruit Program, Albion
Michael Fargione, CCE, Hudson Valley Commercial Fruit Program, Highland
Kevin Iungerman, CCE, Northeastern New York Commercial Fruit Program, Ballston Spa
William Jordan, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Albany

Cooperator(s):

Elizabeth Bihn, Cornell Good Agricultural Practices Program, Department of Food Science
Alison DeMarree, CCE, Lake Ontario Fruit Program, Newark
Andrew Landers, Department of Entomology, Geneva
Randall Paddock, Lake Ontario Fruit Inc.

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Project location(s): This demonstration and education project was located in the apple-growing regions of New York State. Distribution of the EUREPGAP Audit Workbook is restricted to apple growers in New York State.

Abstract:

Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE), the NYS Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM), and NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) developed the EUREPGAP Audit Workbook for NY Apple Growers, conducted EUREPGAP certification training workshops, engaged EUREPGAP auditors in the training sessions, and reached 126 members of the NYS apple industry with the outcome to date that 40 apple growers in NY have certified their crop to the EUREPGAP standard required by the European Union apple markets. The objectives of EUREPGAP are to ensure food safety, environmental protection, and worker health, safety and welfare in the production of fresh produce. The European export market is worth \$13 M to the NY apple industry.

Background and justification:

Issue - New York apples are prized in England and Europe where imports exceed 700,000 bushels of Empire, McIntosh, and Gala. At a value to New York's economy of 18.00 dollars per bushel, this amounts to 13 million dollars. Recently, European retailers have required all apple growers importing into the European Union (EU) to certify their farms under EUREPGAP. The EUREPGAP protocol has 210 control points that apple growers are audited against to pass

certification. Growers must pay for yearly audits, maintain detailed records, and demonstrate compliance with requirements that, in a few cases, exceed those of NY and the USA. New York apples are stored, packed, shipped, and brokered by several NY packinghouses, and each has taken a different approach in addressing EUREPGAP certification. The NY Apple Association estimates almost half of NY apple growers will need to meet EUREPGAP standards, including 70 percent of Empire, 20 percent of McIntosh, and 40 percent of Gala acreages. In 2002 and 2003 EUREPGAP certification was voluntary. However, New York's 2004 apple crop must be EUREPGAP certified to qualify for the EU export market. Growers of Empire apples, especially hard hit, have threatened to 'push-out' their orchards, at the expense of the orchard agro-ecosystem and the NY economy. Because the EUREPGAP control points principally address integrated fruit production, the NYS IPM Program was pivotal in coordinating the statewide project addressing apple EUREPGAP certification.

Objectives:

1. Develop educational materials in print and electronic versions for NY apple growers to facilitate EUREPGAP certification – CCE & IPM.
2. Contact EUREPGAP-approved auditing firms to discuss audit pricing for NY apple growers – NYSDAM.
3. Conduct EUREPGAP certification audit workshops in the major apple-growing regions of NY – CCE, IPM, NYSDAM.
4. Provide updates to apple growers of changes in EUREPGAP Control Points and Compliance Criteria – CCE & IPM.

Procedures:

Response - At an April 2003 meeting organized by the NY Apple Association to discuss EUREPGAP certification, the NYSDAM committed to supporting the NYS IPM Program and Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) in developing a EUREPGAP educational program for NY apple growers. The Fruit IPM Coordinator, Carroll, provided overall harmonization of the educational program across the CCE Regional Programs. NYSDAM successfully lobbied auditing firms for reduced EUREPGAP audit pricing and developed a brochure advertising the EUREPGAP workshops. A workbook for apple growers entitled 'EUREPGAP Audit Workbook For New York State Tree Fruit Growers' was developed and written by IPM and CCE containing typical answers to the 210 control points in the EUREPGAP certification protocol and included sources of additional information. CCE of Orleans County published the Audit Workbook in 2003 and an updated version published in 2004. A CD electronic version of the EUREPGAP Audit Workbook and the EUREPGAP web-based documents was produced to accompany the Audit Workbooks. Posters and bulletins on preventing microbial contamination of produce, courtesy of the Cornell Good Agricultural Practices Program, were included in the Audit Workbooks. Eight daylong training workshops were held in the winters of 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 (Table 1). Workshops provided in-depth coverage of all 210 EUREPGAP control points and associated compliance criteria in the Audit Workbook. Growers were encouraged to ask questions and promote discussions on topics of concern. EUREPGAP auditors were present at the workshops held in the winter of 2003-2004 and were able to contribute to greater understanding of the EUREPGAP certification process.

Table 1. EUREPGAP presentations and workshops conducted in 2003 - 2005.

Date	Title	Location	Audience	#
12/16/03	EUREPGAP Workshop	Highland, NY (Hudson Valley & NE NY regions)	Apple growers, CCE, EUREPGAP auditors, NYSDAM	20
12/17/03	EUREPGAP Workshop	Newark, NY (Lake Ontario region)	Apple growers, CCE, EUREPGAP auditors, NYSDAM	17
1/20/04	EUREPGAP Workshop	Albion, NY (Lake Ontario region)	Apple growers, CCE, EUREPGAP auditors, NYSDAM	25
1/22/04	EUREPGAP Workshop	Highland, NY (Hudson Valley & NE NY regions)	Apple growers, CCE, EUREPGAP auditors, NYSDAM	16
2/25/04	Market Certification – Addressing EUREPGAP Standards in NY	Kingston, NY; Hudson Valley Winter Fruit School	Apple growers, CCE, faculty, industry	150
2/27/04	Update on Fruit IPM – EUREPGAP & TracApple	Syracuse, NY; Statewide IPM GAC	Growers, faculty, NYSDAM	15
3/23/04	EUREPGAP Workshop	Albion, NY (Lake Ontario region)	Apple growers and packers/shippers	20
11/12/04	Addressing EURERPGAP certification for apple growers in New York State	Guelph, Ontario, Canada, Great Lakes Fruit Workers Conference	Extension, Research, and Government personnel	75
12/15/04	EUREPGAP Workshop	Newark, NY, (Lake Ontario region)	Apple growers and packers/shippers	7
12/17/04	EUREPGAP Workshop	Lockport, NY, (Lake Ontario region)	Apple growers and packers/shippers	13
1/14/05	EUREPGAP Workshop	Highland, NY, (Hudson Valley region)	Apple growers and packers/shippers	8

Results and discussion:

Impact - As of January 2005, 126 members of the apple industry have been educated on the EUREPGAP protocol and received the EurepGAP Audit Workbook and CD. Ten percent of those attending were potential multiplier audiences who would be assisting growers in the EurepGAP certification process. Meeting EUREPGAP certification preserves a key export market for NY apples and its continuing 13 million dollar contribution to the state's economy. The price of a EUREPGAP audit was reduced, benefiting NY apple growers experiencing prior years of poor market returns. Growers praised the thoroughness of the Audit Workbook in demystifying the EUREPGAP protocol and dispelling the fear associated with contemplating an audit. Those attending the EUREPGAP training sessions and using the Audit Workbook have 'impressed' auditors with their ability to sail through the certification audits. The EUREPGAP training program has reduced the tension and stress on the NY apple industry and given apple growers the confidence to undertake a EUREPGAP audit. Because the EUREPGAP protocol addresses integrated fruit production, environmental conservation, and food safety, the audit process will foster greater awareness of how apple production practices can contribute to and support environmental conservation and a safe food supply. Apple growers have upgraded their farm operations, as needed to meet EUREPGAP certification, through the building of improved pesticide storage facilities, developing wildlife conservation plans, establishing systems for record keeping and traceability, to name a few examples, all of which have positive, long-term impacts on apple production in NY. Growers who attended the EurepGAP workshops and used

the Audit Workbook reported saving up to 80% of the time it would have taken to prepare for the audit without the Workbook and workshop. To date, every NY apple grower undertaking a whole farm audit has met the EUREPGAP certification requirements and, so far, 40 growers are EurepGAP certified.

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