
Harmonization of Produce Food Safety Standards - an Industry Action Plan

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Welcome

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Why We Are Here

Objective: To drive acceptance towards harmonized standards and audits

- **Produce supply chain leaders** have increasingly recognized the **cost and inefficiency** of multiple GAP standards and audits now being used
- During the United Fresh *Global Conference on Produce Food Safety Standards*, April 2009
 - government and private-sector stakeholders involved with on-farm produce GAP standards/audits and post-farm gate audit protocols presented overviews of their own systems
- Then, over 200 leaders from each stage of the produce supply chain, government, and third-party standard owners and auditors explored the potential value of harmonization and greater alignment of standards

Outcomes From the Conference

- Produce GAP standards used in various audits seem to be at least 90% the same, providing a clear opportunity for harmonization.
- Inclusion of non-food safety standards (environmental, social issues) is a likely obstacle to harmonization, particularly in North America. These issues may need to be addressed separately.
- Harmonized food safety standards and audits (leafy greens, tomatoes) are being developed and accepted.
 - The process of bringing key stakeholders together to develop and endorse commodity-specific standards provides a good model for building consensus on general GAP standards.

Outcomes From the Conference

- Harmonization of general GAP standards/audits must be transparent with open communication of intent, progress, and conclusions.
- Retailers, foodservice companies, fresh-cut processors, grower-shippers, and government (FDA, USDA) must all be at the table working together.
- Auditors and standard owners need to be at the table as well, but not at the expense of the harmonization goal.

Draft Process to Harmonization

Identify a small but influential Steering Committee of major industry representatives with the ability to drive broad industry acceptance of common standards:

- comprised of business leaders who have authority regarding their own companies' supplier audit requirements (i.e., authorized to ultimately accept the harmonized checklist);
- who are committed to achieving the harmonization vision;
- with broad representation from the fresh produce supply chain, including suppliers, distributors, retail and foodservice businesses that have a say in produce suppliers' pre-farm gate food safety requirements;
- who represent a critical mass of volume of produce purchased.

Draft Process to Harmonization

Assemble the Steering Committee in a face-to-face meeting:

- to achieve consensus on the draft vision of harmonization;
- to achieve consensus on the draft harmonization process;
- to identify concerns that must be addressed in the process;
- to discuss and create support for a second, larger Technical Working Group representing *all* stakeholders interested in cooperating to achieve the harmonization vision.

Draft *Vision (subject to consensus)*

A single, generic checklist for GAP audits:

- Focused on food safety practices of pre-farm gate produce operations;
- With clearly defined requirements that minimize opportunity for misunderstanding, misinterpretation and “standards creep” by operations and auditors;
- Globally recognized, but specifically applicable to North America operations;
- Requirements that are achievable, auditable and verifiable;

Draft *Vision (subject to consensus)*

- Scalable to all size fresh produce operations;
- Considerate of regional- and commodity-specific food safety needs;
- Sufficiently non-prescriptive to be accepting of equivalent food safety practices;
- Acceptable to a critical mass of customers requiring general produce food safety audits;
- Freely usable by any 1st, 2nd or 3rd party auditor;
- Flexible to adapt as science reveals better practices and limits.

Steering Committee role:

With learnings from PTI...

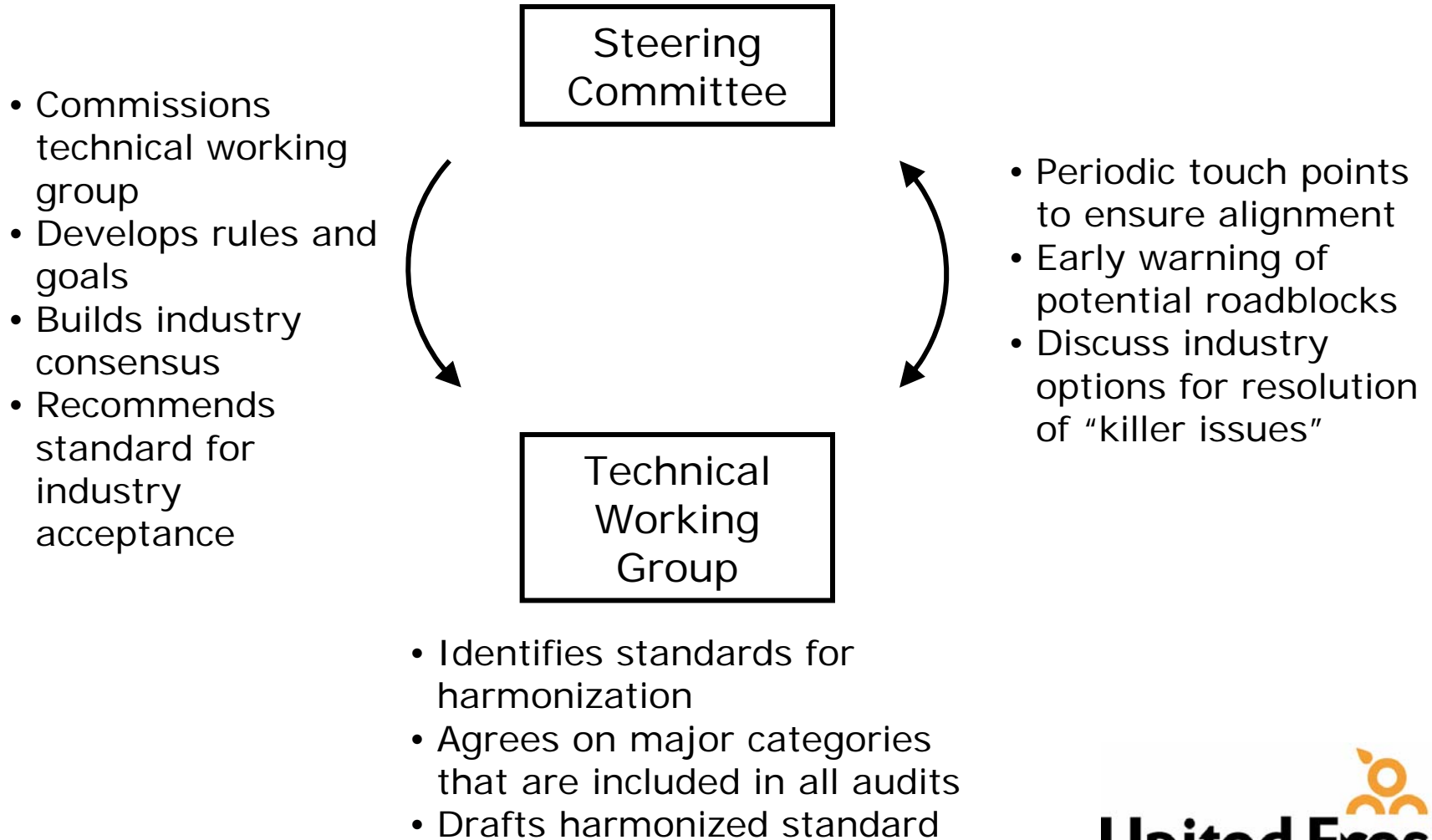
- To agree to a Scope, Vision and Process to achieve harmonization
- To develop the rules and goals for a second, larger Technical Working Group representing *all* stakeholders interested in cooperating to achieve the harmonization vision
- Ultimately, to consider the standard for endorsement and recommend its adoption across all industry stakeholders
- Two face-to-face meetings over the next 6-12 months.

Technical Working Group:

Much larger group, representing:

- customers, suppliers, government, audit companies, association staffs;
- a broad scope of fresh produce commodities;
- a broad scope of operation sizes; and
- a broad scope of producing regions, including Mexico and Canada.

Harmonization Roles and Process:



Questions?

Next Steps

- A draft Action Plan (covering these points) will be sent to all invitees to this call
- Obtain firm commitments of participation on the Steering Committee
- Schedule a face-to-face meeting to discuss and reach consensus on rules, Scope, Vision and Process; to identify role of Technical Working Group; to identify potential obstacles
 - Possibly September? Atlanta?