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# Greenhouse-Grown Plant Certification Program Questions and Answers

Last Modified:

Find answers to common questions related to the U.S.-Canada Greenhouse-Grown Plant Certification Program (GCP).

## About the Program

What are the benefits of the GCP?

The GCP authorizes facilities that meet specific compliance elements to use an Export Certification Label for the export of plants to Canada or the United States. Authorized GCP facilities can use the Export Certification Label in lieu of a phytosanitary certificate, providing two significant benefits:

1. Cost savings—authorized GCP facilities do not use phytosanitary certificates to ship certified plants.
2. Increased flexibility—authorized GCP facilities can make last-minute changes to an order without needing to get a phytosanitary certificate reissued.

Why and when did the Greenhouse Certification Program change its name to the Greenhouse-Grown Plant Certification Program?

The GCP working group received feedback that it was unclear from the program's name whether certification applied to plants or to greenhouses. That's why the original name was changed in 2016, making it clear that the GCP program certification applied to plants. The program continues to use the GCP acronym because it is known and recognized by facilities and the plant industry.

Is the GCP voluntary?

Yes. The GCP is a voluntary alternative for export certification of eligible greenhouse-grown plants traded between the United States and Canada.

## Requirements

When will I need a phytosanitary certificate?

If a GCP facility produces plants that are not eligible for export with an Export Certification Label, then a phytosanitary certificate must be requested. Plants that meet the import requirements of the destination country may be inspected and issued a phytosanitary certificate by the appropriate government agency. Facilities that do not participate in the GCP may export plants and must request a phytosanitary certificate.

Why aren't plants allowed to come into contact with soil under this program?

When plants in soil are shipped between Canada and the United States, specific phytosanitary measures are required to address the risks associated with soil-borne pests. To address the risks associated with soil-borne pests, the GCP requires that growing media must not contain soil.

What plants can be shipped under the GCP?

Plants that meet the import requirements of the United States and Canada are eligible to be produced and shipped under the GCP. The GCP requires the facility to indicate the types of plants they are growing and where they come from. This list of plants will be reviewed by the GCP auditor to verify that all the plants are eligible for

the program. Some plants are excluded from the GCP and include plants that are prohibited entry into the United States or Canada, regulated invasive plants, noxious weeds, as well as true seeds, grains, and potatoes.

Does the GCP restrict the types of plants that may be certified?

The GCP is for plants that are greenhouse-propagated and -grown. In addition, plants must be eligible to enter both Canada and the United States. Plants that cannot be exported using a phytosanitary certificate cannot be exported using an Export Certification Label.

Are plants that I ship to another greenhouse still eligible to be exported using an Export Certification Label?

When plants are shipped between participating GCP facilities in the same country, an Interfacility Stamp may be used to demonstrate that the plants in the consignment are certified and ready for export. If the plants are shipped to a facility that is not registered in the GCP, the plants lose their certified status.

Can a GCP facility grow plants outside of a greenhouse?

The GCP is designed for plants which are propagated and grown in a greenhouse. There are limited exceptions; for example, there are provisions to allow greenhouse-grown plants to be hardened off in order to acclimatize to outdoor conditions before sale. Any other facility production practices involving outdoor growth must be preapproved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) or APHIS.

What are the traceability requirements for the program?

The GCP does not establish traceability requirements; instead, it provides a common language for all facilities and auditors so there is a consistent approach to traceability. GCP facilities must have a system in place that allows eligible plants to be tracked from the time they enter the facility to the time they are shipped. There must be sufficient information available to substantiate eligibility and ensure that only eligible plants are certified under the GCP.

How will the audit process work?

The audit process is based on the compliance agreement between the facility and the national plant protection organization (NPPO)—either CFIA or APHIS. Audits are conducted up to four times per year and will include at least one complete systems audit. Auditors assess the practices of the greenhouse against the compliance agreement, as well as verify that plants are free from regulated pests and practically free from other injurious pests. The compliance agreements contain the same technical elements for facilities in Canada and the United States, which improves consistency and equivalence between greenhouses.

What are the training requirements for staff on the program?

The GCP does not establish training requirements; instead, it provides a common language for all facilities and auditors so there is a consistent approach to staff training. Staff must have the knowledge, skills, and ability to ensure that GCP requirements are met.

What will be the process for conflict resolution or for reviewing updates to procedures following audits?

Each NPPO is responsible for authorizing, auditing, suspending and removing facilities from the GCP in their country, including any procedures for conflict resolution. APHIS and CFIA regularly evaluate the GCP, including noncompliance information, to improve the program.

## **The GCP Pest Management Plan**

Can the GCP manager and scout be the same person?

Yes. In small operations it is typical for one person to serve in both capacities.

If a facility amends their pest management plan, do they need to suspend activities until the amended plan is approved?

This depends on situation. Contact your Federal or State regulatory official for guidance.

What are the GCP manager's responsibilities?

The GCP manager is responsible for the overall functions of the program at their facility. The [GCP's Technical Requirements](#) list the manager's responsibilities on pages 26 and 33.

What information will be audited?

You can review the GCP Audit Checklist in the [Technical Requirements](#) to see what an audit includes and the required records and documents.

Is there a cost for an audit?

USDA does not charge an audit fee. Contact your State agriculture official for information about their audit service.

What are conforming plants?

Conforming plants meet the requirements of the GCP and cannot be a [NAPPRO](#) (plant that is not eligible to ship) plant for the United States or Canada.

Is there an action plan for growing media contaminants?

Yes. You can reference the [Technical Requirements](#) section 2.2.1.1, "Protection from Soil-borne Pests" (page 30) for information about growing media contaminants.

Are there uniform pest modules that can be shared for common pests?

There are no uniform pest modules currently. We advise using the spotted lanternfly pest module as a model.

What is the process to upgrade a facility from conditional to standard status?

After a GCP facility has successfully completed 1 year of audits (four audits: three for surveillance and one for systems) under conditional status and without any noncompliances, the facility may request a status change from their Federal or State contact.

## Other Information

Is the GCP equivalent to the National Plant Board's Systems Approach to Nursery Certification (SANC)?

No, they are not equivalent. SANC is a domestic certification program. GCP is a bilateral certification program supporting exports to Canada.

If *Phytophthora ramorum* is found at a GCP facility, how long before the facility can resume shipping plants to Canada?

A GPC facility could resume shipping plants only after agriculture officials determine the facility meets the program's specific compliance elements. That determination is made on a case-by-case basis.

To learn more about this disease, visit [Phytophthora Ramorum](#).

Where can I find Canada's *Phytophthora ramorum* regulations?

You can find Canada's regulations on the CFIA website at [D-01-01: Phytosanitary requirements to prevent the entry and spread of \*Phytophthora ramorum\*](#).

What is the role of the authorized certification official (ACO) for the GCP?

ACOs review and provide pest management plan guidance to a facility as well as facilitate program audits.

Where can I find a list of participating GCP facilities?

Visit [USDA-Approved Facilities Authorized To Participate in U.S.-Canada Greenhouse-Grown Plant Certification Program](#).

For a list of CFIA's approved facilities, see [GCP Authorized Facilities in Canada](#).

## Contact Us

If you're interested in becoming a GCP-approved facility, contact your [State plant regulatory official](#), State ACO, or Federal ACO. State and Federal officials should communicate regularly to support a seamless process.

For further questions about the GCP, email us at [ppgexportservices@usda.gov](mailto:ppgexportservices@usda.gov).

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