

# Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP)

## Overview

The Commonwealth Quality Seal serves to identify locally sourced products that are grown, harvested, and processed right here in Massachusetts using practices that are safe, sustainable and don't harm the environment. The practices are based on the UMass Extension/Massachusetts Farm Bureau/Massachusetts Department of Ag Resources Best Management Practices Guidelines. Best Management Practices include soil conservation and health, IPM, worker protection, and food safety. Becoming part of Commonwealth Quality involves taking a self-assessment survey of practices and agreeing to follow guidelines on the use of the Commonwealth Quality Seal.

Commonwealth Quality is not designed to replace full USDA GAP certification but may be considered an alternative by some customers. Recent federal legislation and upcoming FDA regulations are expected to allow states to create on-farm food safety programs that insure that growers are following good food safety practices. Growers will use a self-assessment form to meet the requirements.

## Commonwealth Quality Food Safety Requirements

Commonwealth Quality requires that farmers employ food safety standards that minimize the risk of microbial contamination and food-borne illnesses. This requirement is accomplished through adherence to existing food safety assurance audit programs, such as the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) program, as well as other third party food safety audits, based on the United States Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) guidance document.

Massachusetts farmers can also fulfill the food safety requirement by both completing the University of Massachusetts GAPs session(s) and employing food safety practices identified in the Best Management Practices (BMPs) GAPs checklist developed by the University of Massachusetts Extension Service in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources.

Commonwealth Quality ensures that certified fresh produce is grown and harvested using practices that minimize the risk of food borne illness by utilizing existing standards and BMPs that ensure:

- Microbial contamination of produce is minimized by eliminating potential risks.
- Prevention is achieved through practice implementation, training and education.
- Water sources are maintained in a way that limits possible pathogen transport.
- Compost management is conducted in a manner that reduces possible microbial contamination.
- Animal influence is restricted and minimized to avoid fecal contamination.

## Program Participant Information - Application Package

Having the seal of Commonwealth Quality on your products conveys freshness, safety and reliability to consumers. It provides an unspoken guarantee that your products are not only Massachusetts-grown, harvested and tended with care, but that your practices adhere to a top-level set of criteria and environmental standards.

To apply to become a certified Commonwealth Quality business, you'll need to review, complete and submit the following registration paperwork which are all available at <http://www.mass.gov/agr/cqp/index.htm>

- [CQP Requirements & Certification Form](#)

Sector-specific program requirements for participation are outlined in this document. Your business must meet all of the outlined requirements for those product lines it wishes to sell under the CQP label. By signing the accompanying certification form, you agree to comply with program standards.

- [CQP Product Registration Form](#)

Fill out this form with basic contact information – business name, address, phone, etc., and provide details about the products you'd like to register. Don't forget to attach a check for \$50 made out to the "New England Vegetable & Berry Grower's Association"; this covers your one-time registration fee.

- [CQP License Trademark Agreement](#)

Signing this agreement grants you permission to use the seal of Commonwealth Quality on registered products and in your marketing materials in exchange for following program standards.

- [CQP Checklist & Score Sheet](#)

This checklist outlines best management practices that were developed by MDAR, Farm Bureau, & the UMass Extension specifically for Commonwealth Quality. BMPs focus on soil conservation and health, integrated pest management, worker protection, and food safety.

The corresponding score sheet is a self-assessment survey that will help us understand whether your business currently qualifies for the program.

If you have questions or input related to registration materials or Commonwealth Quality in general, please contact the CQP program coordinator.

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Mail all completed applications for the Commonwealth Quality Produce Seal along with a check for \$50 payable to the New England vegetable & Berry Growers Association (NEVBGA) to:

John Howell

NEV&BGA  
109 Lee Road  
South Deerfield, MA 01373  
[howell@umext.umass.edu](mailto:howell@umext.umass.edu)  
Office: 413-665-3501  
Mobile: 413-835-5380

The NEVBGA will work with the Massachusetts DAR to complete the process.

**Important Links:**

<http://www.mass.gov/agr/cqp/index.htm>

<http://extension.umass.edu/agriculture/index.php/services/commonwealth-quality-seal>