

GLOBALGAP CONFERENCE

GAP makes global gains

The ninth GlobalGAP conference heard that good agricultural practice is spreading rapidly, with the standard turning increasingly more heads in the US

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GlobalGAP board of industry leaders focused on the "considerable progress" made to implement the good agricultural practice standard internationally at the organisation's ninth conference, which was held in Cologne, Germany on 15-17 October.

Some 300 delegates from 25 different countries attended the three-day event, with representatives from Kenya, Mexico, Japan and China amongst others on hand to explain how they have established monitoring systems with the assistance of GlobalGAP.

And in the wider European context created through an enlarged EU, representatives from member states such as Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary also reported that they had moved ahead from the time when they first reported progress to the conference in Prague, the Czech Republic, two years ago.

"GlobalGAP now represents over 90,000 certified producers and producer groups in 85 countries," said Chairman Nigel Garbutt. "What is particularly significant is the achievements of small-scale producers who realise that it is vital they adopt the required levels of discipline in record keeping and food safety in order to maximize their potential for export. We have showcased some of the best practices in small holder certification worldwide and tools which can help small producers achieve compliance."

The event saw a number of speaker sessions covering a variety of themes, from the introduction of the GlobalGAP standard to regulation and case studies from various points in the supply chain.

During a session focusing on the implementation of new techniques in fruit and vegetables production for reducing MRLs below EU limits, José Hernandez Navarro, director general of the Paloma Group, highlighted the fact that GlobalGAP certification has helped his group to keep pace with changes in customer demand.

"The EU's strategy of harmonising The EU's strategy of harmonising MRLs, the reduction of active materials for fruit

and vegetable production and, most importantly, the requirements of the distribution channels plus the consumers' need for healthy and nutritious products do not only constitute a challenge, but place an obligation on all producers – not just in Europe, but across the world," he said. "In the Paloma Horticultural Group we have made this a top priority for years and I must acknowledge that GlobalGAP certification has helped us enormously to achieve improvements.

Frederik Callens of GlobalGAP described how the certification standard is maintained in the session 'Guaranteeing the Reliability of GlobalGAP'. He said that the standard's Integrity Programme aimed to ensure consistent implementation worldwide, encourage improvement, give feedback and follow up complaints. He said that regular assessments remained crucial so as to "avoid inconsistencies and misinterpretations."

Meanwhile, GlobalGAP secretary Kristian Moeller expressed his pleasure at the interest in the standard shown by US groups, particularly in the light of several high-profile food safety concerns in the country. Mr Moeller said that heightened awareness of safety was driving companies to place greater emphasis on safety and traceability.

"A further key element which it is believed will have a major impact is the interest being expressed in the United States, he explained. "Following several food safety scares, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is encouraging companies to be more pro-active in establishing a greater level of traceability as part of their food discipline. The Canadian Horticultural Council is following the same route."

Indeed, GlobalGAP attained its first US-based retail member during the course of 2008 in the form of East Coast multiple group Wegmets.



Around 300 delegates saw a variety of speakers assess the impact of the GlobalGAP standard

And In the session 'Focus on Smallholders – Lessons Learnt in Group Certification', Dr Stephen Mbithi of the Fresh Produce Exporters Association of Kenya said that a growth in export figures in the country proved that the growing move towards KenyaGAP certification (running in parallel with GlobalGAP) is bearing fruit.

"There is more and more interest from large marketing organisations and even total representative industries from across the Atlantic," added Mr Moeller. "Increasingly they are accepting that GlobalGAP is a soundly based international concept which, like its members and products, has no boundaries when it comes to food safety."