



2023/2024 ANNUAL REPORT





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OVERVIEW

Arizona is often called the winter lettuce capital of the United States because the desert climate provides a short growing season from November to March. Each year, Arizona farmers grow approximately 25% of the total U.S. lettuce supply.

Organization

The Arizona LGMA protects public health by providing safe and healthy lettuce and leafy greens. This food safety program cultivates food safety practices, verifies on-farm compliance, utilizes data for improvement and empowers industry with tools to advance food safety. The Arizona LGMA food safety standards require agricultural water risk assessments, field personnel training, environmental risk assessments, field and transport sanitation, evaluation of soil amendments prior to use, equipment cleaning and sanitation, food safety practices for harvest, and more.

Members

Arizona farmers are committed to growing and harvesting safe lettuce and leafy greens through the Arizona LGMA food safety certification program. Arizona LGMA members are shippers of Arizona leafy greens who utilize strict food safety standards to ensure the integrity of leafy greens grown, harvested, and shipped from Arizona. The program is administered by the Arizona Department of Agriculture. In 2023/2024, Arizona LGMA members represent 98.6% of leafy greens grown in Arizona.



Audits & Compliance

To be certified, Arizona LGMA members must complete multiple audits each growing season. Audits are conducted by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and ISO certified auditors that verify compliance with the food safety standards (also called metrics).

Funding

The Arizona LGMA operates solely using collected fees from its members. The Arizona LGMA assessment fee can vary from year to year depending upon projected costs. The assessment rate for a standard carton was set at \$.007 from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024.

The Arizona LGMA is accountable to its members, the fresh produce industry, and consumers for providing safe and healthy lettuce and leafy greens. Beyond the food safety standards and audits, science and training are important elements of success. The program also values education and is driven to improve the knowledge and practices of everyone in our industry. We understand and appreciate the role that each individual plays in every step of the leafy greens production process.



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HAPPENINGS

Food Safety Standards Updated

The Arizona LGMA Food Safety Committee approved multiple changes to the food safety standards (also known as metrics) that all Arizona LGMA members must adhere to. The changes went into effect August 31, 2023, and Arizona Department of Food and Agriculture auditors began verifying compliance in November when harvest began for the 2023/2024 season.

The changes included:

- Issue 1: General Requirements - Minor editorial change.
- Issue 3: Records - Removal of the requirement for shipper designation of supervisor. This designation will be made by the company providing the input.
- Issue 6: Water - Addition to the Best Practices Section for Baseline and Routine Water Treatment bullet points to mirror the total coliform requirements in Table 2D.
- Issue 7: Soil Amendments and Crop Inputs - Table 3: 7B [2]- Clarification on Biopesticide Product requirements

LGMA Programs Introduce Environmental Risk Assessment Tool to Help Leafy Greens Farmers

In September 2023, the Arizona and California LGMA food safety programs announced the availability of a new food safety tool to aid growers and shippers as they assess risk in the crop production environment. This assessment looks at various risks both on the ranch that the farmer controls and on land adjacent to the crop production area.

“The LGMA has always required that its members conduct an environmental risk assessment, but this new tool incorporates the LGMA requirements and standardizes the way that each member addresses specific hazards,” said Teressa Lopez, Arizona LGMA Program Administrator. “After completing the assessment, the user will get a risk score and see what impact specific mitigation measures can have on safety of the crop.”

Arizona Lettuce and Leafy Greens Harvest Celebration

Arizona’s Governor, Katie Hobbs, proclaimed November 2023 as Arizona Leafy Greens month. This was the State’s 11th annual celebration of the start of harvest for Arizona leafy greens. The Arizona LGMA conducted outreach on this topic via social media partnerships and giveaways as well as produce trade press outreach.

New Online Food Safety Training Platform

Three food safety organizations - Arizona LGMA, California LGMA and Yuma Safe Produce Council - have collaborated on a training tool to help all their members in the produce industry. The shared online training platform is a learning management system that provides free training.

All the training courses are online and free for anyone in the fresh produce industry to take. The courses can be done at your own pace, users can plan for about two to three hours for each course. After successful completion an individual will be issued a certificate of completion.



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LEADERSHIP & STAFF

The Arizona LGMA is managed by the Arizona Leafy Greens Food Safety Committee, a five-member committee of signatory shippers or their designated representative. The members have three seats that represent the Yuma area and the other two seats are for any other leafy greens growing areas. The volunteer leadership consists of industry professionals who are shippers or designated representatives of shippers. The Arizona LGMA has the Arizona Leafy Greens Technical Subcommittee overseeing and maintaining the science-based Metrics. The Arizona Leafy Greens Communications Subcommittee then oversees public relations for both consumers and industry.

Food Safety Committee Members	
Megan Chedwick – Chairwoman	Church Brothers Farms
Armando Figueroa	Braga Fresh Family Farms
Jesus Canchola	Fresh Express, Inc.
Kristina Nunes	The Nunes Company, Inc.
Chato Valdez	Sabor Farms, LLC.

Technical Subcommittee Members	
Amanda Brooks (Chair)	Harrison Farms
Guadalupe Camarena	Nature Fresh Farms
Jesus Canchola	Fresh Express
Bob Mills	Harbinger dba Misionero
Michael Menes	True Organics
Valentin Sierra	Amigo Farms
Megan Chedwick – Alternate	Church Brothers Farms
Matthew Burk – Alternate	Tanimura & Antle
Jeremy Vanderzyl– Alternate	Diamond Block Services

Communications Subcommittee Members	
Kelly Miller – Chair	Griffin Ranches
Amanda Brooks – Co-Chair	Harrison Farms
Vicki-Lynne Scott	Scott Resources
Valentin Sierra	Amigo Farms, Inc.
Kelly Williams	Smith Farms
Vacant	Vacant

Staff	
Teresa Lopez	Administrator
Kami Van Horn	Technical Assistant
April Ward	Public Relations Liaison
Kevin Watson	Compliance Officer



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MEMBERS














Amigo Farms, Inc.	Harbinger Group dba Misionero	TLC Custom Farming Company, LLC
Beachside Produce	Hitchcock Farms, Inc.	Zada Fresh Farms
Bengard Ranch, Inc.	Ippolito International, Inc.	 <p>Certified Members of Arizona LGMA are shippers who are committed to adhering to the food safety standards set forth. View the current member list at: www.arizonaleafygreens.org</p>
Bonipak Produce	Mann Packing Company, Inc.	
Braga Fresh Family Farms	Muzzi Family Farms, LLC	
Church Brothers, LLC / True Leaf Farms	The Nunes Company	
Classic Salads, LLC	Ocean Mist Farms	
Coastline Family Farms	organicgirl, LLC	
D'Arrigo Bros Co of California	Pacific International Marketing, Inc.	
Direct Advantage Farms, LLC	Ratto Bros., Inc.	
Dole Fresh Vegetables, Inc.	Ready Pac Foods, Inc.	
Duda Farm Fresh Foods, Inc.	River Fresh Farms, LLC	
Dynasty Farms, Inc.	Sabor Farms, LLC	
Everkrisp Vegetables, Inc.	The Salad Farm, LLC	
Field Fresh Farms, LLC	Salad Savoy Corporation	
Fresh Express, Inc.	Steinbeck Country Produce	
Gold Coast Packing, Inc.	Tanimura & Antle Fresh Foods, Inc.	
Green Gate Fresh, LLLP	Taylor Farms California	



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CROP STATISTICS

The Arizona LGMA food safety program covers 15 different types of leafy greens and members reported shipping the following 24lb cartons or *carton equivalents:

Commodity		2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
	Iceberg Lettuce	24,147,896	28,805,728	24,187,777
	Romaine	13,426,037	12,195,276	13,160,264
	Romaine Hearts	11,989,761	11,484,018	12,723,650
	Green Leaf	4,145,442	4,661,019	4,573,310
	Red Leaf	769,306	762,377	962,379
	Butter Leaf	568,846	598,159	741,512
	Spinach (Teen & Baby)	10,384,608	10,249,657	9,201,693
	Baby Leaf Items (Spring Mix)	5,791,653	6,969,465	5,878,889
	Cabbage (Green, Red & Savoy)	3,879,955	4,007,508	3,820,110
	Kale	825,016	797,565	641,188
	Arugula	951,023	903,493	778,679
	Chard	88,605	79,800	96,181
	Escarole	35,593	40,959	33,313
	Endive	22,330	23,206	25,028
	Radicchio	95,936	100,403	66,602
Total Cartons*		77,122,007	81,678,683	76,890,575



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AUDIT REPORT

The Arizona LGMA is a part of the Arizona Department of Agriculture (AZDA). The AZDA uses United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and ISO certified auditors that verify compliance with the Arizona LGMA Food Safety Standards (also known as metrics).



Each year the Arizona and California LGMA come together to discuss auditing plans for the year. Auditors from both states are calibrated on metrics intent and new metrics requirements from both states and address any challenges from the previous season. This helps to ensure all metrics are being evaluated in the same manor throughout the LGMA programs.

Representatives from the following agencies attend this discussion:

- Arizona Department of Agriculture
- Arizona LGMA
- California Department of Food and Agriculture
- California LGMA
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Arizona LGMA contracts with AZDA/USDA to conduct two scheduled and one unannounced audit with each shipper, and to audit each grower at least once. There are some shippers that only ship from Arizona a few weeks a year and therefore will only receive one scheduled audit and one unannounced audit.

Audit Type	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Scheduled Audits	70	73	75
Unannounced Audits	35	36	37
Total Audits	105	109	112



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MEMBER SURVEY ON AUDIT PROGRAM & TRAINING

In July of 2024, the Arizona LGMA conducted a survey of its members with the goal of rating the audit program. A total of 17 responses were collected, which represents approximately 45% of the Arizona LGMA membership.

Overall Audit Process and Feedback on Auditors

The survey asked participants the following questions:

Was the audit scheduling process accommodating?

- Over 80% responded that the process was very or very accommodating.

Did the auditor conduct the audit in a professional manner?

- Over 70% responded that auditors were very professional.

Were the auditor's questions clear and concise?

- Over 80% responded that auditors were clear and concise.

Was the length of the audit too long?

- Nearly 60% of respondents thought the audit length is too long.

Do you feel Arizona LGMA requires too many audits each season?

- Nearly 60% of respondents thought that too many audits are required each season.

Then asked if the participant felt the audit is too long, what can we do to improve this?

- Several participants noted that SOP review and the paperwork portion of the audit takes too long and might not be needed at the current frequency.

Next the survey asked, how many audits did you have in Arizona this season?

- 60% of respondents had 3 audits, 27% had 4 audits, and 13% had 2 audits.

Lastly, the survey asked how the audit process could improve.

- Multiple participants noted that growers should only be audited once per season.

The survey asked participants how satisfied they were with different aspects of the individual auditing processes including:

- SOP Review
- Field Review
- Corrective Action Verification
- Audit Report Results
- Compliance Findings Reports
- Corrective Action Submission Process
- Arizona LGMA Annual Certificate Certification

With the exception of SOP Review, the individual auditing processes were rated as satisfactory or very satisfactory by the majority of participants.

Training Survey

Over 95% of participants were satisfied or very satisfied with the availability of Arizona LGMA training. Over 40% of participants prefer online training, while more than 30% prefer in-person training.



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COMPLIANCE

After an audit is conducted, the Arizona LGMA Compliance Officer conducts a review of the audit and sets each citation at one of four violation levels. The Compliance Officer works with each LGMA member to ensure that all violations are corrected in a timely manner. Additionally, the LGMA Technical Assistant conducts an annual review at the end of the season for member to assess compliance and address recurring issues. In 2023/2024 there were three major violations given for a missing compliance plan, an incomplete traceability process and an elevated citation for past non-compliance of training documentation.

Violation Level	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024
Flagrant	0	0	0
Major Deviation	0	3	3
Minor Deviation	399	584	485
Minor Infraction	83	46	105
Total	482	633	593

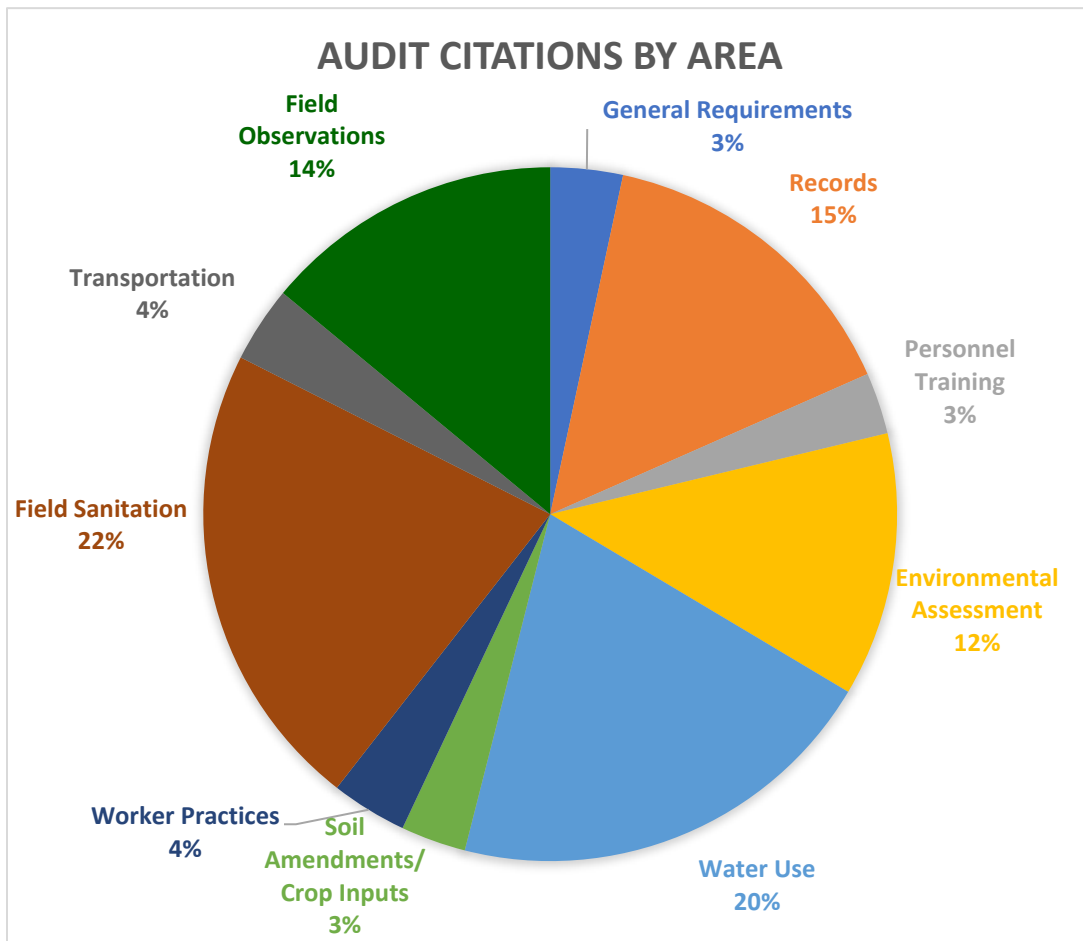
- A **Flagrant violation** occurs when the signatory shipper buys, consigns, or otherwise accepts or handles a leafy green product and knows or should have known the product was grown, packed, shipped, processed, or handled in violation of the best practices and the violation significantly increased the risk of delivering unsafe product into commerce. A single flagrant violation leads to a loss of the privilege to use the LGMA service mark.
- A **Major Deviation** is a violation of the food safety standards that may inhibit the maintenance of food safety, but that does not necessarily result in an unsafe product. A signatory who commits a major deviation must submit a corrective action plan to the Food Safety Committee or its designee, within five business days of receipt of the inspection report, noting the deviation. The Food Safety Committee may consider a major deviation to be a flagrant violation if the signatory fails to provide a timely corrective action plan. Once the Food Safety Committee or its designee accepts the signatory's corrective action plan, an unannounced audit will be performed.
- A **Minor Deviation** is a violation of the food safety standards that the signatory can correct within five business days and that does not necessarily increase the risk of a foodborne illness. A signatory who commits a minor deviation must submit a corrective action plan to the Food Safety Committee or its designee, within five business days of receipt of the inspection report noting the deviation. A minor deviation does not require a follow-up inspection within three business days of submitting the corrective action plan. Instead, the inspectors will ensure compliance at the next regularly scheduled inspection.
- A **Minor Infraction** is a violation of the food safety standards that is corrected before the inspector leaves the inspected premises and that does not necessarily increase the risk of a foodborne illness. The Food Safety Committee or its designee may treat an otherwise minor infraction as a minor deviation; if there have been multiple similar minor infractions over the past twelve months.



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COMPLIANCE

Another way to look at Arizona LGMA compliance is by the area of the food safety practices, or metrics, where audit citations are frequently occurring.



The chart above shows that the top three categories for audit citations in the 2023/2024 year were as follows:

- Field Sanitation (130 citations, 22% of the total)
- Water Use (121 citations, 20% of the total)
- Records (89 citations, 15% of the total)

Throughout the season, Arizona LGMA staff monitors audit citation trends and provide targeted training to help improve compliance.



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TRAINING

Food Safety Training

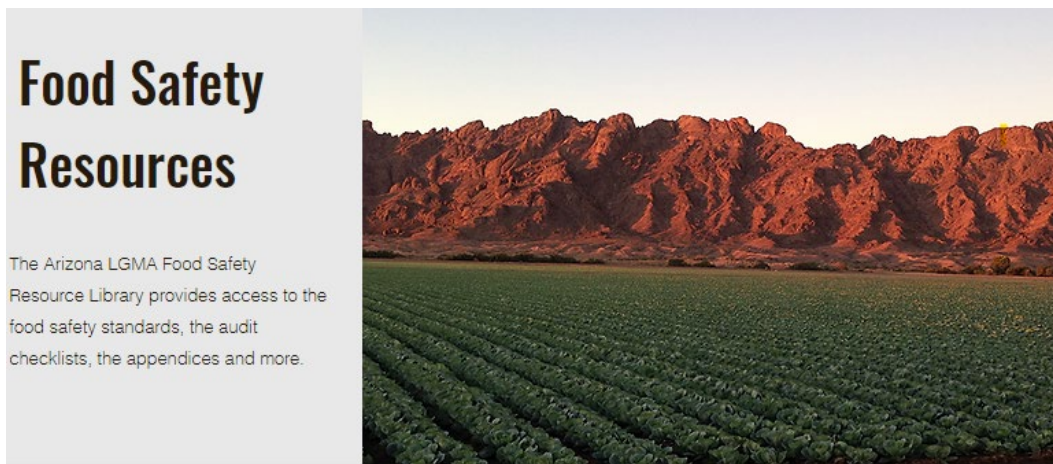
The Arizona LGMA provided multiple opportunities for members to obtain information, ask questions, and hear from others in the industry through a Mid-Season Review office hours session in January 2024.

The Arizona LGMA also offered a variety of virtual and in-person trainings throughout the season, including:

- Environmental Risk Assessment Training
 - 9 English sessions reaching 149 participants
 - 5 Spanish sessions reaching 78 participants
- Cleaning and Sanitation of Harvest Equipment
 - 4 English sessions reaching 38 participants
 - 5 Spanish sessions reaching 59 participants
- Special Topic Training: Irrigation Water Sampling (Partnership with Yuma Safe Produce)
 - 36 participants

The Arizona LGMA also provided special topic bulletins on the topic of water turbidity and ag water assessment templates.

Last but not least, the Arizona LGMA launched an updated resource library on its new website that provides food safety resources, training resources and training opportunities. All resources are free and accessible anytime online at www.arizonaleafygreens.org



Food Safety Standards / Metrics	Audit Checklists
Appendix Documents	Bulletins & Templates
Training Resources	Training Opportunities



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COMMUNICATIONS

Updated Website

In August of 2023, the Arizona LGMA debuted an updated website at www.arizonaleafygreens.org. The website offers a clean new look and a reorganization of data. "We looked at the most popular content on our old website and reorganized it and made it easier for visitors to find exactly what they are looking for," says April Ward, Public Relations Liaison for the organization.

Arizona Leafy Greens Month

In November 2023 Arizona LGMA and the farming community in Arizona celebrated the 11th annual Arizona Leafy Greens Month. The celebration included a proclamation from the Governor's office, social media education and prize giveaways and a booth at the Yuma Farmer's Market. Arizona LGMA partnered with Yuma Safe Produce Council, as well as online influencers including Farmer Jon (Dinsmore), Ram628 (Ramiro Ruiz), Camelback Nutrition & Wellness (Kristen Carli) and The Produce Nerd (Megan Crivelli). The social media campaign included recipe development, the farmers perspective, the harvester's view, and consumer education.

Stakeholder Communications

The Arizona LGMA maintained its communications efforts with the farming community (growers, shippers, harvesters), produce buyers and the greater produce industry. Regular updates were provided via a multitude of communications including blog posts, Harvest Times newsletters and social media posts.

