



Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness

Local GAP Certification in Ethiopia as a Pathway to Safe Horticulture Production and Consumption

Gemechis Jaleta, *CASA*
Ethiopia Market Manager

March 2026



**UK International
Development**

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity



The Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) Programme aims to drive global investment for inclusive climate-resilient agri-food systems that increase the income of smallholder farmers.

No responsibility is accepted for use of any part of this paper in any other context or for any other purpose or by third parties. This paper does not purport to give legal advice. Legal advice can only be given by qualified legal practitioners.

The views expressed in the paper are entirely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of FCDO, nor any of the CASA implementing partners.

BACKGROUND

Ethiopia's horticulture sector has experienced remarkable expansion over the past decade, contributing significantly to export earnings, job creation, and livelihood diversification, particularly for women and youth. Despite this progress, several systemic challenges continue to undermine its full potential. Chief among these are unsafe production and handling practices, the absence of harmonised local standards for safe horticultural production, and weak consumer confidence in locally-produced fresh produce.

Most smallholder farmers who constitute the backbone of the domestic horticultural supply chain lack the technical capacity, financial resources, and infrastructure required to implement Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Consequently, the safety, traceability, and quality of their produce often fall short of both domestic and international standards. The situation has heightened public and market concerns regarding food safety, pesticide residues, and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, with increasing demand from supermarkets, processors, and export markets for compliance with strict quality and safety standards, the competitiveness of smallholders is at increasing risk unless appropriate local systems are established.

Rationale

Global GAP standards often require high levels of documentation, strong technical capacity, food safety control systems, and consistent infrastructure conditions that are difficult for smallholders who operate with limited resources and support. Key barriers include the high cost of certification and audits, insufficient training and awareness of standard requirements, weak extension and advisory services, gaps in traceability systems, and fragmented institutional coordination. Additionally, the complexity of global standards and their limited adaptation to local realities makes them inaccessible for farmers who lack basic record-keeping tools, quality inputs, or adequate production facilities.



Recognising these challenges, CASA Ethiopia, in collaboration with the [Ethiopian Horticulture Producer Exporters Association \(EHPEA\)](#), identified an urgent need to develop and operationalise a localised Good Agricultural Practice standard for Ethiopia (Ethio-GAP). The initiative aims for a contextually appropriate, accessible, and affordable certification framework aligned with both international benchmarks and local realities.

The objective of Ethio-GAP is to establish a credible, affordable, and accessible horticulture certification system that enhances food safety, market competitiveness, and sustainability. By focusing on smallholder inclusion, the initiative seeks to:

- Strengthen farmers' capacity to adopt GAP and meet quality standards
- Build consumer and buyer confidence in locally-produced horticultural products and their supply chains, and
- Foster systemic change in the horticulture market through improved coordination, transparency, and shared accountability.

The proposed Ethio-GAP standard responds directly to the above challenges by offering a locally contextualised, affordable, and practical certification pathway. Ethio-GAP maintains core elements of Good Agricultural Practices necessary for food safety such as safe pesticide use, hygiene protocols, and risk-based farm management, while simplifying implementation to fit smallholder realities. It reduces documentation complexity, promotes group certification models, and lowers compliance costs by using national certification bodies instead of expensive international auditors. Through embedded capacity-building and strengthened extension systems, Ethio-GAP equips farmers with the knowledge and skills required to meet essential food safety requirements.

Institutional coordination is also strengthened by harmonising stakeholder roles across government, farmer organisations, and private sector actors. This ensures consistent support from input supply to production, harvest, and market access. By addressing structural and cost-related barriers while safeguarding core food safety principles, Ethio-GAP provides an inclusive framework that enables smallholders to participate in higher-value markets, improve product quality, and establish safer, more resilient supply chains. Ultimately, Ethio-GAP aims to create a resilient, inclusive, and competitive horticulture sector that benefits producers, consumers, and the broader Ethiopian economy.

Positioning in the Market System

The Ethio-GAP framework should be positioned not merely as a certification standard, but as a strategic mechanism that connects Ethiopia's horticulture sector to global quality and safety benchmarks. By aligning with international GAP frameworks – while integrating Ethiopia's domestic food safety regulations and

agricultural development policies – Ethio-GAP functions as a vital bridge between local production realities and international market expectations, enabling farmers and agribusinesses to compete effectively in both domestic and export markets.

By promoting compliance with health, safety, and sustainability standards, Ethio-GAP enhances consumer trust and strengthens Ethiopia's reputation as a source of safe, responsibly-produced horticultural products. Moreover, it supports a market system where ethical, inclusive, and environmentally-sound production practices become the norm, helping smallholders transition from informal supply chains to formal markets. In the long term, Ethio-GAP can play a transformative role in advancing Ethiopia's food safety ecosystem, stimulating private sector investment, and unlocking access to high-value domestic, regional and global markets. With Ethiopia in the process of becoming a member of the World Trade Organization, this will help boost exports and trade diversification. Investors are more confident in economies governed by predictable trade rules and that attracts foreign investment.

THE PARTNERSHIP AND INITIATIVE

Who Is Involved

The Ethio-GAP initiative is a multi-stakeholder partnership bringing together EHPEA, farmer groups, horticultural enterprises, regulatory bodies, development partners, and market actors. This coalition represents all critical segments of the horticulture ecosystem, from producers and technical service providers to policymakers and buyers. CASA Ethiopia provided a facilitative role to support EPHEA to lead the coalition. Such diversity is essential to ensure that the certification framework is inclusive, practical, and responsive to the varied needs and capacities within the value chain.

The involvement of regulators ensures alignment with national policies and standards, while the participation of farmer groups and private businesses fosters ownership, local innovation, and sustainability. Development partners such as CASA provided technical backstopping

to EHPEA and facilitated the business model development by commissioning technical assistance, ensuring that Ethio-GAP evolves as a locally owned yet internationally backed standard.

Design of the Pilot

The design of the Ethio-GAP framework incorporates clearly defined criteria, verification systems, and institutional arrangements, based on localised adaptations to the Global GAP framework, to support transparent and efficient implementation. The framework rests on the pillars of safety, quality, sustainability, and inclusiveness, providing structured yet flexible guidelines that enable farmers to progressively meet certification requirements. Benefits to farmers – better prices, more consistent demand, climate-smart/resilient techniques resulting in better incomes and shock absorption – meant the framework is symbiotic for both parties.

Verification and audit mechanisms were adapted to the local context and based on group rather than individual verification and so aiming for smallholder affordability without compromising credibility. Institutional arrangements clearly defined the roles of implementing partners, certifying bodies, and farmer organisations in promoting accountability and learning. In this way, Ethio-GAP aimed to integrate smallholder production systems into formal market channels through a credible and accessible certification process.

The pilot sought to demonstrate how Ethio-GAP can enhance farmers' compliance with food safety and quality requirements, improve market linkages, and foster consumer trust in locally-produced horticultural products. Ultimately, the initiative is expected to strengthen the enabling environment for sustainable horticulture production systems in Ethiopia, supporting both domestic market assurance and export competitiveness.

The Learning

The Ethio-GAP initiative represents a critical learning journey to understand how local market dynamics, producer capacity, and institutional systems can converge to make safe and sustainable horticulture both practical and profitable. The pilot's learning process and messages focus on three interlinked dimensions of readiness: market, producer, and institutional. Together, these dimensions provide the foundation for scaling a locally-owned and trusted certification system that benefits consumers, farmers, and market actors alike.

Market Readiness

Recent market studies¹ reveal growing consumer awareness and a strong demand for safe and traceable horticultural products in domestic markets in Ethiopia. From supermarkets and hotels to institutional buyers

and individual households, there is a clear shift in consumer behaviour driven by health consciousness and concerns about pesticide use and food safety. In line with global trends in premium produce and food safety concerns, surveys conducted by EHPEA with CASA support highlight that institutional buyers are increasingly willing to pay a 5-15% price premium for certified produce they can trust, although no formal links have yet been established.

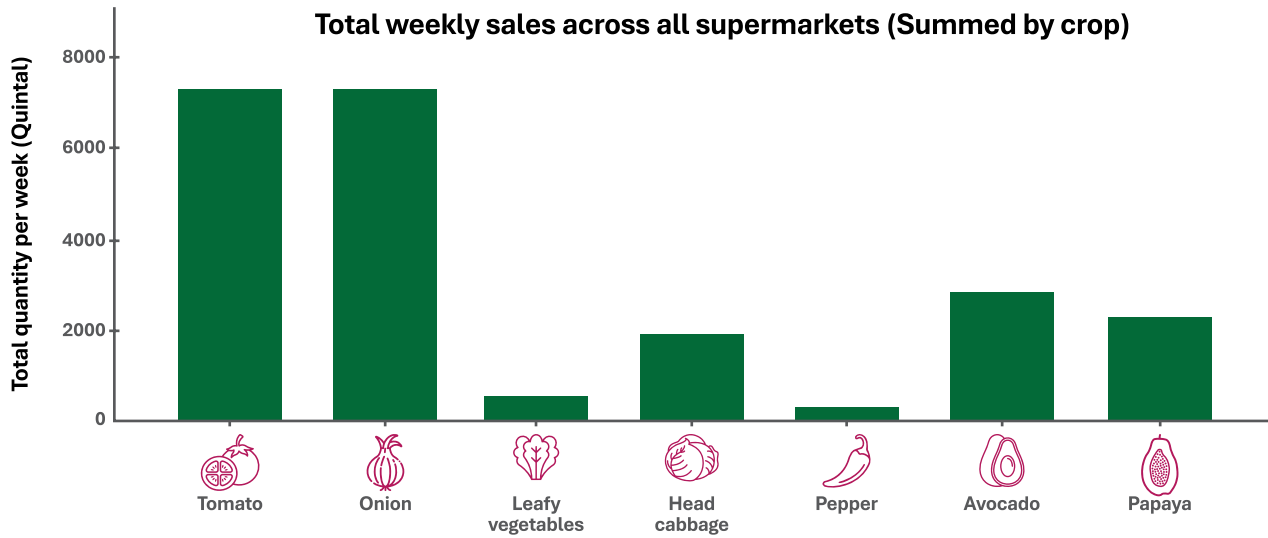
These early insights suggest that Ethio-GAP certification has significant potential to create a differentiated market segment for safe and responsibly produced vegetables, although the precise mechanisms – by which willing consumers know that the farmers have been motivated to comply and by which producers know where that demand is with sufficient faith to invest in becoming certified – are yet to be worked out. The presence of a consumer base willing to invest in health and safety provides a strong business case for farmers to adopt GAP. In essence, market demand is emerging as a pull factor, motivating producers to comply with certification standards while building a reputation for quality and reliability in the domestic market.

The market potential for local GAP-certified products is strong, particularly within major supermarket chains in Addis Ababa. Key retail outlets report a consistently high volume of daily vegetable and fruit sales (see the figure), indicating strong and stable consumer demand. Supermarket representatives also emphasised that customers increasingly prefer “safe,” traceable, and certified products, particularly for leafy greens and high-risk vegetables, and are willing to pay a premium for verified quality. Collectively, these trends demonstrate a clear commercial opportunity for producers and suppliers capable of meeting certification requirements and providing reliable, year-round supply.



National GAP Code Technical Working Group

1. e.g., <https://www.statista.com/outlook/cmo/food/vegetables/ethiopia#revenue>



Producer Readiness

On the supply side, the readiness and capacity of farmers to adopt GAP practices vary widely. Many smallholder producers express enthusiasm for certification and improved market access, understanding that it will give them access to higher paying premium markets as well as good agronomic advice to improve their production practices, but still face several challenges, including financial limitations, inadequate knowledge of standard requirements, and limited access to appropriate inputs and technologies. However, promising trends are emerging from early adopters who have participated in pilot training sessions and compliance trials organised under EPHEA with CASA support (going forward costs will be embedded in offtaking agreements or included in government extension systems). These farmers report² improved farm management practices, enhanced productivity, and stronger linkages with reliable buyers. Their experience underscores that technical assistance, mentorship, and practical demonstrations are essential enablers of change.

The Ethio-GAP learning journey, therefore, prioritises capacity-building interventions including training on safe input use, recordkeeping, post-harvest handling, and traceability systems that will need to be embedded into contracted supply chains by offtakers. This focus aims to reduce the barriers to certification while empowering farmers with the confidence and skills required to sustain compliance independently. As adoption spreads, a growing network of trained and certified producers will serve as local champions and peer educators, further driving behavioural change within farming communities.

Institutional Readiness

Institutional capacity and coordination are central to the long-term success of Ethio-GAP. EHPEA serves as the lead technical body and the Ethiopian Agriculture Authority (EAA) as the certifying body, ensuring that the Ethio-GAP standard remains credible, practical, and aligned with market realities. Collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, EHPEA, EAA and other development partners such as CASA strengthens regulatory alignment and policy coherence to create an enabling environment for sustainable certification systems.

Government partners have expressed a strong commitment to mainstreaming GAP adoption within broader food safety and agricultural quality assurance frameworks. At the same time, efforts are underway to enhance trust, transparency, and recognition of the certification system among consumers, producers, and market actors. Establishing robust institutional mechanisms such as accreditation systems, quality audits, and knowledge-sharing platforms will be essential to ensure the long-term credibility and scalability of Ethio-GAP.

Through this collaborative and iterative learning process, the Ethio-GAP pilot aimed not only to test a new certification framework but also to generate actionable insights on how Ethiopia can build a sustainable, inclusive, and market-driven food safety ecosystem that benefits both producers and consumers.

EMERGING INSIGHTS

The Ethio-GAP pilot has highlighted the feasibility of implementing localised Good Agricultural Practice standards within Ethiopia's horticulture sector. Early market assessment and business modelling shows that a locally-adapted certification framework is both technically viable and institutionally relevant, provided that appropriate support systems are in place to address capacity, financing, and market incentives.

A key insight emerging from the pilot is the critical role of financial and technical support mechanisms in enabling smallholder farmers to achieve and maintain certification compliance. Compliance with GAP standards requires investment in inputs, infrastructure (such as proper irrigation, post-harvest handling facilities, and recordkeeping tools), and periodic audits, all of which may be beyond the immediate financial reach of small producers. This highlights the need to establish innovative financing models, such as blended finance, cost-sharing mechanisms, and partnerships with microfinance institutions, to make compliance more accessible and sustainable.

Another important lesson is the significance of producer incentives and consumer awareness. Farmers are more likely to invest in certification when there is clear market demand and tangible financial reward such as access to premium buyers or long-term contracts³. Similarly, raising consumer awareness about the health and safety benefits of certified produce is essential for sustaining market demand. The pilot's business model revealed that informed consumers are more willing to pay a price premium for certified vegetables, but it is likely that an entire communications infrastructure needs to be developed around the certification, including feedback loops, two-way demand information loops, labelling systems and product promotion to strengthen public trust in certification labels.

From an institutional standpoint, the pilot underscored the importance of policy alignment, coordination, and regulatory endorsement. Collaboration among EHPEA, the Ministry of Agriculture, EAA and development partners has proven effective in ensuring that Ethio-GAP is aligned with national food safety and agricultural quality assurance frameworks. However, continued government recognition and integration of Ethio-GAP into the national agricultural certification system⁴ are essential to ensure long-term institutionalisation.

In summary, the pilot has indicated the relevance of Ethio-GAP while also identifying areas requiring further investment, particularly in financing mechanisms, consumer education (outside of the high-end consumers buying from institutional buyers market segment), and policy integration to ensure that the certification system delivers value across the horticultural value chain.

For EHPEA and its partners, the lessons and data emerging from this pilot will inform the next phase of Ethio-GAP development and scale-up. This includes refining certification standards to better reflect local realities, strengthening verification systems, and expanding the initiative to other high-potential horticultural regions. The scaling pathway will focus on three pillars:

- **Institutionalisation:** Securing national recognition and integration of Ethio-GAP within government policy frameworks
- **Market expansion:** Leveraging private sector and buyer engagement to grow demand for certified products, and
- **Sustainability:** Developing self-financing, training, and knowledge systems that enable long-term certification adoption beyond donor support.

Through these pathways, Ethio-GAP has the potential to become a national model for safe and sustainable agriculture, positioning Ethiopia as a regional leader in food safety and responsible horticulture production.

3. Not CASA experience, but Meki Batu farmers union has experience with producing and supplying green beans to lead firms and institutional buyers such as Ethiopian Airlines and are mentioned in the study done by a CASA consultant.

4. Currently undergoing a major digital transformation, spearheaded by the Ethiopian Agricultural Authority (EAA), to enhance efficiency, quality control, and export competitiveness. The core of this modernisation is the Integrated Export and Import Certification System (IEICS), also known as the e-Phyto project.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of the Ethio-GAP pilot has demonstrated that Ethiopia possesses both the potential and the momentum to build a locally-owned, credible, and sustainable certification system for horticultural products. By addressing critical challenges in food safety, production quality, and market access, Ethio-GAP offers a transformative framework capable of reshaping Ethiopia's horticultural value chain from the ground up.

The initiative implies an important truth: when smallholder farmers are equipped with knowledge, resources, and incentives to meet recognised standards, they can compete and thrive in modern markets as well as benefit from increased incomes, better resilience against shocks, and use of more environmentally-sustainable techniques and technologies. Consumers, in turn, benefit from safer and more reliable food, while institutions and private sector actors gain from a stronger and more trusted agricultural system.

However, realising the full potential of Ethio-GAP requires collective and sustained action. Development partners, government agencies, and private sector stakeholders are called upon to deepen their engagement through financial investment, policy alignment, and market facilitation. Donor support remains vital for scaling capacity-building programmes, financing compliance mechanisms, and strengthening verification and accreditation systems.

To strengthen the national traceability system for vegetables, it is advisable to integrate the Ethio-GAP certification framework with Ethiopia's National ID initiative. Such integration would enable farmers, cooperatives, and supply chain actors to be uniquely and consistently identified across certification, production, and market systems. Linking GAP compliance records with verified digital identities would enhance transparency, reduce risks of mislabelling and streamline monitoring and verification processes. In addition, this alignment would facilitate more reliable tracking of produce from farm to market, improve accountability, and support buyers – including supermarkets, exporters, and institutional consumers – in accessing accurate, trusted information on the origin and safety of certified products.

The next phase of Ethio-GAP presents an opportunity to institutionalise food safety as a pillar of Ethiopia's agricultural transformation. With strategic coordination, Ethiopia can position itself as a leader in sustainable horticulture within the region, ensuring that local farmers, businesses, and consumers alike share in the benefits of a safe, inclusive, and competitive food system.

Now is the time to act. By uniting public, private, and development efforts under the Ethio-GAP framework, Ethiopia can build a future where every household has access to safe food; every farmer earns a fair return for responsible production; and the country's horticultural sector thrives in both domestic and global markets.





Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness

