



Laboratory Selection Considerations

Let's review some AZ LGMA Guidance & metrics regarding the use of third-party or private laboratories.

- Laboratories used for analytical parameters must be certified and/or accredited by recognized State, Federal, or International bodies(ISO) for the analytical methods being reported and the matrices being analyzed.
- Any FDA-allowed method may be used for compliance with the water portion of the metrics.¹
- Soil Amendments & Crop Inputs recommended test methods:
 - Fecal Coliforms: U.S. EPA Method 1680; multiple tube MPN
 - Salmonella spp: U.S. EPA Method 1682
 - STEC & *Listeria Monocytogenes*: Any laboratory validated method for compost or soil amendments.
 - Other U.S. EPA, FDA, AOAC, TMECC or validated/Accredited methods may be used as appropriate.

It is the responsibility of our members to suitably select a laboratory that will perform microbiological testing and report results using methods that meet the Leafy Green Marketing Agreement Metrics. The off-season is the perfect opportunity to evaluate your suppliers, including the laboratories that perform your microbiological testing.

Selecting the *wrong* laboratory can have negative implications on the integrity of your food safety program. Likewise, selecting the *right* lab can provide confidence in the effectiveness of your food safety policies and procedures. They can be a great trusted resource for maintaining & developing your food safety program as you validate processes.

There are some basic criteria you can use when selecting or evaluating your laboratory.

- Quality Assurance Management System;
- Sample receipt, handling, & chain of custody;
- Methods Used & Implementation;
- Reporting of results, and turnaround times;
- Location of Laboratory for sample submittal.

¹.<https://www.fda.gov/food/laboratory-methods-food/equivalent-testing-methodology-agricultural-water>

If you would like more information on the Arizona LGMA and metrics topics, feel free to contact us.

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➤ QA Management System

- Does the laboratory have an effective QA Program and is it reviewed by an external third party at least annually? These third parties will verify compliance with the laboratory's standards such as the ISO standards. Although accreditation to ISO standards is not required, it does provide a level of confidence in the quality and accuracy of the test results.

➤ Sample receipt, handling, & chain of custody

- Ensure the laboratory has a system for maintaining integrity of samples once received, throughout storage, analysis, and reporting.
- The laboratory should be able to explain their Standard Operating Procedures for their processes and ensure a chain of custody system is used to track movements of the sample while in process.

➤ Methods Used & Implementation

- Is the laboratory you've selected using validated methods for testing?
- Are those validated methods, validated on the products you want to analyze? Are they validated for the microorganisms of concern that you want to look for?
- What are the detection limits for that method?
- Ultimately, will the method provide you the information you want to find out using a validated proven method?

➤ Analysis Result Reporting & Lab Location

- When does the laboratory accept samples? Is the laboratory operating 5 or 7 days a week for reporting and sample submission?
- Lab turnaround times as well as location of laboratory will need to fit your company specific needs.

It is important that as a Grower or Shipper, you build a working relationship with the laboratory that you select. This will ensure they are able to assist and respond to testing needs and updates as your program requires. They are a valuable resource for your food safety program.

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