



Georgia Crop Improvement Association

2023 Annual Report

2023 GCIA Recap & Review

- Billy Skaggs, Executive Director

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2023 was another good year for Georgia Crop Improvement. As great as it was, the speed at which the year seemed to pass by is hard to believe. Maybe it's the fact that I'm been here at GCIA for going on eleven years now. Or perhaps it's the simple fact that we're all getting older, and time seems to fly by at an ever-increasing pace. Either way, here we are almost one quarter of the way through 2024.

In terms of certified inspected acreage, we had increases in all commodities except forage grasses. GCIA inspected 145,782 acres of cropland & turfgrass - up almost 16K acres from 2022. As in previous years, peanuts led the way, followed by turfgrass, soybeans, small grains, and forage grasses. GCIA printed 2,817,514 certified seed tags in 2023, but what does that really equate to? Each certified tag represents 50-pound unit of certified seed. So, 2.8 million certified tags printed is equal to almost 141 million pounds of certified seed produced in Georgia. GCIA is the country's largest certifier of warm season turf and among the top five certification programs in acres inspected. Pretty impressive.

We continue to have the only international turfgrass certification program. This program, based on domestic turfgrass certification principals, is a proven quality assurance program that monitors production sites worldwide to ensure that turfgrasses are produced under a rigorous set of rules and standards. Currently, ITGAP has clients in 14 countries around the world, including a network of almost 40 growers in Australia (AusGAP).

In addition to traditional certification, GCIA has several programs which operate under the umbrella of Agricultural Audits, LLC. Around 20 years ago, the GCIA board of directors authorized Agricultural Audits to provide services to farms & business outside of the scope of our core business (seed & turfgrass). These services include organic certification (under the supervision of USDA AMS), royalty and license compliance audits, food safety audits, and association management. Organic certification, in particular, has grown to be an important revenue generator for GCIA.

While the facts & figures above paint part of the picture, I would be remiss if I didn't highlight two primary factors for GCIA's continued success – leadership and dedication. Our success would not be possible without the dedication and hard work of our staff, and I cannot thank our team enough! And regarding leadership, the board of directors continue to provide invaluable guidance and direction to our organization.

Also, on the subject of leadership, the staff and membership of GCIA certainly owe a debt of gratitude to our former executive director, Terry Hollifield. Terry served our organization for 53 years, and we wouldn't be where we are today without him. Thankfully, Terry is still working on a part time basis so we can continue to learn from him as well share a few laughs along the way. Thanks Terry!



MEMBER
Association of Official
Seed Certifying Agencies
<http://www.aosca.org>

Seed Certification Program

Timely field inspection of the growing crop is made by GCIA’s highly trained inspectors. Certified seed may be defined as seed certified by the Georgia Crop Improvement Association as to origin, adaptation, breeding, seed condition, purity of variety, freedom from disease and noxious weed seed.

Through its certification service, the Georgia Crop Improvement Association makes available the best seed possible for Georgia farmers. Seed certification encourages farmers to purchase seed of approved varieties; it also protects the buyers of crop seed in that only high quality, superior performing seed are approved for certification.

Certified seed grown in Georgia can be readily identified by the official tag or certificate of the Georgia Crop Improvement Association attached to the container of seed. Certified seed standards of the Association meet or exceed the minimum standards approved by the Association of Official Seed Certifying Agencies and the Georgia State Seed Law. Becki Hicks and Leslie Wright provide administrative support for the program, and all field staff assist with field inspections.

In 2023, GCIA inspected 145,782 acres of cropland & turfgrass which is up almost 16K acres from 2022. In addition, GCIA printed 2,817,514 certified seed tags. As in previous years, peanuts led the way, followed by turfgrass, soybeans, small grains, and forage grasses.



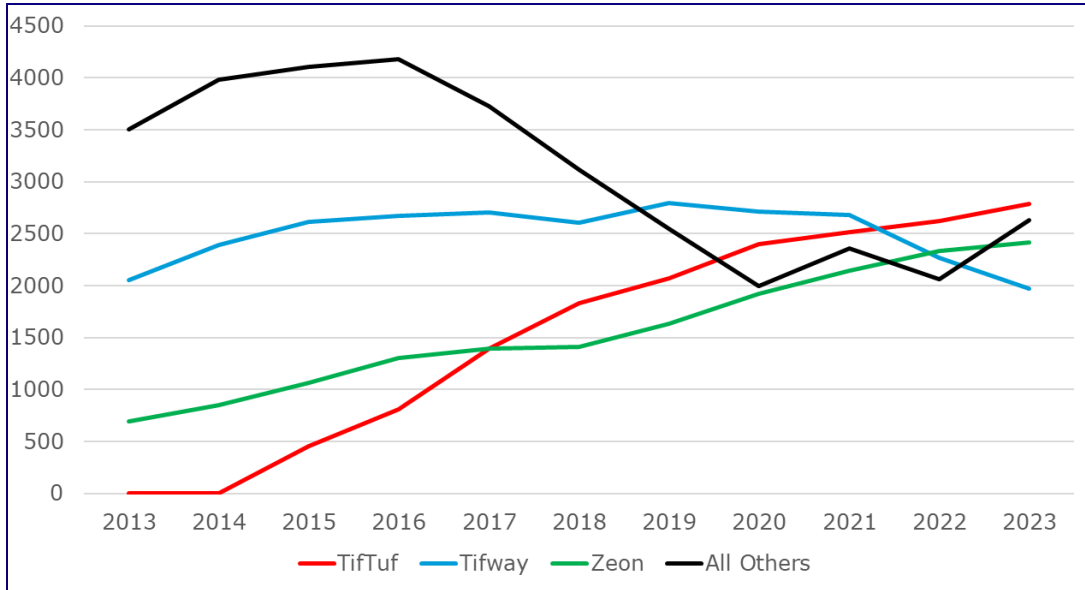
CROP	ACRES
Peanuts	139,705
Turfgrass	9,932
Small Grains	4,947
Forage Grasses	1,033
Soybeans (including Corteva)	5,986
TOTAL	161,603



Turfgrass Certification Program

GCIA’s turfgrass certification program is the only quality control offered for protection of the sod buyer, as state and federal laws do not address vegetatively-produced crops. GCIA turfgrass members produce “blue tag” certified sod which is field inspected at least three times each year by experienced inspectors.

In 2023, certified turfgrass producers applied for almost 9,932 acres of which 9,039 acres were certified at season’s end. Since 2013, certified turfgrass acres have increased 59%. Much of this growth can be attributed to the expansion of TifTuf bermudagrass and Zeon zoysiagrass (see table below).



GCIA also administers the International Turfgrass Genetic Assurance Program (ITGAP). ITGAP is a proven, quality assurance program that monitors production sites worldwide to ensure that turfgrasses are produced under a rigorous set of rules and guidelines. ITGAP protects the purity of those grasses against contamination, weeds, and other crops during production.

ITGAP Benefits

- Experienced professional inspectors monitor production sites worldwide to ensure that turfgrasses are grown under a rigorous set of production standards.
- ITGAP is an internationally accepted and recognized verification program for turfgrass production.
- Golf and sports turf facility owners, architects and designers see ITGAP as a respected source for quality assurance.



Produce Food Safety Program

The Produce Food Safety Program is an inspection/auditing program conducted by Agricultural Audits in conjunction with the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association and PrimusLabs to verify that good agricultural practices are followed during production, packing and shipping. In today's marketplace, food safety verification and confidence are critical. Terry Crane serves as the Food Safety Program Manager for GCIA. In 2023, 85 audits were conducted which is down from 2022.



Produce Food Safety Program benefits:

- Requires the use of environmentally safe practices
- Requires the use of laboratory tested water
- Requires a safe environment for workers
- Requires sanitary handling and packing practices
- Promotes the use of food security precautions.

For more information on this program, visit www.georgiacrop.com/food-safety.

2022 Food Safety Audits:	# Performed
Packing House	21
Ranch	37
Harvest Crew	18
Cooling & Cold Storage	4
Indoor Agriculture	1
Storage & Distribution	2
GAPP	2
TOTAL	85

Georgia / Florida Soybean Association

GCIA continued to provide administrative services to the Georgia/Florida Soybean Association, including membership, annual meeting coordination and correspondence with the American Soybean Association. In addition, GCIA represented GA/FL Soybean Association at the Georgia Farm Bureau Convention in December 2023. As an exhibitor at the tradeshow, GCIA staff had the opportunity to meet and connect with soybean producers from around the state.



Georgia Soybean Commodity Commission

Since March 2014, GCIA has provided administrative support to the Georgia Soybean Commodity Commission. Services provided to the Commission include:

- Edited and distributed quarterly GA Soybean News to Georgia soybean growers and industry;
- Distributed soybean education and promotional materials to schools and other groups;
- Wrote and submitted articles to Farmers & Consumers Market Bulletin, Farm Bureau News, and Georgia Agribusiness Council re: Commission funded research;
- Worked with United Soybean Board compliance auditor and GDA staff re: audit and provided all requested documentation; prepared annual budget;
- Distributed call for grant requests; coordinated review of grant proposals; in 2023, over \$180,000 was awarded for soybean research, extension & promotional efforts - up over \$30k from the the previous year.

Organic Certification

What exactly is organic certification? Organic certification verifies that a farm or handling facility located anywhere in the world complies with the USDA organic regulations and allows the operator to sell, label, and represent their products as organic. The regulations ([7CFR Part 205 National Organic Program Final Rule](#)) describe the specific standards required for an operator to use the word “organic” or the USDA organic seal on food, feed, or fiber products. The USDA National Organic Program administers these regulations, with input from its citizen advisory board and the public.



While the USDA administers the National Organic Program (NOP), they do not routinely conduct the onsite inspections of these facilities. Instead, USDA NOP relies on agencies and organizations to conduct organic inspections. The Georgia Crop Improvement Association is a USDA NOP Accredited Certifying Agent (ACA). Once approved, organic certifiers are accredited for five years. To ensure compliance, every two and a half years USDA conducts an onsite assessment. Renewing ACA’s will have onsite assessments prior to renewal around the five year mark. These assessments are performed by the NOP.

Billie Dunn serves as the Organic Program Manager. Johnny Luke is the senior organic inspector. Other available inspectors include Daniel Tinsley, Sean Cunard, and Billy Skaggs. Jeanne Gonzales and Mary Jo Kennedy are Organic Certification Specialists providing vital administrative support for the program. Matthew Young with Tennessee Crop Improvement assists with final reviews of completed inspections.

Clients by scope:	
Crop	73
Processor / Handler	83
Greenhouse	3
Livestock & Poultry	1
Total	160

For more information, visit www.georgiacrop.com/organic.

Approved Seed Conditioning Facilities

All certified seed must be conditioned in a GCIA approved facility. The facilities are inspected annually to determine if equipment is properly installed and maintained to prevent contamination between varieties. Approved plant representatives are knowledgeable in plant operations and record keeping. Representatives must also attend a GCIA supported training session. Many of these plants are available for custom seed cleaning as well. In 2023, GCIA had 41 approved facilities with several conditioning more than one kind of certified seed; see the breakdown below.

Kinds of Certified Seed Conditioned:	# Facilities
Peanuts	22
Small Grains / Soybeans	15
Grass Seed / Forages	2
Foundation Seed	2





Georgia Crop Improvement Association

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