

GFSI-Recognized Food Safety Schemes Ensure Global Acceptance

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Major food companies and retailers now demand their suppliers adhere to GFSI schemes to ensure food safety.



The beginning of the second millennium witnessed a number of food safety crises across the world, ranging from widespread salmonella poisoning in eatables, to finding of worms in packaged food products. Several well-documented contamination and product recall cases led to the launch of the [Global Food Safety Initiative](#) [1] (GFSI) in 2000.

The GFSI platform acts as an international quality benchmark in the food industry, and helps establish uniform and consistent international food safety standards. The GFSI schemes also enable companies to comply with the requirements of the 2011 [Food Safety Modernization Act](#) [2] (FSMA) that aims to create a safer, transparent and efficient food supply chain.

Understanding the Key GFSI Approved Food Safety Schemes

Currently, there are 10 benchmarked standards by different scheme owners, who developed their own food safety standards by incorporating the basic benchmarking factors laid down by GFSI.

The four key [GFSI-benchmarked schemes](#) [3] are **[1]**:

1. Safe Quality Food (SQF) owned by the Food Marketing Institute

[SQF certification](#) [4] implies that a company's food safety and quality management system is in compliance with global and regional food safety mandates. SQF code governs all aspects of a food supply chain, including primary food manufacturing, ingredient manufacturing, product packaging and distribution. The [SQF audit](#) [5] takes 14 days from initiation to closure. The major non-conformances have to be closed within 14 days, while minor non-conformances must be addressed within 30

days.

2. British Retail Consortium (BRC) Food Standard

The [BRC scheme](#) [6] is relevant to food manufacturers, retailers and brands. The scheme underlines that all entities in the end-to-end food supply chain must have systems in place to detect, monitor and control food safety hazards. It also specifies legal due diligence activities for the supplier and the retailer. The [BRC audit](#) [7] takes five days to complete, after which 14 days are given to close major non-conformances, and 28 days for minor non-conformances.

3. International Featured Standards (IFS)

The [IFS certification](#) [8] is relevant to companies that process or deal with food and food ingredients. Key aspects governed by this scheme include safety criteria for transportation, packaging, storage and/or distribution of pre-packaged food, senior management responsibility, food quality and safety management, resource management, and production process. The [IFS audit](#) [9] takes two days. Six weeks are given to clear the major non-conformances, and 12 months to clear the minors.

4. Food Safety System Certification (FSSC) 22000

[FSSC](#) [10] has an added prerequisite program certification called ISO/TS 22002-1:2009 to control food safety hazards in food manufacturing environments, developed by the British Standards Institution. [FSSC 22000 auditing](#) [11] is done in two stages comprising document review and facility evaluation, and takes four to five days.

Here, the auditor makes recommendation to the certification body, which in conjunction with the auditor makes the final decision. Companies have up to 180 days to close out non-conformances.



Choosing the Right GFSI Scheme

Food manufacturers and retailers can choose the best scheme by considering the following:

- Examine the various GFSI recognized schemes and determine if the industry in which a company operates is included in the scope of a specific certification.
- Access and understand the scheme documents relevant to a company's

business.

The Food Safety Audits

Independently trained, authorized and licensed experts in the industry conduct GFSI scheme audits. An independent certification body audits the schemes, while an accreditation body audits the certification body.

Getting Ready for Certification in a GFSI Recognized Scheme

The company must have in place a food safety team (FST) led by a food safety leader to conduct self-assessment and determine the gaps in the food safety system inconsistent with the chosen food safety scheme. Now, a third-party gap assessment is done to help companies gain idea about their program status. Finally, the company can schedule a full certification by the chosen certification body, or the company that will perform the audit.

A glimpse into the full certification process:

- The certification body issues a proposal consistent with the size and nature of the organization.
- At 'pre-audit' stage, loopholes are identified and corrected.
- At 'Readiness Review' stage, organization's documented system is examined against set standards and audit is planned.
- Key elements of the system are tested, and report is generated. Immediate action is taken in case of any non-compliance. An authorized certification manager performs technical review and decides whether to issue the certificate.
- Full recertification audits are scheduled at defined intervals.

Leveraging Technology to Manage GFSI Requirements

Technology enables companies to adopt an integrated approach to food safety programs. Advanced web-based solutions with sophisticated technology architecture facilitate end-to-end processes involved in planning and implementing GFSI food safety schemes. Technology can help companies to adopt a workflow based approach, automate and streamline key processes, eliminate silos, and seamlessly achieve the desired results from the program.

Technology can help companies strengthen their food safety programs by managing various components like compliance, hazard analysis and risk, preventive controls, audits, non-conformance, corrective action, customer complaints, and training.

Summary

Adhering to the GFSI benchmarking in food safety enables companies to perform with discipline, and be more efficient and profitable, and to strengthen brand value and product integrity. GFSI certified companies can be assessed with equivalence

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across countries and continents, and their products enjoy greater acceptance in the global markets.

Good food processes means improved consumer confidence in an enterprise. To achieve this goal, companies in the food business must embrace GFSI approved schemes, and enhance their food safety processes, with the added support of relevant technology.

This article has been adopted from a detailed MetricStream Insight article on 'Strengthen Food Safety Management Programs by Adopting the Right GFSI Recognized Standard'. To view the original article click [here](#) [12].

[1] <http://www.mygfsi.com/about-gfsi/gfsi-recognised-schemes.html> [3] (Section 3.3, pg. 36)

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Links:

[1] <https://twitter.com/myGFSI>

[2] <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/16/idUS195024+16-Aug-2011+BW20110816>

[3] <http://www.mygfsi.com/about-gfsi/gfsi-recognised-schemes.html>

[4] <http://www.sqfi.com/>

[5] <http://www.sqfi.com/wp-content/uploads/SQF-Code-Ed-7.1-4-29-13.pdf#page=27>

[6] <http://www.brcglobalstandards.com/>

[7] http://www.standards.org/standards/listing/brc_food

[8] <http://www.ifs-certification.com/index.php/en/>

[9] <http://www.ifs-certification.com/index.php/en/ifs-certified-companies-en/ifs-certification/the-ifs-audit>

[10] <http://www.fssc22000.com/en/>

[11] <http://www.fssc22000.com/downloads/1.pdf>

[12] <http://info.metricstream.com/Strengthen-Food-Safety-Management.html>

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