

## **Emerging standards and certification schemes in global food safety management systems**

The following article is a part of FIFP webinars conducted on 9th January 2021 on the topic Certifications and regulations in seafood industry (Part 2)

### **Note from the Chief Editor:**

Certifications and regulations in seafood industry (Part 2) comprised the main theme of FIFP webinar conducted on 9th January 2021. In all, three presentations were made that covered Ensuring food safety: an overview of food safety management systems; Emerging standards and certification schemes in global food safety management systems; and Seafood safety management systems. Smt. Rema Sunil elaborated GFSI approved schemes particularly some of the most commonly adopted standards by branded goods manufacturers such as FSSC 22000, BRC, SQF 2000 and IFS. She gave a comparison of these GFSI recognized schemes with regard to certificate validity, integrated audit, recertification and certification mark. Standard requirements and benefits of each of the GFSI schemes are discussed. The significance of certifying an organization against the requirements of a GFSI approved scheme to meet the growing global customer requirements with focus on food safety system management was highlighted.

### **Introduction**

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is a non-profit association of industry experts committed to improving food safety along the value chain. Its major objectives are reduction in food safety risks by delivering equivalence and convergence between effective food safety management systems; manage costs in global food system by eliminating redundancy and improving operational efficiency; develop competencies and capacity building in food safety to create consistent and effective global food systems; and also provide a unique international stakeholder platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange and networking. FSSC 22000, SQF, BRC, Global GAP, Global Aquaculture Alliance Seafood, The International Featured Standard & Global Red Meat Standard comprise GFSI approved schemes. GFSI benchmarks the various food safety standards against a basic set of criteria. Some of the most commonly adopted standards by branded goods manufacturers are (FSSC 22000, BRC, SQF 2000 and IFS).

### **Food Safety System Certification (FSSC 22000)**

FSSC 22000 is one of the benchmarked standards rising in popularity. FSSC 22000 applies to food manufacturers. FSSC 22000 uses the requirements in ISO 22000-2018 Food Safety System Certification and the ISO/TS 22002-x Series and additional requirements.

## **ISO 22000 and the ISO/TS 22002-1**

ISO 22000 contains the requirements for the Food Safety Management System. ISO/TS 22002-x contains sector specific requirements for Prerequisite Programs for food manufacturers.

### **Benefits of FSSC22000**

FSSC22000 has several benefits. It provides a good framework against which an organization can develop its food safety management system; with flexibility to choose the best way to control its own system and ensure food safety policy and objectives are being met. Include comprehensive requirements detailing how to conduct effective HACCP studies and HACCP plan. Also, it promotes continuous improvement in food safety.

### **BRC (British Retail Consortium)**

The BRC (British Retail Consortium) has developed a set of Global Standards, which is an international product safety and quality certification programme. The BRC Global Food Standard was developed with the objective of specifying the safety, quality and operational criteria required for food manufacturers to comply with regulations and protect consumers. The requirements of Standard are as follows:

- Senior Management Commitment and Continuous Improvement
- Food Safety & Quality Management System
- Site Standards
- Product Control
- Process Control
- Personnel

It focusses on quality, as well as food safety and legality. The standard has descriptive requirements for process and hygiene control which provide clear guidelines as to how food safety should be addressed. It has a simple certification process which only requires an on-site audit, there is no requirement for a desk study step. It includes a voluntary recertification audit.

### **Safe Quality Food (SQF) 2000 Standard**

The SQF 2000 standard is half of a two-part scheme covering food manufacturing and distribution as well as primary production, the latter under the SQF 1000 standard. The scheme aims to meet the needs of buyers and suppliers worldwide. The standard certifies that a supplier's food safety and quality management system comply with international and domestic food safety regulations. Each SQF standard can be achieved at 3 different levels ( level1, level 2 and level 3), level 2 being GFSI approved.

### **SQF Standard Requirements**

The SQF 2000 standard requires each of the following, where appropriate, to be achieved at the level detailed: SQF 2000 System Requirements are Commitment, Document Control and Records, Specification and Product Development, Attaining Food Safety, Verification, Product Identification, Trace, Withdrawal and Recall, Site Security& Identity Preserved Food  
Food Safety Fundamentals:

- Building and Equipment Design and Construction
- Site Requirements and Approval of Food Handling Area
- Water and Ice Supply
- Storage Facilities
- Separation of Functions
- On-site Laboratories
- Staff Amenities
- First Aid Facilities
- Waste disposal
- Exterior

### **Benefits Of SQF**

There is enhancement of the organization's food safety management system. It demonstrates commitment to producing and trading safe food. It increases consumer confidence in the products produced. Brand equity is enhanced. It prepares organizations for inspection by regulatory authorities and other stakeholders. It improves new market and customer prospects. If SQF level 3 is achieved organizations can use the SQF quality mark on their products.

### **The International Featured Standard (IFS)**

The IFS aims to provide a uniform quality assurance and food safety standard for retailer branded food products. The IFS provides a range of integrated checks on food safety and food quality in food processing companies. It covers all product ranges, offering certification across the whole range of food processing with the exception of agricultural primary production. The IFS covers the complete food supply chain with three related standards: IFS Food; IFS Broker; and IFS Logistics.

### **IFS Standard Requirements**

The audit assesses whether the elements of an organization's quality management system as given below are documented, implemented, maintained and continuously approved

- Senior Management Responsibility
- Quality Management System
- Resource Management
- Personal Hygiene
- Protective Clothing for Personnel Contractors and Visitors
- Procedures Applicable to Infectious Diseases
- Production Process
- Measurements Analysis & Improvements

### **Benefits of IFS standards**

It has a simple certification process which only requires an on-site audit. The standard has a focus on quality, as well as food safety and legality. Once certified, there is no need for a re-audit and certification for 1 year, this applies to all levels awarded. The IFS has a global network of strategically placed offices covering Europe, America, and Asia. Suppliers are given a 12-month time period to make corrective actions (when not directly related to food safety or regulatory compliance) allowing for budget planning and continuous improvements. Audits can be conducted electronically with software support. All the IFS criteria are risk-based

and there are no prescriptive elements. The IFS Audit Portal is both a database and a reporting and notification tool.

#### A COMPARISON OF THE GFSI RECOGNISED SCHEMES

SUBJECT	BRC	IFS	SQF	FSSC22000
CERTIFICATE VALIDITY	Certificate valid for 1 year Grade C-Recertification within 6 months	Certificate valid for 1 year	Certificate valid for 1 year Grade C-Recertification within 6 months	Certificate valid for 3 years
INTEGRATED AUDIT	As recertification depends on the result of the audit (grade C need to be recertified in 6 months interval or integrated condition will be changed depending	Cannot be integrated with ISO management system standard, can be integrated with product certification scheme	Different management system structure but possible for integrated audit	Same management system structure as ISO standard so it is easy to integrate with other management system standards
RECERTIFICATION/ MAINTENANCE VISIT	Same audit time as Certification visit	Same audit time as Certification visit	Same audit time as Stage 2 on site	Less audit time than Stage 2 on site
CERTIFICATION MARK	Does not allow to be displayed on the product	Does not allow to be displayed on the product	Level 3 certification can use certification mark on the product	Does not allow to be displayed on the product

## Conclusion

Certifying an organization against the requirements of a GFSI approved scheme means it is prepared to meet the growing global customer requirements and demonstrate its diligent focus on food safety system management. All GFSI schemes demand senior management commitment and require companies to regularly review customer requirements, define processes and demonstrate consistent control over identified hazards, updating and improving the food safety management system to adapt to changes in process, requirements or regulations. The most important thing an organization needs to consider when choosing a GFSI approved food safety scheme is making sure there is the perfect match between the scheme and the organization.

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Rema Sunil is currently the Managing Director, Safehand Foodtech Consultants, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. She is responsible for developing and establishing food safety Consultancy Company that includes Food hygiene training (Basic, Intermediate, Advanced level HABC, CIEH, UK); Food safety training (Hazards analysis & HACCP In Practice, HABC, CIEH, UK); and Technical consultancy & Implementation assistance in GMP, GHP, HACCP, FSSC 22000, BRC, ISO 22000, ISO 9000, ISO 14000 etc. Prior to this, she was Manager (Food & Hospitality Division) SGS Gulf Limited, Dubai, UAE and was engaged in developing and Implementing a Food and Hygiene Division. She has also worked as Quality Control Manager at Gulf Sea Food Company LLC, Dubai, UAE; Assistant Manager - Quality Control, Innovative Marine Foods, Cochin, India; and Production Executive, Choice Canning Company, Cochin, India.

