

CHECKLIST

GFSI Standards

Getting Started with the SQF Code



The SQF Code is a process and product certification standard created and maintained by the Safe Quality Food Institute (SQFI), a division of the Arlington, Virginia-based trade association, the Food Marketing Institute (FMI).

The SQF Code is based on the international standard ISO/IEC 17065 and applies to every facet of the food business, from primary production to transport and distribution. The main feature of the Code is its emphasis on the efficient application of HACCP to identify and control food safety and quality hazards. Thus, implementing the SQF management system addresses a buyer's food safety and quality requirements while providing a comprehensive solution for businesses supplying local and global food markets.

With this standard, SQFI helps make certification more attainable for smaller companies by separating the process into four modules:

- **SQF Fundamentals Program:** Complies with systems based on Good Manufacturing Processes (GMPs).
- **SQF Food Safety Program:** Conforms to HACCP food safety requirements.
- **SQF Food Safety and Quality Program:** Follows HACCP quality management systems.
- **SQF Ethical Sourcing Program:** Adheres to environmental, social, health, and safety requirements for ethical ingredient sourcing.

The latest edition of the SQF Code, Version 9, went live May 21, 2021, and streamlines the program's architecture.

Companies can earn SQF certifications in each program but first must complete the SQF Food Safety Program to secure GFSI-recognized certification. If a company achieves the SQF Food Safety and Quality Program, it may display the SQF-quality shield.

SQF Documents can be downloaded at the SQFI Website and include:

- The SQF Code.
- Guidance for Developing, Documenting, and Implementing SQF.
- Additional guidance documents.

The two main things SQF can do for organizations are to:

1. Offer a rigorous system to manage food safety risks and provide safe products for companies in the food industry.
2. Deliver a recognized food safety certification. This endorsement allows customers to have confidence in a business's food safety program and know a rigorous food safety system is in place.

SQF Certification Involves Eight Critical Steps

1. The first step toward certification is to understand the basics of the SQF Code itself. Companies can achieve this by:
 - a. Attending an implementation training course offered by one of more than two dozen licensed SQF training centers.
 - b. Taking the online "Implementing SQF Systems" training course available through the SQFI website.
 - c. Through self-directed learning by downloading the SQF Code.
 - d. Taking the "Implementing SQF Systems" online examination through the SQFI website.
2. Companies then must sign up for the relevant modules of the SQF Code, realizing that food safety practices differ and depend on each product's food safety risk. SQFI designed the SQF Code to meet each industry segment's unique requirements with these differences in mind.
3. The next step is to register in the SQF Assessment Database. To be considered for certification, suppliers must register in the database on the SQFI website. There's an annual registration fee and an additional cost for each supplier site.
4. The next phase includes the designation of an SQF practitioner. Unique to the SQF program, every supplier must have a qualified individual onsite to validate and verify the food safety fundamentals and quality plans. Many companies choose to have their practitioner, key personnel, and senior management participate in the training. This course introduces the supplier to the SQF program and Code and facilitates simple implementation.
5. The supplier then must choose the desired certification program based on customer needs and the status of the company's food safety and quality management systems.
6. The next step is to document and implement the food safety and/or quality management systems. Companies can verify implementation by using the chosen Code modules as a checklist. In addition, SQF makes the Code and applicable guidance documents available in other languages for foreign-language suppliers.
7. At this point in the process, the supplier will choose from a growing list of SQF-licensed and accredited certification bodies to oversee the certification audit and issue the SQF certificate of registration. Accreditation means the certification body has had its internal policies and functions reviewed by an independent third party. A list of SQFI's licensed and accredited certification bodies is available on the organization's website.
8. Lastly, suppliers can submit to an optional pre-assessment check on their own or through the supplier's certifying body ahead of the official certification audit.

Self-assessments and certifications can be time-consuming and complicated. TraceGains helps streamline and automate the process making certifications a snap.

+1 720.465.9400 | **connect@tracegains.com** | **tracegains.com**