

SAFE QUALITY FOOD



*Globally Trusted Food Safety
and Quality Certification*

Criteria



SQF
Consultant
Code of
Practice

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PREFACE

The first edition of the SQF Consultant Code of Practice has been developed as a result of over seven years experience with the implementation of SQF Systems.

This Code of Practice applies to SQF Consultants who are registered by the SQF Institute to use the SQF Program intellectual property to implement SQF Systems under consultant arrangements. This document:

- Outlines the SQF Institutes expectations of the SQF Consultant
- Provides a link between the SQF Codes, guidelines, guidebook and SQF Consultant's service delivery
- Provides a system for the measurement of performance of SQF Consultants

The development and release of the Code of Practice is necessary, as the control of the SQF Program has been handed to the SQF Institute (A Division of FMI) based in Washington, DC USA.

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Disclaimer

The content of this Code of Practice was based on the information available at the time of printing. It has no statutory force and nothing in it should be construed as absolving anyone from complying with legal requirements. All possible care has been taken in its preparation and it is provided for general guidance without liability on the part of the issuing body in respect of its application and use.

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1.0 PURPOSE

The SQF Consultant is required to deliver a service that:

- Meets the aims and objectives of the SQF Institute USA
- Meets the Client's needs
- Is technically and scientifically sound
- Is cost effective

This Code of Practice has been developed to ensure that the SQF Consultant operates in a professional manner.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Client means a person, company, cooperative, partnership, joint venture, business or other entity that has, or agrees to have, supplied to them the service by the Consultant.

Code of Practice means the current edition of the document entitled "SQF Consultant Code of Practice", published by FMI.

Consultant and Consultants means a SQF Consultant

SQF Expert means a SQF Consultant or a SQF Practitioner.

3.0 POSITION STATEMENT

A number of independent reviews, surveys and audits have shown a high degree of consolidation and up-take of the SQF Program since its release in 1995. These reviews indicate that Suppliers are generally satisfied with their Consultant's performance. However, it is very important that there not be inconsistencies in implementing SQF Systems and that those Consultants fully understand their role and responsibilities and their Client's expectations.

SQF Systems are food safety and quality management systems that are certified by a Licensed Certification Body. It is important that a Consultant's interpretation of the SQF Program on behalf of a Client is consistent with the intent of the program.

This Code of Practice has been developed to minimize the opportunities for inconsistencies and ensure the Consultants technical competence is maintained.

From time to time Consultants will be encouraged to contribute to a review of this Code of Practice.

SQF CONSULTANTS

A SQF Consultant should maintain:

A Client Focus – it is the Client who pays the bill, so the Consultant must provide benefit/value to the Client.

Integrity – honesty on a personal and professional level. Being ethical, avoiding conflict of interest, respecting confidentiality and the Client's capability and circumstance.

A High Competency and Skill Level – have a recognized level of skill and knowledge to do the work in areas within their scope of Consultant registration.

Professionalism – a commitment to work for completion in a timely, organized and cost effective manner.

Accountability – to ones self, the Client and the SQF Institute.

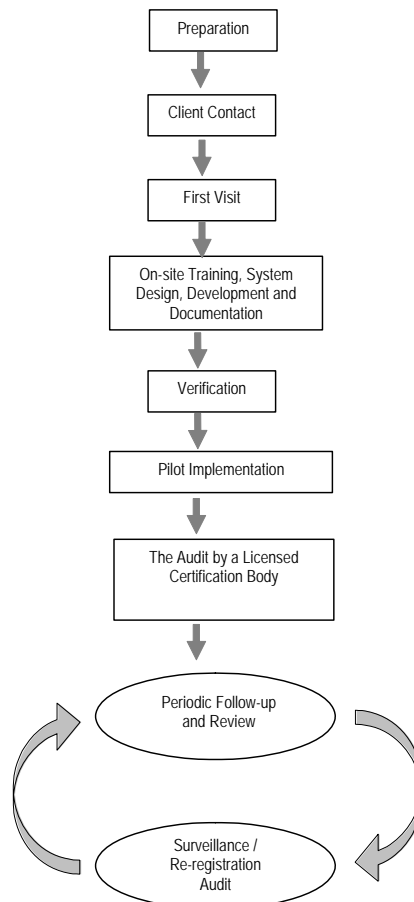
The Role of the Consultant

The role of the Consultant is a complex one due to the developing relationship with a Client. The Consultant's task is to make the process of SQF implementation as easy as possible. They must ensure a Client understands the SQF Program, the relevant issues involved and is able to confidently use their SQF System.

A major role of the Certification Body is to determine the level of system ownership by the Client as a critical measure of their commitment and effective implementation of the system.

4.0 SQF CONSULTANT AT WORK

This section outlines the process a Consultant should use when providing a service.



4.1 Preparation

- Register as a SQF Consultant with the SQF Institute.
- Obtain the current version of the SQF Codes and guidelines.
- Maintain a level of professional development through continuing education.
- Be aware of all relevant food legislation relating to the food industry sector under study.
- Be aware of Occupational Health & Safety, Environmental requirements.
- Ensure your license is current for the contract delivery period.
- Make notes of deficiencies or additions to standards and guidelines that can be presented at SQF System reviews.

4.2 Client Contact

Initial Contact

The Consultant should make available to a potential Client, examples of their work and references from existing and past Clients. At this point it is also advisable to provide the Client with:

- Details of the Consultant's registration through the SQF Institute and details of the Food Sector Categories in which the Consultant is registered to work
- An overview of the SQF Program and details of SQF Systems Training courses
- A copy of the relevant SQF Code
- Rules for Use of SQF 1000 Certification Trade Mark
- Rules for Use of the SQF 2000 Certification Trade Mark
- A list of Licensed Training Centres
- A list of Licensed Certification Bodies
- The relevant SQF Guidebook
- Information relating to the ongoing role of the Consultant in the maintenance of the SQF System. (The Client must be made aware at this time that the Consultant will be required to document, validate and verify changes to a Food Safety Plan unless the Client businesses have a staff member trained and registered as a SQF Practitioner. The Client should not find out about this after contracts have been signed).

Finally the Consultant should provide to the Client an overview of the SQF Program and the benefits that can be derived from its implementation. The Client should be encouraged to make all the information provided available to other staff.

Pricing

Provide the Client with a full and accurate quotation that

- Is fair and reasonable for both parties.
- Full cost estimates should be quoted including local/national taxes levied (GST/VAT) and expenses, travel estimates and ongoing maintenance costs (post Certification).
- Funding assistance should be quoted separately and not guaranteed.

Give the Client adequate time to read and consider the proposal.

Reinforce to the Client that the value of their SQF System relates to the product and the process and that the System is customised to fit the business.

Commitment

The Client's senior management commitment is critical. The SQF System should be designed so that it works for the business and not designed in such a way that the business is a slave to the System. Commitment means the Client and staff actively participate in the development and ongoing management of the System. The level of Client involvement can affect the cost of implementation, it may even reduce the overall price depending on the level of uptake and involvement of the Client and staff and the Client should be made aware of this.

Implementation Plan

Prepare an implementation plan, define the scope of work, outline all the implementation process steps, a timeline that includes onsite visits, training, milestones, Certification Body selection, meeting with the Certification Body, audit timing, payment terms, post Certification reviews.

Service Contract

Prepare a Service Contract that clearly outlines the project, the tasks, responsibilities, timelines, price, liabilities, termination clauses and dispute resolutions.

4.3 First Visit

During the first visit the necessity for Client commitment, ownership and benefits of implementation should be reinforced. The following points should be covered:

- Explain:
 - The role of the Consultant - during the implementation and post Certification phase.
 - The likely implementation and audit process
 - The likely timeframe
- Review the Implementation Plan in detail with the Client in order to remove any misunderstandings. Explain fully the role of the Client and their staff, and the tasks the Client will be required to complete.
- Review the Service Contract as there may be changes that require renegotiation.
- Explain the Consultant's public, professional and accident liability coverage.
- Explain the dispute resolution process.
- Identify the training needs of the Client.
- Provide a checklist (milestones detailed in the Implementation Plan) to allow the Client to become involved and track that the implementation is proceeding as planned.
- Organize for a time to meet potential Certification Bodies to enable the Client to make an informed choice of Certification Body and to allow each Certification Body to present its case for providing the certification and audit service.
- Finalize the contract.

4.4 On-Site Training, System Design, Development and Documentation

The Consultant is expected to make easy the implementation of the SQF System. The Consultant should use professional project management techniques to keep the project on track and to schedule.

- Implementation of a SQF System can only be done by the Client or a person responsible for that process or product. The Consultant takes a lead role in developing, validating, verifying and documenting the Client's SQF Program and SQF System and should ensure the Client is involved and understands all aspects of this process. The Consultant is also expected to be responsible for guiding the implementation of the system. The Consultant should inform the Client if, through the inclusion of additional elements other than those required by the Codes that other expertise may be required and the cost of securing this expertise.
- In some cases the Consultant may work with a number of Clients within one particular food industry sector, e.g. apple producers/packers in the horticulture sector. While it is acknowledged that there will be commonalities across the Client's operation, the Consultant should carefully consider the practice of using common documents and procedure without first testing their relevance and applicability to their individual Client's operation.

The Consultant should:

- Deliver the SQF Systems Awareness Training or ensure that the Client's key people have completed this training.
- Track the project development and provide regular progress report to the Client.
- Meet milestones previously set and regularly review their relevance.
- Ensure all staff are aware of how to use the system once designed and all individuals are made aware of their responsibilities
- Be prepared to renegotiate contracted steps and remain flexible about the process to meeting Client priorities and needs.

4.5 Verification

Verification of the SQF System remains the major responsibility of the Consultant. SQF Systems must be tailored to each product line and the Clients operations. Following are the main activities that should be completed when validating and verifying the effectiveness of the Food Safety Plan. Ensure:

- All pre-requisite programs are in place and validate and verify their effectiveness.
- The layout plans, product flows and process flow diagrams of each premise are accurate and they have been signed by the Consultant (including the SQF Consultant registration number). It is advisable to have a responsible Client staff member sign these documents and both the Consultant and the Client initial each page of the hazard analysis and audit table to ensure no changes are made to the system without their knowledge.

The purpose of the Consultant's signature is to indicate to an external body (the auditor, the customer) that an appropriately qualified person has verified the Food Safety Plan.

- The Consultant must explain the importance of the signature to the Client and ensure that all changes to the Food Safety Plan are developed, validated, verified and documented by a SQF Expert and that it is a critical step in the implementation and maintenance of the SQF System. Deliberate breaches of this requirement will result in critical or major corrective actions being issued by the auditor and in some cases suspension of the certification.

It is not necessary for the Consultant to verify all system improvements. However, a SQF Expert must verify those changes that impact on food safety.

- The Client should be advised on the details of discrepancies if it was found not to be fully in compliance with the criteria set by the relevant SQF Code.

The Consultant must work only within their scope of registration and must only sign off systems that they have personally developed, validated, verified and documented. Clients will be required to carry out internal audits of their own system (some coaching and instruction on how to carry out internal audits is advisable). The strength of the SQF System lies in that the Client's SQF System is verified twice, once by the Consultant and again by the auditor.

4.6 Pilot Implementation

The implementation and use of the SQF System is the Client's responsibility. The Consultant uses the pilot implementation phase to ensure the SQF System is being developed as intended and confirm with the Client those aspects of the system that are working.

The pilot SQF System must be implemented as early as possible.

During the pilot implementation stage the Certification Bodies contacted earlier should be interviewed. Once selected the Certification Body must provide the Client with a detailed explanation of the Certification and SQF Audit procedure.

The Certification Body should demystify and explain the SQF Audit process, outlining the Audit procedure, process, follow up and reporting requirements. It should also remind the Client of the benefits of the SQF Audit and circumstances in which a suspension or withdrawal of the Certificate of Registration may occur. The practice of issuing corrective actions, the importance of addressing corrective and preventative actions within the agreed time should also be described.

- Explain use of the SQF logos to Client.

System Review

- Carry out an internal audit.

- Make a checklist to carry out improvements.
- Conduct further on-site verifications of Pre-requisite Programs and general system customization.
- Ensure the milestones have been met.
- Resolve complaints.
- Provide the Client with hard and electronic copy of the SQF System. The Intellectual Property associated with the Consultant's work belongs to the Client.
- Reinforce the importance of the Client's ownership of the System and their responsibilities in ensuring its future effectiveness and compliance.

4.7 The SQF Audits (Certification, Re-registration and Surveillance)

The SQF Audit is a contract arrangement between the SQF Auditor and the Client. The SQF Auditor, acting on behalf of the SQF Institute, determines whether the Client's SQF System meets the requirements of the relevant Code. The SQF Auditor is assessing the Client's knowledge and understanding of their SQF System, its implementation and its operation.

The role of the Consultant is to make sure that the Client is ready for the audit and they have all documentation and records available to enable the audit to proceed smoothly.

If the Consultant is present during the audit they should not get involved. The SQF Auditor is not testing the Consultant's knowledge of the SQF System and therefore has the every right to insist the Consultant not be present at the audit. The Consultant must not enter into disputes with the SQF Auditor – issues of this nature should have been resolved long before the audit takes place. Interference by a Consultant may lead the SQF Auditor to conclude the Client has little understanding or ownership of the SQF System and could result in the audit being aborted.

The Certification Body has procedures for handling disputes that may arise over audit findings. The Consultant should make use of this service when necessary.

A debriefing between the Consultant and the Client must be conducted without delay after any SQF Audit. Plans can be made to correct any problems found during the SQF Audit and these meetings often strengthen the professional relationship between the Consultant and the Client.

At the debriefing the Consultant must encourage the Client to complete the "SQF Consultant Performance Questionnaire" and forward it to the SQF Institute, 655 15th Street NW, Washington DC 20005, USA.

The questionnaire can be supplied on computer disc or hard copy, completed in private by the Client and submitted by post, facsimile (+1(202)220-0894) or e-mail (info@sqfi.com). It is acknowledged that some Clients may not submit a completed questionnaire however the SQF Institute will expect that at least 80% of questionnaires issued are returned.

4.8 Periodic Follow-up and Review

If the Client does not have a SQF Practitioner as staff, then keeping in contact with the Client after the system has been implemented and certification achieved is an important part of the Client/Consultant relationship. Follow up visits must be planned to review the SQF System and make improvements. Such surveillance visits will ensure that the procedures, practices and documents certified as complying with the criteria of the relevant SQF Code are duly maintained.