

Criteria for SQF Auditors

Auditor Competency and Registration



8th Edition
September 2014

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SQF Institute is a division of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI).

INTRODUCTION

The SQF (Safe Quality Food) Program is a third-party audited food safety and quality program implemented by suppliers. This policy describes the qualifications, registration and reregistration requirements for auditors auditing the SQF Code, edition 7, or subsequent versions, and is applicable for all SQF auditors applying for registration and reregistration beginning July 3, 2014.

The development of the SQF Program has been a significant move towards the recognition of the importance of independent third party assurance of food safety and quality at all levels of the food supply. The Program focuses on the benefits to both industry and the consumer, whereby improved product quality enhances marketability and profitability.

This latest edition of the "Criteria for SQF Auditors" has been reviewed and updated to align with the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) guidance document sixth edition or subsequent versions.

SQF auditor registration is conducted by SQFI. It is designed to enhance the integrity of the SQF Program by providing the food industry with a register of auditors who have the appropriate qualifications and work experience necessary for auditing SQF Systems.

The integrity provided through the auditing of SQF Systems by registered SQF auditors to provide additional assurance of food safety and quality, has received global recognition.

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Disclaimer

Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the process for evaluating applicants for registration is effective, FMI does not accept liability for services provided by registered SQF Auditors that fail to meet the requirements of all clients of the services.

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1 FUNDAMENTALS

1.1 Registration Category

The criteria described in this document are for the SQF auditor classification. Food Sector Categories (FSCs) are defined in the SQF Code, edition 7, or subsequent versions, Appendix 1.

1.2 Definitions

For the purpose of these criteria the relevant definitions given in the "SQF Code" Appendix 2: Glossary together with the following definitions applies:

Audit Team One or more auditors undertaking an audit of a SQF System.

HACCP Training Training that meets the CODEX guidelines or NACMCF HACCP principles, and this training is:

1. HACCP training course used extensively in a country.
2. Administered and delivered by an institution recognized as a food safety training center of excellence and issues a certificate of attendance to attendees.
3. Shall be a minimum of two (2) days in duration.
4. Shall be examinable.

1.2 Overview of the Requirements for SQF Auditor Registration

All applicants:

- Applicants shall successfully complete a registered Management System Lead Auditor training course of 40 hrs. duration (e.g., Exemplar Global, IRCA), and the 'Auditing SQF Systems,' course, edition 7 (three (3) days). Alternately, applicants may attend the five (5) day SQF Lead Auditor Training Course (refer Attachment 1).
- Shall attend a HACCP training course with certificate issued.
- Shall have completed the SQF Auditor Online Examination.
- Shall have completed at least 160 hours of food safety and/or quality auditing in the food industry (20 audit days) for high risk auditors and at least 120 hours of food safety and or/quality auditing in the food industry (15 audit days) for low risk auditors.
- For each high risk Food Sector Category (FSC) that is requested for registration, applicant shall demonstrate two (2) years work experience in food safety and/or quality management within requested FSC, or one hundred-sixty (160) audit hours within requested FSC, or a combination of work experience and audit experience for each FSC requested.
- Shall be employed by one designated SQF licensed Certification Body (if contracted, then the applicant must be sponsored by at least one SQF licensed certification body).
- Shall sign and submit the "SQF Auditor Code of Conduct."

2 REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION

The following educational, training, work and food safety experience requirements apply to all applicants unless otherwise specified.

2.1 Education

Applicants must demonstrate that, through their qualifications and/or work experience; they have achieved a satisfactory level of knowledge and experience in a particular food industry sector. This knowledge and experience shall be described and substantiated in writing and shall cover the food safety hazards and quality defects and their control within a food industry sector.

2.1.1 High Risk Food Sector Categories

For high risk food sector categories the applicant shall have attained a university degree in a discipline related to the food sector category(ies) (FSCs) being applied for (e.g. food science, food technology, dairy technology, etc.) or equivalent as outlined in GFSI Guidance, version 6.1, or subsequent versions, Part II, Annex 3,. In addition appropriate qualification for specific processes (e.g. the completion of an Approved Schedule Process Course for determining the scheduled process of canned food) may apply for some food sector categories. However, an approved scheduled processing course is required to gain FSC 15 (canning process) qualification.

2.1.2 Low Risk Food Sector Categories

For low risk food sector categories, the applicant shall have attained a higher education qualification, or a qualification considered as equivalent (e.g. a qualification granted by a trade or professional association) in a discipline related to the FSC's being applied for as outlined in GFSI Guidance, version 6.1, or subsequent versions, Part II, Annex 3. In addition, a degree or higher certificate in packaging technology and a relevant certificate recognized by the SQF in food technology, food hygiene or related science subject OR a primary qualification in food technology, food safety/ hygiene or related science subject and a certificate in packaging technology that is recognized by SQF shall be demonstrated to gain FSC 27 (packaging) qualification.

2.2 Training

Prior to applying for SQF registration Applicants shall have successfully completed the following training courses:

2.2.1 HACCP training (defined in 1.2) with certificate issued.

2.2.2 Registered Management System Lead Auditor training course of forty (40) hrs duration (i.e. Exemplar Global, IRCA).

2.2.3 SQF Systems Training – Auditing SQF Systems – three (3)-day.

2.2.4 The applicant may attend the 5-day SQF Lead Auditor Training Course (Attachment 1) in place of 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.

2.2.5 In addition to an SQF auditing course, applicants must successfully complete the auditor examination administered by the SQFI and achieving the SQF certificate of attainment through the on-line examination service available through the SQFI web site, www.sqfi.com.

2.2.6 Auditing SQF Systems courses taken before January 1, 2012 will not be valid for new SQF auditor applicants and will need to complete the above course(s).

Note: *The training required for registration does not alone address the needs required to demonstrate competence of particular food sector categories.*

2.3 Food Industry Work Experience

Applicants shall have at least five-year work experience in a technical, professional or supervisory position involving accountability and the exercise of judgment.

When an applicant wishes to obtain registration outside of their normal scope of operations (for example, a person with a meat processing background wishing to operate in the produce pack house industry), they must demonstrate they have upgraded their knowledge in this area through completion of appropriate short courses or other appropriate qualifications. All applicants are required to demonstrate operational experience with food hygiene and food safety based programs involving HACCP or other appropriate risk management systems. Alternatively, demonstrated experience involving equivalent practices that are deemed to provide experience relevant to the system being developed and the competencies described in this document for SQF auditors may be considered. It is possible for an applicant to be registered in more than one food sector category.

2.3.1 High Risk Auditors

The applicant shall have at least five (5) years full-time work experience in a food related technical, professional or supervisory position involving accountability and the exercise of judgment.

2.3.2 Low Risk Auditors

The applicant shall have at least five (5) years full-time work experience in a food related technical, professional or supervisory position involving accountability and the exercise of judgment.

Auditors applying for the Manufacture of Food Sector Packaging Materials Packaging (Food Sector Category 27) must include a minimum of two (2)-year experience in packaging manufacture (plastics, paper and board, metal, or glass) within their five (5) years.

2.4 Food safety and/or Quality Auditing Experience

All SQF auditors must complete, at a minimum, 160 hours of food safety and/or quality audits. To demonstrate their auditing experience, all SQF auditors shall maintain an audit log as a record of their audit experience. Audit experience used as justification must be of a third party, second party, or first party from a corporate auditing standpoint. Internal audits of a facility by an employee of that facility will not be considered and should not be included on the audit log. Audits that can be included on the audit log must reference a designated checklist or audit tool, criteria for the conducting of the audit and applicable SQF Food Sector Category of the facility that was audited.

Audit experience may have been acquired up to ten years prior to application. Auditing experience shall be with management systems within the food sector category that have used HACCP, ISO/FSSC 22000, Pre-Requisite Programs, GMP, GAP, ISO 9000 principles or a combination of these systems. Product cuttings, pest control assessments, training and sample retrieval are examples of activities that should not be included on an audit log. Audits included on the audit log must include on-site contact information so that the information included on the audit log can be verified as necessary by SQFI. Audit checklists used by the applicant may be requested to by SQF in order to determine the scope of the audit.

2.4.1 High Risk Auditors

Applicants must complete, at a minimum, one hundred-sixty (160) hours of food safety and/or quality audits. To demonstrate their auditing experience, all applicants shall maintain an audit log as a record of their audit experience.

Audit experience used as justification must be of a third-party or second-party food safety or quality management audits, including but not limited to, any GFSI recognized standard, HACCP, GMP, GAP, ISO/FSSC 22000, or other food safety audit program.

Audits that can be included on the audit log must reference a designated checklist or audit tool, criteria for the conducting of the audit and applicable SQF Food Sector Category of the facility that was audited.

For each Food Sector Category (FSC) that is applied for, the applicant must demonstrate:

- i. A minimum of two (2) year work experience, which may include consulting activities, in food safety and/or quality management within the food industry sector; or
- ii. One hundred-sixty (160) (for high risk FSC) audit hours auditing within the requested FSC, or
- iii. A combination of work experience and audit experience for each FSC requested
- iv. An industry recognized qualification in a technical discipline within the requested FSC may be required.

Auditors applying for FSC 15 (canning) shall, in addition, demonstrate competency in thermo processing through an industry recognized qualification (i.e. better processing school, approved scheduled process course).

2.4.2 Low Risk Auditors

Applicants must complete, at a minimum, one hundred-twenty (120) hours of food safety and/or quality audits. To demonstrate their auditing experience, all applicants shall maintain an audit log as a record of their audit experience.

Audit experience used as justification must be of a third party or second party food safety or quality management audits, including but not limited to, any GFSI recognized standard, HACCP, GMP, GAP, ISO/FSSC22000, or other food safety audit program.

Audits that can be included on the audit log must reference a designated checklist or audit tool, criteria for the conducting of the audit and applicable SQF Food Sector Category of the facility that was audited.

For each Food Sector Category (FSC) that is applied for, the applicant must demonstrate:

- i. A minimum of two (2) year work experience, which may include consulting activities, in food safety and/or quality management within the food industry sector; or
- ii. One hundred-twenty (120) (for low risk FSC) audit hours auditing within the requested FSC, or a combination of work experience and audit experience for each FSC requested.
- iii. A combination of work experience and audit experience for each FSC requested
- iv. An industry recognized qualification in a technical discipline within the requested food sector category may be required.

Auditors applying FSC 27 shall, in addition, hold a primary qualification, a degree or higher certificate in packaging technology and a relevant certificate recognized by the SQF in food technology, food hygiene or related science subject OR a primary qualification in food technology, food safety/ hygiene or related science subject and a certificate in packaging technology that is recognized by SQF.

2.5 Sponsors

Each applicant for initial registration shall be sponsored by a certification body and one other person in the food industry with whom they have a business relationship. Sponsors must have evidence and / or personal knowledge of the relevant information contained within the application that they have verified.

2.6 Personal Declaration

Each applicant for registration or re-registration is required to sign a declaration personally attesting they will comply with the SQF Institute Code of Conduct and that any complaints regarding their performance will be dealt with in a manner to prevent recurrence.

3 KEY COMPETENCIES FOR SQF AUDITORS

3.1 General Competencies

Applicants must demonstrate that, through their qualifications and/or work experience; they have achieved a satisfactory level of knowledge and experience in a particular food industry sector. All applicants:

- Proficiency in auditing, management and effective communication techniques
- The ability to demonstrate the personal attributes and professional integrity necessary for the effective performance of audits
- Knowledge and experience of auditing in the food industry
- The ability to identify and assess potential quality defects at all links in the food supply chain
- The ability to plan, lead and organize the audit

3.2 Food Safety Competencies

- The ability to identify and assess potential food safety hazards at all links in the supply chain including:
 - Biological hazards

- Chemical hazards (including allergens)
- Physical hazards
- The ability to assess the effectiveness of methodologies for controlling food safety hazards
- An understanding of the current principles and practices of HACCP to the current edition of the Codex Alimentarius Commission Guidelines or to the USA National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF) Guidelines
- For auditor applying FSC27 shall demonstrate the knowledge of specific sectors of packaging materials manufacture
- For auditor applying FSC 15 shall demonstrate competency in thermo processing through an industry recognized qualification
- Experience and a sound technical knowledge of the product and the process
- Knowledge of relevant pre-requisite programs, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, industry guidelines and standards

4 APPLICATION PROCESS

The SQFI assesses the competencies of applicants for SQF auditor registration by evaluating education, training, work experience and auditing experience against the requirements specified in these registration criteria. An electronic application form is available from the SQF website, www.sqfi.com.

Applicants should ensure that their application includes evidence of all competencies detailed in the criteria, evidence of required training and other relevant educational qualifications and that all other information requested has been provided. Applications will only be accepted in the format provided which is available from the SQF Institute, www.sqfi.com.

All applications are completed and submitted online at www.sqfi.com. Auditors will be required to upload evidence supporting their application, upgrade application or re-registration in PDF format as part of the online process. Auditors must be prepared to have the following documentation available prior to starting the application process:

- Audit, HACCP or training logs
- Professional development records
- Certificates
- Work experience records
- Sponsor verification form

A non-refundable application fee must be paid before registration can begin. Once an application is approved, applicants will be responsible for paying a registration fee before their SQF professional credentials can be issued. Applicable amounts for fees can be found at www.sqfi.com.

Applications will not be processed unless all information required is provided.

On receipt of an application all information for accuracy, including documentary evidence of training and formal qualifications, and verifies on a sample basis the auditing and work experience claimed by the applicant to establish the validity of such claims. This is done by direct contact with company contacts at site where the audit activity was performed and sponsors.

Applications are evaluated by an independent body who, in considering registration level and scope, evaluate the applicant's qualifications, any food sector related training courses undertaken and the applicant's food sector work and auditing experience. The review may also evaluate the feedback received on the performance of the applicant.

The independent body may request additional supporting information from the applicant or from other industry representatives as required. If the SQFI is unable to obtain satisfactory verification of information and experience from competent referees, an interview may be required. In addition, applicants wishing to be registered for High Risk Processes may be required to be interviewed.

Interviews will be arranged with consideration being given to convenience for all parties; however, costs to attend an interview will be at the applicant's own expense.

The independent body will decide whether to grant registration and the appropriate registration level and scope. The SQFI maintains a file on each applicant, which will remain confidential. The file will include the original application documentation; check sheets, records of investigations, appeals and complaints, auditing logs and re-registration documents.

4.1 Certificate of Registration and ID Card

Each successful applicant will receive a Certificate of Registration and ID card issued by the SQFI. Certificates and ID cards have an expiry date, which is the date re-registration falls due. The terminology to be used by registered SQF auditors in describing their registration on business cards, letterhead etc. is: "Registered SQF Auditor."

4.2 Publication of Registration

A register of SQF auditors is displayed on the SQF Institute website, www.sqfi.com.

5 ADVANCEMENT TO ANOTHER CATEGORY

Advancement to another Food Sector Category can be achieved at any time, provided suitable qualifications and / or experience for that category has been gained. To gain registration for an extra food sector category, applicants will need to submit:

1. Supporting documentation demonstrating additional qualifications and audit experience in the relevant food sector (at least one hundred-twenty (120) audit hours for SQF auditor and one hundred-sixty (160) audit hours for SQF auditor high risk processes) that substantiate the auditor's ability to work in the nominated additional category (ies).
2. If FSC27 will be added, a combination of a degree or higher certificate in packaging technology from a recognized certificate program and a relevant certificate in food technology recognized by scheme owner shall be demonstrated.
3. If FSC15 will be added, competency in thermo processing through an industry recognized qualification shall be demonstrated
4. The appropriate advancement fee.

Note: The additional auditing experience shall be completed under the supervision of qualified personnel.

6 REQUIREMENTS FOR RE-REGISTRATION

Re-registration is required every year from the anniversary date of initial registration. Requirements for re-registration include submission of the following with the annual fee:

1. Evidence of auditing experience, as detailed below.
2. Evidence of professional development, as detailed below.
3. Evidence of participation in SQF Professional Development Update.
4. Declaration of one sponsor CB

6.1 Auditing Experience

For re-registration, all SQF auditors shall submit an audit log demonstrating a minimum of six (6) complete SQF System audits. All audits shall be certification, re-certification or surveillance audits.

6.1.1 High Risk Auditors

High risk auditors must conduct a minimum of one (1) audit in their designated Food Sector Category (ies) within five years. Auditors that do not conduct audits within their designated Food Sector Category (ies) (FSC(s)) for five (5) years, will be de-registered from the FSC (s) in which they do not have the required auditing experience.

6.2 Professional Development

SQF auditors also need to undertake at least fifteen (15) hours of continuing professional development annually, that is relevant to their food safety work and their personal needs for skills and knowledge. Professional development information shall be provided on the Professional Development record. The following activities are examples of professional development, if related to the food industry, which can be included:

- Formal short course participation;
- In-house course / workshop participation;
- Conference / seminar attendance;
- Professional Body / Association meeting attendance;
- Relevant committee and working group meeting attendance;
- Preparation and public presentation of papers;
- Preparation and publication of articles

Note: In the selection of appropriate professional development, SQF auditors need to consider their personal strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for personal improvement. These activities should target new or the improving of existing food safety and quality management methodologies. Consulting, training, development of programs, or other activities completed in the execution of work product are not considered professional development and should not be included.

6.3 SQFI Professional Update

For re-registration, all SQF auditors shall submit an audit log demonstrating a minimum of six (6) complete SQF System audits. All audits shall be certification, re-certification or surveillance audits.

6.3.1 SQFI Professional Update

Auditors shall participate in an annual four (4) hour professional update delivered by SQFI. This update will be delivered via webinar for general participation or delivered directly to certification bodies upon request.

6.4 Sponsor CB

Auditors submitting their re-registration application must declare an SQF licensed Certification Body that will sponsor their re-registration application.

7 APPEALS

Written appeals against the outcome of an application for registration will be referred to the Senior Technical Director of SQFI. Decisions made by the Senior Technical Director relating to any appeal are final.

8 COMPLAINTS AGAINST REGISTERED SQF AUDITORS

Complaints regarding an SQF auditor's conduct will be acknowledged and investigated by the SQF Institute's Senior Technical Director. Substantiated evidence of misconduct may result in withdrawal of registration.

9 SQF AUDITOR CODE OF CONDUCT

All registered SQF auditors have an obligation to maintain the integrity of the SQF Program by observing the following Code of Conduct. Failure to do so may result in withdrawal of their registration. The Code of Conduct is detailed in Part G of the "Application for SQF Auditors" and must be signed and sent to SQFI.

9.1 Fundamental Principles

- 9.1.1** Act professionally, accurately, honestly and impartially and in an unbiased manner.
- 9.1.2** Not to act in any way that would prejudice the reputation of the SQF Program and co-operate fully with an inquiry in the event of any alleged breach of the SQF Program.

9.2 Relations with the Public

- 9.2.1** Use their best endeavors to promote the worth of the SQF Program.
- 9.2.2** Act with professionalism and integrity when promoting their services.
- 9.2.3** Make it clear when dealing with the public, the capacity in which they are acting and on whose behalf (if any) they are acting.

9.3 Relations with their Employer Colleagues/Clients

- 9.3.1** Act in professional matters as a faithful operator to each employee/client.
- 9.3.2** Inform employees and clients of any business connections, interest or affiliations, which might influence judgment or impair the equitable character of its services.
- 9.3.3** Indicate to their employer or clients the adverse consequences to be expected if their professional judgment is overruled.
- 9.3.4** Not disclose information concerning the business affairs or technical process of any present or former client without the client's consent.
- 9.3.5** Not accept compensation from more than one party for the same service without the consent of all parties.

9.4 Relations with Peers

- 9.4.1** The SQF auditor will assist those under their supervision to develop their professional skills.

ATTACHMENT 1

SQFI Auditor Training Courses

SQFI Lead Auditor Training Course (40 hrs)

This training course is only offered by SQFI or persons designated by SQFI and designed for applicants with no prior QMS or FSMS auditor training (see criterion 2.2.2).

Course outline:

Day 1: So you want to be an SQF auditor?

- The incidence of foodborne illness
- What is the responsibility of the food safety auditor?
- Audit definitions
- Criticism of food safety auditors
- SQF certification
- Auditor qualifications/competence
- SQFI
- GFSI
- ISO 19011
- ISO 22003
- Personal behaviors
- Key competencies
- SQF auditor Code of Conduct.

Day 2: Principles of auditing

- Accredited certification
- 'Management' versus 'product' certification
- ISO 19011: 2011
- Structure of ISO 19011
- Principles of auditing
- Audit basics
 - Commonality of audits
 - Types of audits
 - Levels of audits
 - Audit objectives
 - The role of the SQF auditor
 - Objective evidence
 - Where do we audit?
 - When do we audit?

Performing the audit derived from ISO 19011

- Factors influencing the extent of the audit
- 6.2 Initiating the audit
- 6.3 Preparing audit activities
- 6.4 Conducting the audit activities
- 6.5 Preparing and distributing the audit report
- 6.6 Completing the audit

- 6.7 Conducting the audit plan

Day 3: The SQF Code, Part A

- SQFI and GFSI
 - The SQF Code, edition 7 – format
 - Part A – Implementing and maintaining the SQF Code
1. Preparing for SQF certification
 2. The initial certification process
 3. The initial certification decision
 4. Surveillance and recertification
 5. Obligations of suppliers and CBs

Day 4: The SQF Code, Part B

- Module 2
- Auditing module 2
- The system elements
- Auditing the Food Safety Plan
- Auditing the Food Quality Plan
- Pre farm-gate PRPs
- Post farm-gate PRPs

Day 5: The closing meeting and close-out of corrective actions

- The closing meeting
- Corrective actions
- Corrective action extensions
- Close out of corrective actions

Auditing SQF Systems, edition 7.2 (36 hrs)

This training course is only offered by SQFI or persons designated by SQFI and designed for applicants who have already successfully completed a registered Management Systems Lead Auditor training course (40 hrs) (see criterion 2.2.3).

Course outline:

Day 1: The SQF Code, Part A

- SQFI and GFSI
 - The SQF Code, edition 7 – format
 - Part A – Implementing and maintaining the SQF Code
1. Preparing for SQF certification
 2. The initial certification process
 3. The initial certification decision
 4. Surveillance and recertification
 5. Obligations of suppliers and CBs

Day 2: The SQF Code, Part B

- Module 2
- Auditing module 2
- The system elements
- Auditing the Food Safety Plan
- Auditing the Food Quality Plan

- Pre farm-gate PRPs
- Post farm-gate PRPs

Day 3: The closing meeting and close-out of corrective actions

- The closing meeting
- Corrective actions
- Corrective action extensions
- Close out of corrective actions

Implementing & Auditing the SQF Code (edition 7) Upgrade (8 hrs.)

This training course is only offered by SQFI or persons designated by SQFI and designed for applicants who are registered auditors with SQFI and are seeking to upgrade to edition 7.

Course outline:

Overview of GFSI Guidance Document, version 6 or applicable subsequent revisions of this document
Changes to Certification Body Criteria
Part A of the SQF Code
9.4.2 Preparing for Certification
9.4.3 The Certification Process
9.4.4 The Certification Decision
9.4.5 Surveillance and Re-certification
9.4.6 Suspensions and Withdrawals
9.4.7 Obligations of Suppliers and CBs
The SQF Assessment Database
The SQF Audit Assessment Tool
Auditing Module 2: The System Elements
Identifying the right FSC and GAP/GMP modules
Auditing the primary production modules (3 – 8)
Auditing the manufacturing, distribution modules (9 – 15)