Criteria for SQF Certification Bodies

SQF Requirements on the Application of ISO/IEC 17065:2012.

Edition 9.1

April 2023

Foreword

The authorization and distribution of the SQF Certification Program is the culmination of extensive development and piloting of the system. The developmental process included consultation with food sector and quality professionals.

FMI acquired the rights to the SQF Certification Program in August 2003 and has established the SQF Institute (SQFI) Division to manage the Program. The SQFI has established a Technical Advisory Council (TAC) to review and recommend changes to the SQF Certification Program.

It is important that users of the SQF Certification Program ensure they are in possession of the latest edition and any amendments.

The certification body may not provide an auditing service in accordance with this document unless it has first entered into a license agreement with the SQFI and that it provides the service in accordance with the terms and conditions of its license agreement.

The certification body must be accredited as outlined in the license agreement, within twelve (12) months of signing the license agreement, by an International Accreditation Forum (IAF) accreditation body licensed by FMI, as meeting the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065: 2012 and the requirements set out in this document. The certification body shall maintain such accreditation for the term of the license agreement and during this term, the certification body shall provide its auditing service strictly in accordance with its license, this document and the scope of its accreditation.

Suggestions for improvements to this document and the SQF Program should be submitted in writing and be sent to:

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Introduction

The international criteria for the Accreditation of Certification Bodies operating certification of products (products, processes and services) are detailed in ISO/IEC 17065:2012.

This mandatory document specifies the requirements that certification bodies shall observe when operating third party certification of sites' SQF Systems.

This document, in respect to the SQF Certification Program, should be considered as sector specific to ISO ISO/IEC 17065:2012. This document describes the requirements for the application of the SQF standard by SQFI licensed certification bodies. This document provides the basis for the consistent application of the SQF Certification Program by certification bodies. The term "shall" is used throughout this document to indicate mandatory requirements.

It is important to note that these are requirements that shall be met by certification bodies. They are not requirements that shall be met by the site that is audited by the certification body. The site is required to meet the requirements outlined in the SQF Code, edition 9 and subsequent versions. The site determines how its food safety and quality management system will be arranged to ensure it meets the legislative and customer requirements that apply to its operations.

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General Requirements for Certification Bodies Offering Certification of SQF Systems

1.0 Scope

The document applies to the certification of the site, products, processes, and services under an SQF System and includes all processes and services used to make the identified final product or products.

The SQF System requires the application of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), built upon a sound foundation of Good Practice elements such as Good Manufacturing Practices(GMP), Good Production Practices (GPP) or Good Agriculture Practices (GAP) to document and control critical food safety and quality criteria during production in order to deliver a safe, quality product as specified.

The SQF Codes, guidance documents, Criteria for SQF Auditors and Technical Reviewers, Criteria for SQF Training Centers and Training Courses, Criteria for SQF Trainers, Criteria for SQF Consultants and audit reporting formats outline the purpose and the minimum requirements of audit by a certification body.

2.0 References

The following references apply:

- HACCP guidelines developed and managed by the CODEX Alimentarius Commission. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application – Annex to CAC/RCP 1 – 1969, Rev. 5 (2020).

- The SQF Codes – Published by FMI as amended from time to time.

- ISO/IEC 17065:2012, Conformity assessment — Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services.

- ISO/IEC 17011:2017 Conformity assessment – General requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

- ISO 17025:2017 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories.

3.0 Definitions

The relevant definitions outlined in The SQF Code, edition 9, Appendix 2: Glossary and ISO/IEC 17065: 2012 section 3 apply.

4.0 General Requirements

4.1 Legal and Contractual Matters

4.1.1 Legal Responsibility

The certification body shall be licensed by the Food Industry Association (FMI) before providing a service to audit and certify an SQF System.

4.1.2 Certification Agreement

4.1.2.1 Once licensed the certification body shall be accredited by an accreditation body licensed by FMI. The certification body shall achieve the accreditation within twelve (12) months after the acquisition of the SQFI license. The certification body shall be allowed to conduct SQF audits, according to the license agreement during its initial accreditation cycle to allow for accreditation to the SQF standard only.

4.1.2.2 Once all accreditation witness audits have been completed and accreditation against the SQF program has been achieved, then general SQF audits can be conducted. The scope of accreditation shall cover either:

   i.   Activities to certify an individual site's SQF System to one or more food sector categories as defined in the SQF Food Safety Codes or Quality Code, edition 9 (or subsequent editions); or

   ii. Activities to certify an individual site's SQF System and a multi-site organization to one or more food sector categories as defined in the SQF Food Safety Codes, edition 9 (or subsequent editions).

4.1.2.2 The certification body shall assess sites against the requirements, conditions and restrictions contained in the relevant edition of the SQF Code.

Where a certification body provides a service in territory outside the country in which accreditation was attained, it shall be subject to assessment and witness assessments of its activities by the accreditation body where it conducts audits:

   i.   of a multi-site organization; or

   ii. of a high risk food; or

   iii. more than ten (10) low risk food.

Changes to the certification requirements shall include any new SQF Code edition, or criteria released by the SQFI and any amendments to existing documentation. All changes shall be implemented by the certification body within the time frame specified by the SQFI.

The certification body shall ensure the audit includes the evaluation and efficacy of the validation and verification of a site's food safety plan, and food quality plan (SQF Quality Code audit).

4.1.3   Use of License, Certificates and Marks of Conformity

4.1.3.1   The SQFI has prepared rules for use which outline the rules that sites must follow when using the SQF quality shield or SQF logo.

The rules of use for the SQF logo are described in the *SQF Food Safety Codes, Edition 9,* Appendix 3.

The rules for use of the SQF quality shield are described in the *SQF Quality Code, Edition 9*, Appendix 4.

The certification body shall approve the site's application of the unique certification number in the space allocated on the quality shield issued to a site before use. Such approvals shall be documented.

4.1.3.2   Misleading use of the SQF quality shield, logo, certificates, marks or incorrect references to the SQF certification shall be dealt with using the criteria outlined in the SQF Code, part A, sections 13 and/ or 14 and/or the relevant appendix.

4.1.3.3   The certification body shall have a procedure outlining how it provides services in new food sector categories, which steps it will take if approached to operate in dormant food sector categories and how it will acquire the required knowledge, skills and experience before accepting such applications.

4.2   Management Impartiality

4.2.1   Accreditation shall only be granted to a body that is a legal entity as referenced in clause 4.11 of ISO/IEC 17065 and must be confined to declared food industry scopes and locations. Certification of a SQF System by a certification body shall provide confidence that the system meets the specified requirements and that the site has implemented and is maintaining and operating the SQF System effectively and in accordance with the scope specified on the certificate.

4.2.2   Risks to impartiality shall be identified and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

4.2.3   If any risks to impartiality are identified, then control measures shall be put in place to eliminate or minimize said risk.

The certification body shall have a process in place to conduct ongoing evaluations to the risk to its impartiality.

4.2.4   Impartiality and independence of the certification body shall have top management commitment and be assured at three levels:

i.   Strategy and policy;

ii.   Evaluation; and

iii.   Decision on certification.

4.2.5   SQF auditors shall not audit an SQF System where they have participated in a consulting role involving the site in question, or any person related to the site, within the last two years (i.e., considered to be participating in an active and creative manner in the development of the SQF System to be audited). Consulting includes, but is not limited to, activities such as:

i.   Involvement in the production or preparation of food safety plans, food quality plans, manuals, handbooks or procedures;

ii.   Participating in the decision-making process regarding SQF Systems or any other food safety management system;

iii.   Giving advice – as a consultant or otherwise – toward the design, documentation, development, validation, verification, implementation or maintenance of an SQF Systems or any other food safety management system; and

iv.   Delivering or participating in the delivery of an "in-house" training service at which adviceand instruction on the development and implementation of food safety plans and SQF systems for eventual certification is provided.

The certification body shall ensure contract auditors retain impartiality when providing an audit service, that they are registered as SQF auditors, and are clearly identified as representing the certification body.

4.3   Liability and Financing

4.3.1   The certification body shall have sufficient general liability and professional indemnity insurance as outlined in the certification body license agreement, clause 11.4.

4.3.2   The certification body shall be able to demonstrate to the accreditation body that there are resources available for all conformity assessment activities it conducts and are carried out in a competent and reliable manner.

4.4   Non-Discriminatory Conditions

4.4.1   The certification body shall make their services available to all sites and in areas in which they have expertise. As the law permits, the certification body shall limit its services to sites operating within the food sector category(s) in which it has technical competence.

The certification body may use the list of sites that it has certified as part of its promotional activities.

4.5 Confidentiality

4.5.1 SQFI shall ensure that any records, contracts, license agreements or performance data collected or generated by SQFI of a certification body performance shall remain confidential and not for public release or access. This data will be utilized only by SQFI, GFSI, and the applicable accreditation body for the improvement of certification body performance and the improvement of the SQF program.

4.5.2 The certification body shall have provisions in place to ensure that all records, data, and information received during the execution of an SQF audit remains confidential and the property of the site. Only with the authorization of the site can the certification body release audit data to any entity other than SQFI, GFSI, or the accreditation body, unless required by law.

4.6 Publicly Available Information

4.6.1 The certification body shall provide to the site:

   i. Details of the certification procedure including how an audit is conducted and the audit frequency;

   ii. Reference to the edition of the SQF Code that will be audited, and agreement on the SQF food sector category (ies) and products to be certified;

   iii. A description of the type of objective evidence that will be collected during the audit and the action taken as a result of any critical, major or minor nonconformity found. The certification body shall also provide details of the SQF auditor to be used, and outline the rights of the site to object to an SQF auditor

   iv. An estimate of all fees and charges that apply, including audit fees, travel fees, and a detailed description of any ancillary fees that may apply;

   v. A list of the documents and records that will be required to be reviewed during the certification, surveillance or re-certification audit;

   vi. A detailed plan off activities that will be conducted on-site and those that will be conducted remotely using ICT, and

   vii. Details regarding the identification of the root cause and management of corrective action responses after the certification audit.

4.6.2 The certification body shall inform the site that details of the site's certificate will be made available on the SQFI web site for public display and contain the information outlined in section 7.8 of this document.

4.6.3 The certification body shall obtain the sites consent to have the certificate details accessible by their customer(s).

5.0 Structural Requirements

5.1 Organizational Structure and Top Management

5.1.1 The activities within the certification body shall be organized to ensure impartiality.

5.1.2 The certification body shall ensure within the organizational structure that no potential conflict of interest, consulting, or training occurs by auditors contracted or employed by the certification body within existing or potential sites within the SQF program.

5.1.3 The certification body shall ensure that all certification activities are separately controlled and managed (including the development of policy and practices) from any consulting activity. It shall preclude any prospective SQF auditor from undertaking any audit in relation to the certification of SQF Systems that constitute a conflict of interest as outlined below or any other condition that could lead to a conflict of interest.

5.2 Mechanism for Safeguarding Impartiality

5.2.1 The certification body shall appoint an impartial and independent committee selected from the certification body's stakeholder group and shall represent those interests, which may include primary production, manufacturing, storage and distribution, manufacture of food packaging, food service and retail sectors of the food industry, to oversee the decision process on certification and the development of policies and principles regarding the content and functioning of the SQF certification system.

5.2.2 The certification body shall ensure that committees, groups or persons with direct overall responsibility for activities, and decisions including

- Overseeing and making decisions on certification;

- Supervision of its implementation policies; and

- The technical basis for granting certification;

are free from any commercial, financial or other pressure that might influence the results of certification and that they have the appropriate experience to enable them to carry out their role effectively.

6.0 Resource Requirements

6.1 Certification Body Personnel

6.1.1 General

6.1.1.1 The certification body shall be able to conduct all audits using resources under its control and in accordance with its scope of accreditation.

The certification body shall ensure that all employees responsible for executing the SQF program, including SQF auditors and SQF contract auditors, employ and retain qualifications, skills and experience necessary to perform their duties.

6.1.2 Management of competence for personnel involved in the certification process.

6.1.2.1 The certification body shall have sufficient resources, that may include back-up personnel, to ensure that the certification process is not disrupted. The certification body shall demonstrate that programs are in place for all employees responsible for executing the SQF program including: SQF auditors and contract auditors, witness assessors, technical reviewers, certification managers and administration personnel. These programs will provide the training required to maintain their qualifications and awareness of the SQF program, regulations, current food safety and quality issues, and how they relate to the technical judgments they make.

The certification body shall have procedures in place to ensure all employees responsible for executing the SQF program and the certification process including, SQF auditors and contract auditors, technical reviewers, certification managers, and administration personnel are made aware of their role and responsibilities.

Certification bodies shall ensure that these employees are competent and qualified to schedule audits, report audits in the SQF assessment database system, undertake certification audits, surveillance audits and re-certification audits, review audit reports and make technical judgments and recommendations as necessary.

All certification body personnel who review SQF audit reports and/or make technical judgments and recommendations shall be registered as an SQF auditor or technical reviewer, as outlined in the Criteria for SQF Auditors and Technical Reviewers

The certification body shall have established competencies for personnel involved in the certification process that address:

i. The training of personnel involved in certification and SQF program management;

ii. Defined competencies including personnel attributes and behavior, qualifications, experience, and monitoring;

iii. Auditor selection and orientation; and

iv. Implementation of auditors new to the certification body's SQF program shall be assessed at a

minimum on three (3) food safety audits, including at least one witness audit, and until they are assessed as competent.

SQF auditor calibration programs shall include calibration of auditors using existing audit data and on-going auditor training at least annually. The certification body shall require all SQF auditors in a certification body to be witnessed at least once every two (2) years, under any GFSI scheme, with one witness audit being an SQF certification or re-certification audit at least every four (4) years.

The certification body shall ensure that criteria on auditor performance are developed so that corrective action can be taken when performance criteria is not achieved. Corrective action items should be prescribed based on data results from calibration activities.

The SQF auditor calibration program shall include a review of SQF program audits and shall be reviewed by the certification body.

No SQF auditor shall perform an SQF audit for the same site for more than three (3) consecutive certification cycles.

The certification body shall ensure that each SQF auditor who is assigned to conduct an SQF audit, is registered as an SQF auditor in good standing and maintains such registration for the term of their employment or engagement.

Auditors who lack the auditing experience necessary to enable them to be registered as SQF auditors can be engaged in audits of products and processes utilizing the certification body audit tool (i.e., SQF Fundamental audits, non-SQF certification audits,) to gain experience in second and third party auditing.

The certification body shall follow their management systems when adding new auditors to conduct SQF audits. The SQFI compliance manager shall be notified when an auditor no longer audits for that certification body.

The certification body shall ensure SQF auditors do not audit SQF Systems that relate to or include food sector categories in which the SQF auditor is not registered to audit, unless accompanied by a technical expert. When using a technical expert, the certification body shall adhere to the requirements under the SQF Code, Part A, section 15.7.

6.1.2.2   The certification body shall retain detailed records of all SQF auditors, technical reviewers, and personnel involved in the certification process. Compliance records shall be made available to SQFI upon request. The information shall include as a minimum:

i.   Name and address;

ii.   Organization affiliation and position held;

iii.   Educational qualification and professional status;

iv.   Experience and training in the relevant fields of competence in relation to SQFI requirements,

Audit activities (audit log) where applicable;

    v.   Performance monitoring activities such as results of surveillance and witness audits, surveys, appraisals and reviews;

   vi.   Refresher training activities related to certification program updates, emerging issues, regulatory updates, etc.

  vii.   Confirmation that the defined competency including personnel attributes and behavior, qualifications, experience, and monitoring have been met.

6.1.3 Contract with Personnel

The certification body shall ensure an SQF auditor and personnel involved in the certification process disclose to it any personal or professional existing, former or proposed link between themselves or their organization and the site.

6.2 Resources for Evaluation

6.2.1 Internal Resources

6.2.2.1 The certification body shall determine the scope of certification of the site in conjunction with the site. The scope of certification shall include all the products / processes requested by the site in the scope of certification, the site description of the facility including any site exemptions/exclusions, the SQF Code edition, and the relevant modules from the SQF Code.

The scope of certification shall be defined by the certification body and the site prior to the start of the certification audit. Once the certification audit has begun, the scope of the certification shall not be altered.

When evaluation activities are conducted, the certification body shall ensure the relevant international standard requirements are followed.

6.2.2 External Resources (Outsourcing)

6.2.2.1 The certification body shall ensure that the outsourcing of any inspection or testing activity within the scope of SQF certification is conducted by nationally recognized ISO/IEC 17025 accredited or equivalent inspection body and testing laboratories utilizing the services of qualified personnel.

7.0 Process Requirements

7.1 General

7.1.1 The certification body shall demonstrate full control over the audit and shall screen SQF auditors thoroughly before appointment to ensure they meet all requirements for completing SQF certification audits.

7.1.2 The certification body shall adhere to the requirements outlined in the published edition of the SQF Code.

7.1.3 The use of SQF published guidance documents shall follow the requirements in the SQF Code, Part A.

7.2 Application

7.2.1 The site will register with SQFI on the SQF assessment database. The site will be required to complete a profile which includes its food sector category(ies), add contact information and select a certification body. Once registered, a site will need to complete re-registration annually through the SQF assessment database.

The certification body shall ensure the site has a valid registration prior to its re-certification audit. Sites must remain registered at all times to retain their certification.

The certification body shall provide a contract to the site for certification in an official format for completion and endorsement by the site before any evaluation commences. The contract shall include:

i.   The scope of certification including the version of the SQF Code and the specific food sector category and module(s) to be applied;

ii. The site/company name, its site address to which the certification will apply and postal address, telephone number and e-mail address;

iii. The name of the site/company representative, their telephone numbers and email address;

iv. The food sector category(s) and product(s) to be covered by the certification;

v.   The site's consent to have their certification details as outlined in 7.8 displayed on the SQFI web site;

vi. The certification body's appeal process; and

vii. The requirement that the site must notify the certification body in the event of a food safety incident (i.e., recall) by the site at any time during its certification in a timely manner.

7.2.2   In instances where vertically integrated processes are involved in the scope of certification (i.e. dairy and food packaging), auditors and/or technical experts shall be used to cover all food sector categories within the scope of certification identified under 7.2.1i.

7.2.3   Sites that are transitioning to SQF from a different GFSI recognized certification program shall undergo a review process to determine the site's eligibility for SQF certification. The review process shall consider the information available at the time of transition and include, but not be limited to:

i.   a review of the site's previous audit history,

ii.   last unannounced audit date,

iii.   actionable complaints,

iv.   action taken by regulatory authorities,

v.   other relevant audit information that may impact the integrity of the SQF program,

vi.   confirmation that the transition falls within the accredited scope of the certification body,

vii.   confirmation that the location of the transitioning certified organization is within the territories included within the SQF license agreement with the certification body.

7.3   Application Review

The application review shall be determined as outlined in the SQF Code, Part A, Implementing and Maintaining the SQF Code, including section A2 Step 3.

The certification body shall prepare a written site audit plan and make that plan available to the site prior to commencement of the audit.

7.4   Evaluation

The certification body shall develop a plan for the evaluation activities to ensure they meet the requirements in the SQF Code, Part A, Implementing and Maintaining the SQF Code.

Where an audit involves more than one type of product or process, the report shall clearly identify all the elements important to each product type audited.

When information communication technology (ICT) is used in the audit process, the certification body shall reference the relevant sections within part A of the SQF Code and the *SQF policy 025: The Use of Information Communication Technology in the Audit Process.*

When using ICT, the objective is to enhance the audit process allowing the auditor to conduct a more risk focused audit. It is expected that the remote activities will not disrupt the systems audit approach and that the certification of a site's SQF System is an assurance that the site's food safety and quality plans have been implemented according to the SQF Code requirements and the site's System has been verified and determined effective to manage food safety and quality.

The audit report shall be completed by the SQF auditor and include all the requirements and the calculated rating as listed in the SQF audit report explanatory notes described in Part A: Section 9.2 of

the SQF Code.

The certification audit of the SQF System is undertaken to verify the effectiveness of the Site's SQF System in its entirety. It shall establish and ensure:

i.   The effective interaction between all elements of the SQF System; and

ii. That the site has demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the effectiveness of the SQF System and to meeting regulatory and customer requirements.

Certification bodies shall allow SQF auditors sufficient time to undertake all activities relating to the initial audit or re-certification audit and shall monitor all SQF auditor activities to ensure they do not take excessive time to conduct the audit.

The time allocated shall be based on factors such as the size, complexity of operations, whether it involves a high-risk product and/or a high-risk process, the degree of organization of the site and the number of locations, and if there are any remote activities. The certification body shall be prepared to justify or substantiate the amount of time spent on any certification audit, surveillance audit or re-certification audit.

The audit duration shall be based on the duration guide part A, 8.1 of the SQF Code. Documented justification is required for the audit duration and the audit duration shall be captured on the SQF audit report.

The certification body shall ensure that SQF auditors who are conducting an SQF audit use an interview technique which involves the questioning of key personnel at all levels within the site on the implementation of the SQF program.

During an unannounced recertification audit, the auditor is expected to:

▪ Be prepared to share his/her identification card and authorization from the certification body;

▪ Conduct a tour of the site within the first 60 minutes of arrival at the site; and

▪ Review the site's schedule to verify that any identified blackout dates are valid.

The certification body will ensure that SQF auditors who conduct SQF audits are aware of the latest updates, audit tools and materials as provided by SQFI. SQF auditors will utilize the appropriate SQF Code and checklist to conduct SQF audits, and will not add additional standards, criteria, or interpretation to the SQF audit. Customer or other types of addenda can be completed provided the SQF audit has been completed.

A list of non-conformities identified during the audit shall be presented to the site at the conclusion of the site audit.

7.5 Review

7.5.1   The certification body shall include, within its quality management system, a program for reviewing SQF audit reports prior to release of results to sites. The program shall include a technical as well as a grammatical review and shall include criteria and a schedule for the reviews.

The certification body shall ensure that the SQF auditors complete the audit report and provide

the required evidence as directed by SQFI. The primary response and evidence must be completed for all identified non-conformities (minor, major, critical). For those marked not applicable (N/A) or exempt, a primary response is required however, no evidence is needed.

Each section shall include a summary completed by the auditor irrespective of whether or not a non-conformity has been identified within that section. Section summaries must clearly indicate:

i.   Evidence of compliance;

ii.   Summary of element(s) that are non-compliant, not applicable (N/A);

iii.   Reference to other sections or elements where similar issues have been identified (if appropriate); and

iv.   Changes/improvements from previous audits (if appropriate).
All mandatory elements of system elements must be audited and cannot be marked "Exempt" or "N/A."

At least one technical reviewer or registered SQF auditor shall be assigned to review all information and results related to the evaluation. The technical reviewer cannot have been involved in the evaluation process.

The certification body shall ensure that the audit evidence shall be available to the site within ten (10) calendar days from the last day of the audit.

7.5.2   In countries where English is not the national language, the certification body may translate the audit checklist and audit evidence into the local language. Where this is required, the certification body shall have a process in place to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the audit checklist and report.

The local language report shall be translated into English for submission to the SQF assessment database, and the local language version of the report shall be retained and be available to SQFI on request.

7.6   Certification Decision

The certification body shall assign a person(s) to make the certificate decision using the information related to the evaluation and review including any other relevant information. This person(s) may be the technical reviewer or another competent technical officer trained in management of the SQF system. This person shall not be involved in the process for evaluation as outlined in 7.4 of this document.

Certification and re-certification of SQF Systems shall not be granted unless a "C-complies" audit rating or greater is achieved, all nonconformities have been corrected and those corrective actions have been verified by the certification body (by site visit or other appropriate means).

Audit history of the site should be considered as part of the certification decision process to gauge site's performance and continuous improvements.

In situations where the certification decision is made outside the SQFI Code requirements, Part A, section Step 10 shall apply.

7.7 Certification Documentation

Within forty – five (45) calendar days from the last date of the audit, the certification body shall complete the certification decision. If certification is granted, the certification body shall create a certification record in the SQF assessment database and provide to the site:

i. A certificate in the format approved by SQF; with a unique certification number generated by the SQF assessment database;

ii. An electronic copy of the relevant SQF quality shield which shall include the certification body name and certification number for facilities which pass an audit against the SQF Quality Code;

iii. A statement detailing the duration of the certification and the grounds upon which certification may be suspended or withdrawn;

iv. The requirements for undertaking surveillance audits and re-certification audits and their frequency;

v. Where the scope of certification is changed (i.e. expanded or reduced) as a result of an audit, a new certificate shall be issued and the certification body shall notify the SQFI of the change; and

vi. Within ten (10) calendar days of granting certification, the certification body shall provide an electronic and/or hard copy of the site's certificate to the site. The certificate is valid for seventy-five (75) days from the site's anniversary date of the initial certification closest to the next recertification audit date and shall be in a format approved by SQF.

7.8 Directory of Certified Products

All certified, registered sites will be listed in the SQF assessment database, which will display the certification site details and include the site's name, address, expiration date, food sector category(ies), product(s), relevant Code(s), certification body and country on the SQFI website.

7.9 Surveillance (i.e maintaining certification and recertification)

The certification body shall have documented procedures outlining the circumstances and conditions in which certification will be maintained and shall follow the requirements in the SQF Code, Part A, section 12.1.

The certification body shall make available to interested parties all documentation and criteria including written procedures for the certification body's implementation of Part A, section 12.1, and the requirements of the relevant SQF Code.

The certification body shall maintain documents and data related to its scope of accreditation and the food industry sectors in which it operates. Typically, the certification body shall demonstrate access to reference documentation such as Good Industry Practices (GAP/GMP/GDP), HACCP, appropriate legislation, food additives, chemical registration and MRL's and relevant industry a codes of practice.

Use of the SQF logo and quality shield shall follow the requirements outlined in the relevant appendix of the SQF Code.

The certification body shall inform SQF within forty-eight (48) hours of any SQF certified site that has initiated a food safety event requiring public notification. Ongoing communication to SQF shall be provided to the SQF compliance manager and include the following:

   i.   Summary of the event including date of notification and products involved;

   ii.   Ongoing communication regarding the activities conducted by the certification body to determine the scope of the food safety event;

   iii. Follow up activities conducted by the certification body that address the reason behind the food safety event, implemented corrective action, and/or other follow up activities as appropriate.

7.10 Changes Affecting Certification

In the event of significant changes which could affect the safety of product, changes to the requirement of the certification standard, changes of ownership or management of the site or if the certification body has reason to believe there could be compliance issues in relation to certification, the certification body shall re-evaluate the site(s) to assess compliance with the certification standard.

New and revised requirements issued by SQF shall be communicated by the certification body to the SQF sites.

7.11 Termination, Reduction, Suspension or Withdrawal of Certification

The certification body shall implement procedures for suspending and withdrawing certificates as described in the SQF Code, part A, Steps 13 and 14.

In the event that a site refuses an unannounced recertification audit to occur, the certification body shall take the following action:

   i.   Immediately suspend the site's SQF Certificate;

   ii.   Conduct any subsequent audit to regain certification as an announced recertification audit;

   iii. Require the site to undergo a surveillance audit during its certification cycle;

   iv.   Declare the following certification as an unannounced audit.

7.12 Records

The certification body shall maintain sufficiently detailed records of all audits of sites to demonstrate that certification and other actions (such as suspension or withdrawal of certificate, corrective actions and disputes resolution) have been effectively carried out.

The certification body shall maintain written records of all relevant employee (including contract employees) and training undertaken.

Records shall be kept for a minimum of five years, or as required by law whichever is the greater. Records of application processes, certification audits, reviews, decisions and all procedures and the quality manual shall be reported to SQFI upon request.

The certification body shall at all times make available to the SQFI the following information:

i. Authority under which the organization operates;

ii. A statement in relation to its certification system, including information on rules and procedures for granting, maintaining, extending, suspending and withdrawing certification of its clients;

iii. Evaluation procedures and certification processes in relation to the certification program;

iv. Details of the rights and requirements of applicants and clients such as the use of logos and marks and the way in which a client can use information in relation to certification;

v. Details of complaints, appeals and disputes procedures; and

vi. A comprehensive list of all clients certificated against the scope of the certification scheme's standard.

7.13 Complaints and Appeals

This clause is for complaints received by the certification body. The certification body shall document its procedure for handling and resolving appeals and complaints about its activities and decisions made by a site (including, but not limited to, the activities and decisions of its SQF auditors and contract auditors).

i. Appeals regarding decisions on the suspension and/or withdrawal of the SQF certification by a certification body shall not delay the decision to suspend or withdraw the certification;

ii. Complaints received by a certification body from a certified site shall be investigated and resolved without delay.

The certification body shall document its procedure for handling and resolving appeals and complaints made by other parties about a site. Complaints include concerns, comments, questions or anything that questions the certification body's management system.

Complaints received by a certification body from other parties about a site shall be investigated and resolved without delay.

Where upon investigation of a complaint with respect to the implementation of edition 9 or subsequent SQF Codes it is determined that there has been a substantial breakdown of a site's SQF System or any other condition not in accordance with the SQF Code and/or other supporting documents, the certification body shall implement appropriate action.

Complaints, appeals and disputes shall be handled promptly and without undue delay. The majority of such matters should be resolved within one month of receipt. A formal notice of the final outcome shall be communicated to the complainant and appellant. Records of complaints and investigations shall be available to SQFI upon request.

8.0 Management System Requirements

8.1 Options

8.1.1   The certification body shall develop a management system, maintained in accordance with ISO/IEC17065: 2012 clause 8, which shall also address the SQF System requirements outlined in this document and the SQF Codes.

8.1.2   The certification body shall include in the management system provisions that address:

i.   General management system documentation

ii.   Control of document

iii.   Control of records

iv.   Its policies, procedures and activities related to its license with SQFI.

Records must be maintained for all quality system activities to verify compliance and be available to SQFI on request.

i.   Management review (review of inputs and review of outputs)

ii.   Internal audits: The certification body shall conduct annual internal audits of its certification procedures applicable to its SQF certification program. Management reviews and internal audits shall cover the activities of contract service providers.

The internal audits shall cover all activities in nominated territories and the country where the accreditation is granted.

The certification body shall review its management system and certification procedures applicable to these requirements at least annually. Records of internal audits and management reviews shall be reported annually and made available to the SQFI or its representative on request, including:

i.   Corrective actions

ii.   Preventive actions

8.1.1   As part of the SQFI compliance and integrity program, certification bodies shall participate in all scheduled certification body meetings, including but not limited to, the bi-annual certification body meetings.

The certification body shall provide information as requested to support the following activities:

i.   Annual CB visits, either on-site or virtual, as determined by SQFI and based on risk;

ii.   KPI performance data;

iii.   Site validation audits, remote or on-site, to be conducted by SQFI;

iv.   Auditor witness audits, remote or on-site to be conducted by SQFI;

v.   Appeal reviews;

vi.   Complaint investigations;

vii.   Annual health check forms, or

viii.   Other activities as identified by the SQFI Compliance Manager.