

Criteria for SQF Auditors & Technical Reviewers

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Disclaimer

While 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.

Introduction

The SQF Code is a process and product certification standard. It is a third-party accredited food safety and quality management standard built on the HACCP principles and guidelines defined by the CODEX Alimentarius Commission and is intended to support industry or company branded product and to offer benefits to sites and their customers. Products produced and manufactured under the SQF Code certification retain a high degree of acceptance in global markets.

First developed in Australia in 1994, the SQF program has been owned and managed by the Food Industry Association (FMI) since 2003 and was recognized in 2004 by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) as a standard that meets its benchmark requirements.

This document describes the qualifications, registration and re-registration requirements for auditors auditing the SQF Food Safety Codes and SQF Quality Code and is applicable for all SQF auditors applying for registration and re-registration beginning October, 2026.

This document also describes the qualifications, registration and re-registration requirements for technical reviewers employed, or contracted by a licensed SQF certification body with the responsibility of reviewing SQF audit reports. As of January 2, 2018, all SQF certification bodies are to use only registered technical reviewers.

This latest edition of the “Criteria for SQF Auditors and Technical Reviewers” has been reviewed and updated to align with the current version of the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) benchmarking requirements document.

SQF auditor registration is conducted by SQFI or its designee. 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 competencies to audit SQF food safety and quality systems.

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General Requirements for All Categories

1.1 Registration Category

The criteria described in this document are for the purpose of SQF classification and registration as an SQF auditor or SQF technical reviewer.

The SQF Food Sector Categories (FSCs) can be found on sqfi.com.

1.2 Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the relevant definitions available in the SQF Glossary with the following definitions apply:

Applicant	An individual applying to become a registered SQF auditor or SQF technical reviewer.
Bioscience discipline	A bioscience discipline means a university degree with science-based core curriculum (such as biology, chemistry, mathematics, physics, and other electives).
HACCP Training	Training in the principles and application of a HACCP system based on the Annex of the Codex Alimentarius Commission General Principles of Food Hygiene. This training shall be: 1. Recognized as a HACCP training course used extensively in a country. 2. Administered and delivered by a recognized institution. 3. The acquired knowledge of the candidate shall be assessed as part of the training program.
SQF Auditor	A person registered by SQFI to audit a site's SQF Food Safety and/or Quality System. This person shall meet the requirements of this document.
Technical Reviewer	An individual who is employed by a licensed SQF certification body and whose duties include the technical review of SQF audit reports. SQF technical reviewers shall be registered by SQFI as an SQF technical reviewer according to the requirements contained in these criteria.
Work Experience	Operational experience in food safety functions with food hygiene and food safety-based programs involving HACCP or other appropriate risk management systems. Alternatively, demonstrated experience involving equivalent practices, such as consulting or regulatory experience, that are deemed to provide experience relevant to the system being developed and the competencies described in this document may be considered.

1.3 Sponsors

Each applicant for initial registration as an SQF auditor or technical reviewer 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.

1.4 Personal Declaration

Each applicant for registration is required to attest that they will comply with the SQF Professional Code of Conduct (refer attachment 2) and that any complaints regarding their performance will be dealt with in a manner to prevent recurrence.

1.5 Appeals

Written appeals against the outcome of an application for registration or re-registration will be referred to Exemplar Global or designee. Decisions made to any appeal are final.

1.6 Complaints Against Registered SQF Auditors/ Technical Reviewers

Complaints regarding the conduct of a currently registered SQF auditor or technical reviewer will be acknowledged and investigated by SQFI. Substantiated evidence of misconduct may result in withdrawal of registration.

Requirements for SQF Auditors

2.1 Auditor Requirements Overview

2.1.1 Applicant Requirement Overview

All applicants shall:

- Successfully complete one of the following registered auditor trainings:
 - “Management System Lead Auditor” training course of forty (40) hours duration AND the “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training (certificate date of November 16, 2020, or later);
- OR
- “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training (certificate date of April 28, 2022 or later) and;
- Attend a HACCP training course relevant to the sector of activities, and that meets the definition described above (refer 1.2); and
- Successfully complete the “Auditing SQF Food Safety Systems” examination; and
- Have attained a university degree in a food-related discipline (e.g., food science, food technology, dairy technology) or a bioscience discipline as described in 1.2. Applicants who do not hold a qualifying university degree may apply for approval through the applicable Education Equivalency Policy, which shall be initiated by the certification body; and
- Complete at least one hundred-twenty (120) hours of auditing in the food industry. Internal audits, pest control assessments, training and sample retrieval are examples of activities that do not count as audit hours; and
- Demonstrate at least two years (2) of relevant experience in the food industry as defined in 1.2 above, in a food-related technical, professional, or supervisory position involving food safety accountability and the exercise of judgment; and
- Be employed or contracted with at least one (1) designated licensed SQF Certification Body; and
- Attest to the SQF Professional Code of Conduct (refer to attachment 2).

2.2 Food Sector Category (FSC) Designation

2.2.1 FSC Requirements Overview

Applicants are to determine the food sector categories that support their education, training, work experience, and audit history.

For each food sector category that is applied for, the applicant must demonstrate:

- A minimum of two (2) years' work experience, as defined in 1.2 above, within the food industry sector; OR
- One hundred-twenty (120) audit hours auditing within the requested FSC; OR
- A combination of work experience and audit experience for each FSC requested (e.g., one (1) year experience and forty (60) audit hours).
- Auditor applicants are limited to a maximum of five (5) food sector categories during their initial application.

2.2.2 Additional Food Sector Category Requirements

Additional qualifications are required for the following food sector categories:

FSC 00 - Quality

Applicants shall demonstrate any of the following training, auditing experience or professional designations:

- Shall have attended the Auditing the SQF Quality Code training course, or Auditing SQF Quality Systems course; OR
- Shall have attended a quality training course deemed equivalent by SQFI (e.g., ASQ-CQA, CQE, CQI, CQIA, Six Sigma – all levels); OR
- Achieve a credential in one of the following ASQ-CQA, CQE, CQI, CQIA, CMQ-QE, Six Sigma, etc.; OR
- Have completed a quality management post-graduate degree or diploma through a tertiary institution recognized by the governing body of the country of issue; OR
- Have a minimum of sixty (60) hours experience auditing against the SQF Quality Code, ISO 9001 or other equivalent quality management. Quality management system audits shall be referenced on the applicant's audit log;

AND

- Shall complete the "Auditing SQF Quality Systems" examination.

FSC 15 - Canning, UHT, and Aseptic Operations

- A thermal processing course for low-acid or acidified foods meeting federal-level regulation, if applicable and used extensively in a country.

FSC 27 - Manufacture of Food Packaging

- A degree or higher certificate in packaging technology and a relevant certificate recognized by SQFI 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 SQFI.

FSC 30 – Food Safety Services

- Successfully complete the Food Safety Services Auditor Training;
- Submit an FSC 30 Sponsorship Form, completed and signed by the Certification Body for each scope of service.

Note: Qualification for FSC 30 is service-specific and is based on the food safety service being audited, as identified and sponsored by the Certification Body. Approval for one food safety service scope within FSC 30 does not authorize the auditor to conduct audits for other food safety service scopes under FSC 30. Any additional food safety service scope requires Certification Body approval and submission to Exemplar Global.

FSC 35 – Agents and Brokers

- Auditors meeting the auditor qualifications stated in section 2.1 in this document shall follow the FSC requirements outlined in 2.2.1.
- Auditors that do not meet the requirements outlined in this document, including auditors qualified in other GFSI-recognized programs, shall follow the requirements listed on the SQF website (www.sqfi.com) and submit completed applications via the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

Note: Auditor qualification using this approach allows the auditor to audit only FSC 35 and does not provide eligibility for other SQF industry scopes.

2.3 SQF Auditor Application Process

2.3.1 The initial application

SQFI or its designee assesses the competencies of applicants for SQF Auditor registration by evaluating education, training, work experience and auditing experience against the requirements specified in section 2.1 and 2.2 of these criteria.

Completed applications are submitted online via the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com). A non-refundable application fee must be paid before the application review can begin. This information is available on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

Applicants are required to utilize the auditor registration forms available on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com). The forms must be completed according to the instructions provided in the file. All other attachments should be submitted as a PDF document.

All forms shall be completely and accurately filled out and will be returned to the applicant for correction if deficient.

Auditor applicants shall upload the following evidence supporting their application as part of the online registration process:

- HACCP training certificate;
- SQF Auditor training course (as specified in 2.1);
- Work experience log (refer to 2.1 for qualifying experience);
- Audit log (see below for qualifying audits);
- University Degree, unless education equivalency has been approved (refer to 2.1 for qualifying degree);
- Sponsor verification form (one (1) signature must be from a licensed SQFI certification body and one (1) signature from a food industry professional with knowledge of the applicant's work experience);
- Auditor examination certificate; and
- Records to support FSC qualification (refer to 2.2.2)

The audit log shall contain the audit experience of the applicant and meet the following criteria:

- All referenced audits shall be third-party or second-party audits. Internal audits of a site as an employee of that site will not be considered and should not be included on the audit log. Shadow or witness audits where the auditor takes no responsibility in the audit process or the audit outcome will not be considered and should not be included on the audit log.
- Qualifying audits that are included on the audit log must refer to a recognized standard, checklist or audit tool. Examples of acceptable audit standards include HACCP audits, GFSI recognized certification program audits, GMP or GAP audits. Audit checklists used by the applicant may be requested by SQFI or its designee to determine the scope of the audit.
- Only audits that have been acquired up to ten (10) years prior to application will be accepted as audit experience.
- Each audit referenced shall include the information required in the form.

Requirements for SQF Auditors

Following receipt of the application, all mandatory documents, and payment of the application fee, the information is reviewed by SQFI or its designee for completeness and accuracy, including documentary evidence of training and formal qualifications.

In considering registration scope, the applicant's qualifications are evaluated, including any food sector-related training courses undertaken and the applicant's food sector work and auditing experience. SQFI or its designee may request feedback from the verification contacts provided on the application about the performance of the applicant.

SQFI or its designee may request additional supporting information from the applicant as required. If SQFI or its designee is unable to obtain satisfactory verification of information and experience from competent references, an interview may be required.

SQFI or its designee maintains a file on each applicant, which remains confidential. The file will include the original application documentation; check sheets, records of investigations, appeals, complaints, auditing logs and re-registration documents.

Once an application is approved, applicants shall pay the registration fee before their SQF professional credentials can be issued. Applicable fees can be found on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

2.3.2 Publication of Registration

A register of SQF auditors is displayed on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com) and on the Exemplar Global website (<https://exemplarglobal.org/portal/files/sqfi-searchregister.php>).

The terminology to be used by registered SQF auditors in describing their registration on business cards, letterhead etc. is: "Registered SQF Auditor."

2.4 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 through training, auditing, industry experience or consulting experience. To obtain registration for an additional food sector category, applicants will need to submit:

- Supporting documentation demonstrating qualifications and audit experience as outlined in 2.2 in the relevant food sector; and
- The appropriate advancement fee as listed on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).
- Auditor applicants are limited to a maximum of five (5) food sector categories during any advancement session and cannot exceed more than fifteen (15) food sector categories in total.

2.5 Requirements for Annual Auditor Re-registration

Re-registration is required annually prior to the anniversary date of initial registration. Requirements for re- registration include submission of the following, along with the annual fee:

- Evidence of auditing experience, as detailed in 2.5.1;
- Evidence of professional development, as detailed in 2.5.2;
- Evidence of participation in SQF Professional Update course (2.5.3);
- Declaration of one sponsor from a licensed SQF certification body (2.5.4); and
- Reaffirm the SQF Professional Code of Conduct (2.5.5)

2.5.1 Auditing Experience

For re-registration, all currently registered SQF auditors shall submit an audit log demonstrating completion of at least five (5) SQF food safety system audits. Acceptable audits include certification, recertification, and surveillance audits.

In circumstances where an auditor is unable to complete five (5) SQF system audits, a combination of SQF and other GFSI-recognized certification audits may be submitted. However, the audit log must include a total of five (5) audits, with at least one (1) audit being a complete SQF system audit.

Auditors must conduct a minimum of one (1) audit or demonstrate competence through education, training, consulting, etc. in each of their designated food sector category (ies) within five (5) years. The audit can be in any GFSI scheme and should be recorded in the auditor registration form identified as “Last Audit by FSC.”

Re-registration for FSC 00-Quality is annual. For re-registration, one (1) SQF system audit required must include an audit of the SQF Quality Code or one (1) SQF Quality audit conducted for a site registered to another GFSI certification program.

An auditor that has been removed from an FSC can reapply for that FSC by submitting evidence for demonstration of competence through auditing, training, education, or industry experience.

2.5.2 Professional Development

Currently registered SQF food safety auditors shall undertake at least fifteen (15) hours of continuing professional development within their registration year relevant to their registered food sector categories and their personal needs for skills and knowledge. Professional development information shall be provided in the “Professional Update” log in the auditor registration forms. The following activities are examples of professional development:

- 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 annual professional development activities, SQF food safety auditors should consider their personal strengths and weaknesses to identify areas for personal improvement. These activities should target new or the improvement of existing food safety and quality management skills and knowledge.

Auditors are to use the SQF Auditor Professional Development Guide found on the SQFI website (sqfi.com) to assist in creating a professional development plan that targets relevant skills and competencies the auditor should possess, including industry sector categories, regulatory requirements, and food safety/technological developments. The auditor should review the results of their assessment to identify the relevant refresher training, including a summary of the analysis and the relevant courses when submitting their professional development.

Consulting, training, development of programs, or other activities completed in the execution of one’s daily work are not considered professional development and should not be included.

2.5.3 SQFI Professional Update

Registered SQF auditors shall participate in one (1) SQF Professional Update course delivered by SQFI within their registration year. This update may be delivered virtually for general participation, in-person, or delivered directly to certification bodies upon request.

2.5.4 Declaration of Sponsor Certification Body

Currently registered SQF auditors must declare in their re-registration application a licensed SQF Certification Body that will sponsor their re-registration application.

2.5.5 Reaffirmation of the SQF Professional Code of Conduct

Each applicant for re-registration will be asked to attest that they comply with the SQF Code of Conduct and that any complaints regarding their performance will be dealt with in a manner to prevent recurrence.

Requirements for SQF Technical Reviewers

3.1 Overview

Licensed SQF certification bodies are required to use registered technical reviewers or registered SQF auditors to review or provide oversight of the review of all SQF audit reports created by that certification body.

SQF auditors acting as technical reviewers are not required to also register as technical reviewers.

Technical reviewers are not registered against food sector categories.

All applicants shall:

- Successfully complete one of the following registered auditor trainings:
 - “Management System Lead Auditor” training course of forty (40) hours duration AND the “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training (certificate date of November 16, 2020, or later);
 - OR
 - “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training (certificate date of April 28, 2022 or later) and;
- Attend a HACCP training course that meets the definition described above (refer 1.2); and
- Successfully complete the “Auditing SQF Food Safety Systems” examination; and
- Have attained a university degree in food science, food technology or related discipline
- Participate in at least sixty (60) hours of food safety auditing in the food industry. Audits submitted shall meet the same requirements as those for SQF auditors; and
- Demonstrate at least two (2) years’ relevant work experience in food safety and/or quality management; and
- Be employed or contracted with at least one (1) designated licensed SQF Certification Body; and
- Attest to the SQF Professional Code of Conduct (refer to attachment 2).

3.2 Technical Reviewer Application Process

The application process for technical reviewers shall follow the process as outlined in 2.3.1 above with the exception of designation and evidence of Food Sector categories. FSC designation is not applicable for technical reviewers.

3.2.1 Certificate of Registration

Each successful applicant will receive notification of registration that includes an expiry date, which is the date re-registration falls due.

3.2.2 Publication of Registration

A register of technical reviewers is displayed on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

The terminology to be used by registered SQF technical reviewers in describing their registration on business cards, letterhead etc. is: "Registered SQF Technical Reviewer."

3.3 Requirements for Annual Technical Reviewer Re-registration

Re-registration for technical reviewers is annual. Technical reviewers are required to meet the same re-registration criteria as SQF auditors with the exception of the five (5) SQF system audits. There is no requirement for technical reviewers to conduct site audits throughout the year.

Requirements for re-registration include submission of the following, along with the annual fee:

- Evidence of professional development, as detailed in 2.5.2;
- Evidence of participation in SQF Professional Update course (2.5.3);
- Declaration of one sponsor from a licensed SQF certification body (2.5.4); and
- Reaffirm the SQF Professional Code of Conduct (2.5.5)

Attachment 1: Key Competencies for SQF Food Safety Auditors

1. General Competencies

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

- 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, and
- The ability to plan, lead, and organize the audit.

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 according to the current edition of the Codex Alimentarius Commission Guidelines;
- Auditors applying for FSC27 shall demonstrate the knowledge of packaging materials manufacture;
- Auditors applying for FSC 15 shall demonstrate competency in thermal processing of low-acid or acidified foods;
- Experience and technical knowledge of the product and the process;
- Knowledge of relevant pre-requisite programs, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, and industry guidelines and standards.

3. **Quality Management Competencies (if registered to FSC 00 - Quality)**

- The ability to identify and assess potential quality threats at all links in the supply chain;
- The ability to assess the effectiveness of methodologies for controlling quality hazards;
- The ability to apply current principles and practices of HACCP to the identification and control of quality threats;
- Experience and technical knowledge of process control and other quality tools used to measure and improve process capability;
- Knowledge of relevant process controls, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, and industry guidelines and standards.

Attachment 2: SQF Professional Code of Conduct

All registered SQF auditors and technical reviewers have an obligation to maintain the integrity of the SQF Program by observing the SQF Professional Code of Conduct. Failure to do so may result in withdrawal of their registration. The SQF Professional Code of Conduct must be carefully reviewed and acknowledged as part of the applicant's registration or re-registration.

1. I will act professionally, accurately, honestly, impartially, and in an unbiased manner.
2. I will not act in any way that would prejudice the reputation of the SQF Food Safety and Quality Codes.
3. I will co-operate fully with any inquiry in the event of an alleged breach of the SQF Program.
4. I will strive to increase my competence as an auditor and maintain the prestige of my profession.
5. I will not undertake any SQF audits that I am not competent to perform.
6. I will not discuss or disclose any information relating to an SQF audit unless required by law or authorized in writing by the client and/or my employing certification body.
7. I will not disclose information concerning the business affairs or technical process of any present or former client without the client's consent.
8. I will not accept any inducement, commission, gift, or any other benefit from client organizations, their employees, or any interested party, or knowingly allow colleagues to do so.
9. I will not intentionally communicate false or misleading information that may compromise the integrity of an SQF audit or the certification process.
10. I will use my best endeavors to promote the value of the SQF Food Safety and Quality Codes with colleagues, clients, and members of the general public.
11. I will inform employers and clients of any business connections, interests, or affiliations, which might influence judgment or impair the equitable character of its services.

I understand that any breach of this Code of Conduct may lead to warnings, suspension, or withdrawal of certification, in accordance with SQFI's disciplinary procedures.