Criteria for Certified SQF Practitioner Credential

Edition 1.4

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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 Certified Practitioners 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 to obtain and maintain the Certified SQF Practitioner credential beginning June 1, 2024.

Certification as a Certified SQF Practitioner against these criteria is conducted by Exemplar Global. It is designed to enhance the integrity of the SQF Program by providing the food industry with a register of individuals who have the appropriate competencies to oversee the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of an SQF System.

Contents

General Requirements

1.1   Scope

The criteria described in this document are for the purpose of certification and registration as a Certified SQF Practitioner.

1.2   Definitions

For the purposes of this document, the relevant definitions given in Appendix 2: Glossary in the SQF Food Safety Code, together with the following definitions, apply:

Applicant	An individual applying to become a registered SQF auditor or SQF technical reviewer.
Certified SQF Practitioner	Designation for an individual who has successfully obtained the Certified SQF Practitioner credential.
Continuing Professional Development	Activities taken as described in the Certified SQF Practitioner Professional Development Handbook that allow the Certified SQF Practitioner to build knowledge and skills that contribute to the SQF-certified site's culture of continuous improvement.
Employment Certificate	A letter or other documentation serving as verification of employment and a summary of important job duties at a current or previous employer.
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. The training shall be: i. Recognized as a HACCP training course used extensively in a country. ii. Administered and delivered by a recognized institution. ii. The acquired knowledge of the candidate shall be assessed as part of the training program.
Work Experience	Operational experience 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 food safety system being developed, and the competencies described in this document may be considered.

1.3   Personal Declaration

Each applicant for registration is required to attest that they will comply with the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (refer Attachment 2) and that any complaints regarding their performance have been or are in the process of being dealt with in a manner to prevent recurrence.

1.4   Appeals

Written appeals against the outcome of an application for registration or re-registration will be referred to the SQFI Compliance Manager or designee. Decisions made by SQFI relating to any appeal are final.

1.5   Complaints Against a Certified SQF Practitioner

Complaints regarding the conduct of a current or previous holder of the Certified SQF Practitioner credential will be acknowledged and investigated by SQFI. Substantiated evidence of misconduct may result in withdrawal of registration.

Registration Requirements

2.1 Requirements

All applicants shall

Criteria 1.   Successfully complete a HACCP Training Course that meets the definition above (refer to 1.2); and

Criteria 2.   Possess knowledge of the SQF Program as demonstrated by one of the following:

     a.   Option 1: Successfully complete the Implementing SQF Systems Exam completed on or after January 2, 2018 (i.e., SQF Code edition 8, 9, or 10).

     b.   Option 2: Successfully complete the Implementing SQF Systems Exam at any time AND possess at least one (1) year of experience as an SQF Practitioner/backup Practitioner within the past five (5) years.

     c.   Option 3: Possess at least two (2) years of experience within the past five (5) years in food safety management, quality assurance, or related role within the food industry at a site that maintains an SQF System or similar food safety standard, including involvement in at least one (1) SQF certification or re-certification cycle.

     d.   Option 4: Possess at least two (2) years of experience in the past five (5) years leading an SQF System or significantly contributing to the development, implementation, or management of an SQF System (for example, a scope extension for an existing certified SQF System).

     e.   Option 5: Complete the Implementing SQF Systems course or similar comprehensive in-house training program focused on the understanding and implementation of the SQF Code, provided by an experienced and qualified trainer(s). The applicant must demonstrate that the course addresses: SQF Code edition 8 or subsequent, the obligations for the SQF Practitioner and a site that is operating a certified SQF Food Safety Management System; and

Criteria 3.   Demonstrate via an Employment Certificate or attestation, a minimum of two (2) years of experience within the past five (5) years as the SQF Practitioner/backup Practitioner or in a related food safety management or quality assurance role within the food industry at a site that maintains SQF certification or a similar independently audited food safety standard with demonstrated responsibility for developing, implementing and maintaining, a site's risk-based food safety system; and

Criteria 4.   Demonstrate, via an Employment Certificate or attestation, the application of the principles of validation and effectiveness; verification; traceability, and product identification within a risk-based food safety management system; and

Criteria 5.   Successfully complete the Certified SQF Practitioner exam delivered by Exemplar Global as part of this credentialling process.

2.2 Application Process

2.2.1 The initial application

SQFI or its designee assesses the competencies of applicants for the Certified SQF Practitioner credential by evaluating the applicant's submitted documentation against the requirements specified above.

Applications are submitted online via a third-party registration portal linked on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). A non-refundable application fee must be paid before the application review can begin. Fee information is available on the SQFI website (sqfi.com).

Applicants are required to utilize the registration portal linked on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). Attachments must be submitted in PDF format.

All forms shall be completely and accurately filled out and all necessary documentation submitted. Incorrect or incomplete applications will be returned to the applicant for correction. Missing documentation will be requested.

Following receipt of the application, all documentation, and payment of the application fee, the information is reviewed by SQFI or its designee for accuracy.

SQFI or its designee may request feedback from the verification contacts provided in the application regarding 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.

Once the supporting documentation is approved, applicants will be sent a link to complete the online Certified SQF Practitioner exam. Successful completion of the exam consists of a minimum passing score of 70%. Further information on the online Certified SQF Practitioner exam can be found in the *Certified SQF Practitioner Certification Examinee Handbook* and *Exam Preparation Guide available* on the SQFI website (sqfi.com).

SQFI or its designee maintains a confidential file on each applicant. The file will include the original application documentation; check sheets, records of investigations, appeals and complaints, and re-registration documents. Once an application is approved and the exam is completed, applicants must pay the registration fee before their professional credentials and badging can be issued. Fee information is found on the SQFI website (sqfi.com).

2.2.2   Publication of Registration

A register of those having received the Certified SQF Practitioners credential is displayed on the SQFI website (sqfi.com) and on the Exemplar Global website (https://exemplarglobal.org/portal/files/sqfi-searchregister.php).

The terminology to be used by those achieving the Certified SQF Practitioner credential in describing their certification on business cards, letterheads, etc. is: "Certified SQF Practitioner."

2.3   Requirements for Re-registration

To maintain the Certified SQF Practitioner credential, re-registration is required every three (3) years by the anniversary date of the initial registration.

Additionally, the Certified SQF Practitioner is required each year to successfully complete an annual SQF Program Update, as detailed in 2.2.1 and pay a fee on or before the anniversary date of the initial registration:

2.3.1 Requirements:

Annually, all currently credentialed Certified SQF Practitioners must complete an SQF Program Update and pay an annual fee. The SQF Program Update is a separate requirement from the triennial required 45 (forty-five) hours of Professional Development.

Every three (3) years, Certified SQF Practitioners must undertake at least forty-five (45) hours of continuing Professional Development according to a self-described Professional Development plan as described in the *Certified SQF Practitioner Professional Development Handbook*, which includes a variety of activities and both technical and soft skills.

Candidates for re-registration must demonstrate ongoing experience as a food safety professional with responsibility related to the management of their site's food safety system. Minimum of one (1) year of employment experience within every three (3) years.

Each applicant for re-registration will be asked to attest to compliance with the SQFI Code of Conduct and that any complaints regarding performance have been or are in the process of being dealt with in a manner to prevent recurrence.

Attachments

3.1 Attachment 1: Key Competencies for Certified SQF Practitioner Credential

3.1.2 The Certified SQF Practitioner will have the knowledge and ability to:

- Navigate an SQF Code and understand the obligations the Code specifies for both the SQF Practitioner and a site that is operating a certified SQF Food Safety Management System.

- Oversee the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of a Food Safety Management System, including the system elements.

- Oversee the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), including pre-requisite programs.

- Implement and maintain food safety plans.

- Undertake a food safety risk assessment, including predicting the impact of food safety risks on the food safety management system; ascertaining the level of risk; and identifying when additional expert advice is required.

- Understand and apply change control principles to changes that may impact food safety, including verification of the effectiveness of controls.

- Apply the principles of validation and effectiveness; verification; traceability; and product identification within the food management system.

- Conduct a root cause analysis (including the identification of appropriate corrective and preventive measures).

- Communicate effectively with internal and external stakeholders to ensure implementation and maintenance of the food safety management system.

- Demonstrate ability to differentiate relative risk and where controls are needed or not needed.

- Ability to assess/identify food safety culture weaknesses and develop plans for improvement.

- Ability to act as the organization's lead food safety management system representative, including during external audits.

3.2   Attachment 2: SQF Professional Code of Conduct

3.2.2   All those who have obtained the Certified SQF Practitioner credential have an obligation to maintain the integrity of the SQF Program by observing the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct. Failure to do so may result in the withdrawal of their certification. The SQFI Professional Code of Conduct must be carefully reviewed and acknowledged as part of the applicant's certification or re- certification.

3.2.3   Professional Integrity and Competence

- Professional Behavior: Act professionally, accurately, honestly, and impartially and in an unbiased manner.
- Integrity of the SQF Program: Act in a manner that will not prejudice the reputation of the SQF Program.
- Commitment to Food Safety: Prioritize food safety and management of risk in all aspects of professional practice.
- Continuous Learning: Stay updated with the latest developments, standards, and regulations in food safety.
- Accurate Reporting: Ensure all reports and records are truthful, accurate, and complete.
- Ethical Advocacy: Promote ethical practices and challenge unethical behavior within daily activities.

3.2.4   Ethical Behavior

- Honesty and Fairness: Act with honesty, fairness, and integrity in all professional interactions.
- Conflict of Interest: Avoid situations where personal interests conflict with professional duties. Disclose any potential conflicts of interest to relevant parties.
- Confidentiality: Respect the confidentiality of sensitive information obtained during the course of professional activities.

3.2.5   Compliance with Laws and Regulations

- Adherence to Standards: Follow all applicable food safety laws, regulations, and standards, including those set by the Safe Quality Food (SQF) Institute.
- Reporting Deviations: Promptly address any deviations from food safety standards or regulations per internal policy.

3.2.6   Professional Responsibility

- Competence in Practice: Only undertake tasks and responsibilities for which you have the necessary knowledge, skills, and competence.
- Due Diligence: Exercise due diligence in identifying and managing food safety risks.
- Accountability: Take responsibility for the consequences of your professional actions and decisions.

3.2.7   Respect for Others

- Fair Treatment: Treat all colleagues, customers, and stakeholders with respect and without discrimination.
- Collaboration: Foster a collaborative work environment to enhance food safety practices.
- Communication: Communicate effectively and respectfully with all stakeholders.

3.2.8   Commitment to Continuous Improvement

- Continuous Improvement: Strive for continuous improvement in food safety practices.
- Innovation: Encourage and implement innovative solutions to improve food safety.

3.2.9   Transparency and Trust

- Openness: Maintain transparency in all professional dealings.
- Building Trust: Work to build and maintain trust with customers, colleagues, and the public through reliable and ethical practices.

3.2.10   Professional Development

- Education and Training: Pursue ongoing education and training to maintain and enhance professional competence.
- Mentorship: Support and mentor less experienced professionals in the field of food safety.

3.2.11   Commitment to the Profession

- Representation of Credential: Appropriately represent the Certified SQF Practitioner credential and the importance of food safety in public forums and within the industry.

3.2.12   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.