



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

GETTING STARTED: STEPS TO SQF CERTIFICATION

The SQF family of food safety and quality Codes are designed to meet industry, customer and regulatory requirements for all sectors of the food supply chain. The Safe Quality Food (SQF) Institute has programs for primary production, through to manufacturing, distribution, food packaging, foodservice and retail operations. Retailers, manufacturers and food service companies rely on SQF certification when approving their supply chain and for some it is a requirement before any product can be shipped or served.

Taking that first step is always the hardest. You may not know how to start or where to go. There are a lot of requirements and terms that may not be familiar. However, just like eating an elephant, the SQF Code should be consumed one bite at a time and by reading this tip sheet you have already taken that first bite!

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	APPLICABLE CODE ELEMENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE SQF PROGRAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 2.1.3.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ IDENTIFY THE STEPS TO BECOMING SQF CERTIFIED	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ 2.5.1
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ PREPARE FOR SQF CERTIFICATION	

KEY TERMS

- GFSI

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is an international organization of food manufacturers and retailers that brings experts together to address emerging issues on food safety. It is the organization that benchmarks the certification programs such as SQF to a set of food safety requirements.

- SQF PROGRAM

The Safe Quality Food (SQF) program is recognized by retailers, manufacturers and foodservice providers around the world as a rigorous, credible food safety management system. The program follows the requirements outlined by the GFSI and uses retailer and stakeholder feedback to address the many food safety issues we all face every day.



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

○ CERTIFICATION

The issuance of a certificate after the successful completion of an audit conducted by an SQF licensed certification body (CB).

○ FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

A pattern of shared values and beliefs throughout an organization that affect mind-set and behavior toward food safety.

○ SQF SYSTEM ELEMENTS

The System Elements define the core elements of the SQF Code which include the key programs for any food safety system and are required to be implemented by all sites seeking SQF certification. It forms the foundation of the site's SQF System. It includes the commitment of site management to maintain a safe food supply and the management processes that must be in place to do so.

○ FOOD SECTOR CATEGORY (FSC)

A classification established to assist in a uniform approach to management of the SQF Program. Often referred to as an FSC, the food sector category identifies the activities and auditor requirements for each site.

○ SQF MODULES

The SQF modules are the required good operational practices and pre-requisite programs for each site. The relevant module depends on the food industry sector, product(s) and process at each site.

PROCESS STEPS

1. Learn about SQFI and the SQF Code
 - a. There are several ways to learn how to implement the SQF Food Safety Code for Foodservice within your site. The following options are available:
 - i. Take the online training course “Implementing SQF Systems” available from the SQFI website (sqfi.com);
 - ii. Complete the foodservice self-study guide available from the SQFI website (sqfi.com);



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

- iii. Review the foodservice Tip Sheets available from the SQFI website (sqfi.com);
 - iv. Train yourself by downloading the SQF Food Safety Code for Foodservice from the SQFI website (sqfi.com) free of charge and apply it to your site.
- b. Training in other food industry disciplines, such as Food Handler, HACCP, Good Operating Practices (GOP) and Internal Auditing may also be required and licensed SQF training centers can provide details of the other training courses they provide.

2. Building Your Food Safety Team

- a. Having the right staff in place is important to maintain and sustain your food safety system. Designate one of your employees as the person in charge of food safety. Regardless of the title, this person is responsible for implementing and maintaining your food safety system. It's important that they have knowledge of food safety and be familiar of the food safety risks to your products and processes. Make sure you review the appropriate elements of the Code describing the requirements for this person.

Who will be your dedicated food safety person? _____

- b. The responsibility of food safety doesn't fall solely on the shoulders of the person in charge of food safety. It's important that the site have a food safety team that includes members from all areas of the organization, including senior management, shift managers, purchasing, sanitation and maintenance. Getting everyone involved is the best way to get buy-in as you build and strengthen your SQF food safety system.

Who will be on your food safety team?

Area	Name	Area	Name
QA and/or food safety manager		Food Safety Person	
Maintenance		Front of house staff	
Purchasing		Training	
Chef/Cooks		Consultant	



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

3. Implement and Document the SQF Code Requirements
 - a. Now it's time to implement the SQF Code requirements. The requirements can be implemented using in-house expertise or in some cases, the site may choose to use a consultant. While it isn't a requirement to use a consultant, SQFI has available a list of registered SQF consultants on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). These consultants meet specific education and experience requirements. Consultants can be searched by region or food sector category.
 - b. The SQF Food Safety Code for Foodservice has one food sector category – 23.
 - c. There are two parts to the Code: Part A and Part B and several appendices that include the Food Sector Categories, Glossary, Logo Rules of Use and multi-site requirements.
 - c. Part A includes information on the certification methodology and Part B includes the technical requirements that must be implemented by the site. Your understanding of Part A will come soon enough, so begin by focusing on Part B.
 - d. Part B is broken up into 2 sections:
 - i. System Elements: Instead of looking at them as individual requirements, look at them as 9 sections and focus on building the food safety program. A System Element is the foundation for a successful food safety program. By focusing on implementing the programs to support the requirements in this section you will begin to form your food safety system and organizational culture.
 1. The System Elements has 9 Sections:
 - 1) Management Commitment
 - 2) Document Control and Records
 - 3) Specifications, Supplier Approval and Recipe Development
 - 4) Food Safety Systems
 - 5) SQF System Verification
 - 6) Product Information, Trace, Serious Incident Management
 - 7) Food Defense and Food Fraud
 - 8) Allergen Management
 - 9) Training



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

ii. The next section is the relevant module; in this case, Module 16, which includes the good operating practices (GOPs).

1. Module 16 consists of 11 sections.

- 1) Site Requirements and Approval
- 2) Site Interior and Kitchen
- 3) Equipment and Utensil Design and Maintenance
- 4) Pest Prevention Program
- 5) Cleaning and Hygiene
- 6) Personnel Hygiene and Sanitary Facilities
- 7) Receiving, Delivery and Transportation
- 8) Storage
- 9) Water, Ice and Air Supply
- 10) Waste Handling and Disposal

e. Training

i. To aid in implementing an SQF System, SQFI has many resources.

1. Training is an excellent resource and depending on your learning preference, budget and time, there are online and face-to-face options.
2. Guidance documents are also available that provide more interpretation explaining the intent to the Code.
3. Tip sheets, such as this one, are also available on specific topics such as internal audits, allergen management, and management commitment.

4. Choose a Certification Body (CB)

- a. The function of the CB is to manage the certification process and issue the certificate.
- b. A list of licensed, approved certification bodies is provided on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). SQF has over thirty CBs that operate globally. Some are bigger, or more well-known, while others are small or may focus on specific commodities. Your CB is your partner in food safety so choose a CB that is the right fit for you.



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

- c. When choosing a CB, first check if you have any retailer or buyer requirements, or regulatory concerns that may restrict which CBs you can use. This would include special addendums, regulatory compliance checks or importer requirements. If there are no requirements, then pick three and interview them.
- d. The obvious questions to ask a CB is how much the audit costs and how long it will take; however, there are other questions you might ask your CB to ensure they are the right fit for your site. Below are a few questions to consider asking.
- e. CB interview questions:
 - i. Auditor competency
 1. How are auditors trained, initially and ongoing?
 2. What is the CBs and auditor's level of experience in auditing my products, process, country, region, etc.?
 3. Does the auditor have my food sector category?
 4. Where is my auditor located (which impacts the cost of the audit)?
 - ii. Complaints and appeals process
 1. Ask questions to get an understanding of what to do if an issue arises during the audit process.
 - iii. Database system
 1. How are non-conformities identified and corrective actions closed out?
 2. What is the average time for receiving the technically reviewed audit report and issuing the certificate based on the last day of the audit, SQFI requires 10 days for the report and 45 days for the certificate decision to be made?
 - iv. Can the CB assist me with my specific requirements?
 1. Are there any special needs you have such as entering data into a buyer database such as ReposiTrak?
 2. Are there any exemptions, restrictions or exclusions to my process?
 3. Are there restrictions on scheduling or audit times?



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

5. Register in the SQF Database

- a. To be considered for SQF certification, sites are required to register in the SQFI assessment database. The database can be accessed from the SQFI website (sqfi.com).
- b. Registration is annual, and there is a fee per site, payable at registration and renewal.
 - i. The fee scale is determined by the size of the site and the gross annual sales revenue. To obtain the registration fee for your site, visit the SQFI website (sqfi.com).

6. Conduct a Pre-assessment

- a. A pre-assessment is a review of the site to determine how the existing food safety system matches up with the applicable SQF Code requirements. This can be done either by an outside consultant, an SQF auditor on behalf of a CB, or the site can do it itself.
- b. If outside help is used, consider asking the CB or consultant for assistance.
- c. If the site decides to conduct its own assessment here are a few tips.
 - i. Define the audit objectives
 1. Some examples of audit objectives include:
 - 1) Make sure we pass the SQF audit
 - 2) Have Management Commitment
 - 3) Meet regulatory requirements
 - 4) Meet customer requirements
 2. Formalize the audit process
 - 1) Define the audit time and schedule and stick to it
 - 2) Use the SQF Code checklist
 - 3) Interview your employees and involve them in the process
 - 4) Conduct opening and closing meetings with your staff
 3. Communicate
 - 1) Write up a formal report



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

- 2) Identify the non-conformities
- 3) Take photos of good practices as well as non-conformities
4. Treat this as its own program
 - 1) Train staff
 - 2) Include as many people as possible
 - 3) Develop procedures
5. Close out the non-conformities
 - 1) Implement corrections and corrective action
 - 2) Identify the root cause to prevent reoccurrence
7. Conduct the SQF Audit with an SQF Licensed Certification Body
 - b. Schedule the audit with your CB. The initial certification will consist of a document review and a site audit.
 - c. Make sure to confirm the scope of certification. Also consider if there are any addendums that need to be included to meet regulatory (e.g., state, local health departments, or other government) or customer requirements.
 - d. The audit duration depends on the size of the site, the number of employees and the type of products being audited. SQFI has developed an audit duration guide that can be found in Part A of the SQF Code. This is guidance that the CB and the site can use to estimate how long the audit will be.
 - e. Once the audit has been scheduled, the CB and the auditor will contact the site with the auditor's name, the audit schedule and confirm the audit location and dates.
 - f. The site audit will typically consist of an opening meeting, and collection of evidence that supports your food safety program. Evidence includes, but is not limited to, review of relevant documents and records, interviews with employees, an evaluation of the site and observation of best practices. A closing meeting will occur which will outline the audit results and identified non-conformities. The auditor will provide the site with a list of the identified non-conformities, a timeframe for closing them out and when the certificate should be issued.



TIP SHEET 1 - FOODSERVICE

RELEVANT RESOURCES

- SQFI website
www.sqfi.com
 - SQF Codes
 - Checklists (SQF and FSMA)
 - Search for an SQF Consultant
 - Search for the foodservice self-study tools and tip sheets
- SQF Conference
www.sqfconference.com
- The National Restaurant Association website
www.restaurant.org
- FDA website
www.fda.org