

Criteria for SQF Consultants

9th Edition

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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 Consultants 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 reregistration requirements for consultants who are providing advisory and/or contract consultancy services using the Food Safety Codes and SQF Quality Code, edition 9, or subsequent versions, and is applicable for all SQF consultants applying for registration and reregistration beginning July 1st 2022.

SQF consultant 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 consultants who have the appropriate competencies to advise against the implementation and management of 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 consultant.

Food Sector Categories (FSCs) are defined in the current version of the SQF Codes.

1.2 Definitions

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

Applicant	An individual applying to become a registered SQF consultant
HACCP Training	<p>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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Consultant	A person who is registered by SQFI to assist in the development, validation, verification, implementation, and maintenance of SQF System on behalf of client site in the food industry categories appropriate to their scope of registration.
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 system being developed and the competencies described in this document may be considered.

1.3 Sponsors

Each applicant for initial registration as an SQF consultant shall be sponsored by two persons 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 SQFI 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 the SQFI Compliance Manager or designee. Decisions made by SQFI relating to any appeal are final.

1.6 Complaints Against Consultants

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

Requirements for SQF Consultants

2.1 Consultant Requirements Overview

All applicants shall

- Successfully complete one of the following SQF training courses and relevant exam:
 - Implementing SQF Systems
 - Auditing the SQF Code Requirements
 - SQF Practitioner Training Program (online)
- Attend a HACCP training course that meets the definition described above (refer 1.2); and
- Demonstrate at least five (5) years' work experience, as defined in 1.2 above, in a food-related technical, professional, or supervisory position involving food safety accountability and the exercise of judgment. At least 2 of the years shall illustrate the understanding and implementation of SQF or another GFSI benchmarked program; and
- Attest to the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (refer attachment 2).

2.2 Food Sector Category (FSC) Designation

2.2.1 FSC Requirements Overview

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

For each FSC 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. Consulting experience may be used to support the FSC however, the information is to be submitted by project and will be converted to full time equivalency (i.e. 160 consulting hours = 1 month work experience).

OR

One hundred-sixty (160) 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 eighty (80) audit hours).

2.2.2 Additional FSC Requirements

Additional qualification is required for the following FSCs:

FSC 00 - Quality

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

- Shall have attended the SQF Quality Auditor training course, or Quality Systems course,

OR

- Shall have attended a quality training course deemed equivalent by SQFI (eg ASQ-CQA, CQE, CQI, CQIA, Six Sigma – all levels, etc);

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 recognized tertiary institution;

OR

- Have a minimum of sixty (60) hours experience auditing against the SQF Quality Code, ISO 9001 or other equivalent quality management standard (may be included in 160 hours required for auditor registration). Quality management system audits shall be referenced on the applicant's audit log;

AND

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

FSC 15 - Canning, UHT, and Aseptic Operations

- An approved scheduled processing course (canning process)

FSC 27 - Manufacture of Food Packaging

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

2.3 SQF Consultant Application Process

2.3.1 The initial application

The SQFI or its designee assesses the competencies of applicants for SQF Consultant 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 consultant registration forms available on the website. The forms must be completed according to the instructions provided in the file. The applicant can password protect the file prior to submission to prevent unintentional changes. All other attachments should be submitted in pdf format.

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

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

- HACCP training certificate of attainment;
- SQF training courses (as specified in 2.1);
- Work experience log (refer to 1.2 for qualifying experience);
- Sponsor verification form;
- Applicable Examination certificate; and
- Records to support FSC qualification (refer to 2.2.2)

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

In considering registration level and 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 the SQFI or its designee is unable to obtain satisfactory verification of information and experience from competent references, an interview may be required.

The 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 and complaints, auditing logs and re-registration documents.

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

2.3.2 Certificate of Registration and Identification Card

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

2.3.3 Publication of Registration

A register of SQF consultants is displayed on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

2.4 Advancement to Another Category

Advancement to another FSC 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:

- i. Supporting documentation demonstrating qualifications and audit experience as outlined in 2.2 in the relevant food sector; and
- ii. The appropriate advancement fee as listed on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com).

2.5 Requirements for Annual Consultant Re-registration

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

- Evidence of consultancy projects, 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);
- Reaffirm the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (2.5.4)

2.5.1 Consultancy Projects

You are required to provide evidence of continuing involvement in the development, changes and implementation of SQF systems. Each registered SQF consultant must maintain a project log and submit it as supporting documentation for re-registration. A minimum of two (2) SQF projects are required per year. A SQF system project is defined as a minimum of 16 hours of direct consultancy services.

Consultants must conduct a minimum of one (1) consultancy project or demonstrate competence through education, training, auditing, etc. in each of their designated FSCs including Quality (FSC 00) within five (5) years. Consultants that do not conduct projects within their designated FSC within five (5) years, will be de-registered from the FSC(s) in which they do not have the minimum required consultancy experience. The project can be in any GFSI standard and should be recorded in the consultant registration form identified as "Last project by FSC."

A consultant 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 consultants 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 consultant 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 Consultants 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.

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 consultants shall participate in one (1) SQF Food Safety Professional Update course delivered by SQFI within their registration year. This update may be delivered via webinar for general participation or delivered directly to certification bodies upon request.

2.5.4 Reaffirmation of the SQFI Code of Conduct

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

Attachment 1: Key Competencies for SQF Food Safety Consultants

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 project management and effective communication techniques;
- The ability to demonstrate the personal attributes and professional integrity necessary for the effective management of consultancy projects;
- Knowledge and experience of food safety 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 implementation of food safety principles.

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;
- Consultants applying for FSC27 shall demonstrate the knowledge of packaging materials manufacture;
- Consultants applying for FSC 15 shall demonstrate competency in thermal-processing through an industry recognized qualification;
- Experience and a sound technical knowledge of the product and the process;
- Knowledge of relevant pre-requisite programs, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, 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 a sound technical knowledge of process control and other quality tools used to measure and improve process capability;
- Knowledge of relevant pre-requisite programs, industry codes of practice, legal requirements, and industry guidelines and standards.

Attachment 2: SQF Professional Code of Conduct

All registered SQF consultants 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 withdrawal of their registration. The SQFI 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 and 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 a consultant and maintain the prestige of my profession.
5. I will not undertake any SQF consultancy projects that I am not competent to perform.
6. I will not discuss or disclose any information relating to an SQF consultancy project 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, interest 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.