



Criteria for SQF Auditors & Technical Reviewers

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© 2023 Safe Quality Food Institute

2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 800
Arlington, VA 22202 USA
202-220-0635
www.sqfi.com

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For permission contact FMI at www.fmi.org, or 2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 800, Arlington, VA, 22202, USA.

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 reregistration requirements for auditors auditing the SQF Food Safety Codes and SQF Quality Code, edition 9, or subsequent versions, and is applicable for all SQF auditors applying for registration and reregistration beginning June 1st 2021.

This document also describes the qualifications, registration and reregistration 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 Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) requirements document 2020.1.

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.

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 auditor or SQF technical reviewer |
| 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 Auditor | A person registered by the SQFI to audit a site’s SQF Food Safety and/or Quality System. This person shall meet the requirements of this criteria 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 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 SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (refer attachment 3) 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 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

All applicants shall:

- Successfully complete the “Auditing SQF Systems” training course (4 days).
OR
- Successfully complete a registered “Management System Lead Auditor” training course at forty (40) hours duration AND the “Auditing SQF Systems” training course (3 days) taken 2012 or later.
OR
 - Successfully complete a registered “Management System Lead Auditor” training course of forty (40) hours duration AND the “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training (certificate date prior to April 28, 2022).OR
- Successfully complete a registered “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.
- Have attained a university degree in a discipline related to the food sector category(ies) (FSCs) being applied for (e.g., food science, food technology, dairy technology); and
- Complete at least one hundred-sixty (160) 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 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; and
- Be employed or contracted with at least one designated SQF licensed Certification Body; 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 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-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 Food Sector Category Requirements

Additional qualification is 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 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 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 standard (may be included in 160 hours required for auditor registration). Quality management system audits shall be referenced on the applicant's audit log;

Requirements for SQF Auditors

AND

- Shall complete the “Auditing SQF Quality Systems” examination.

FSC 15 - Canning, UHT, and Aseptic Operations

- A scheduled processing course (canning process) recognized by universities or other educational institutions 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 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 Auditor Application Process

2.3.1 The initial application

The 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 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.

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

- HACCP training certificate of attainment;
- Auditor training courses (as specified in 1.2);
- Work experience log (refer to 1.2 for qualifying experience);
- Audit log (see below for qualifying audits);
- University Degree (refer to 1.2 for qualifying degree);
- Sponsor verification form (one signature must be from a licensed SQFI certification body and one signature from a food industry professional with knowledge of the applicants 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 reference 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 in order 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.

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 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:

- 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 Auditor 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 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 SQFI 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 a minimum of five (5) complete SQF System audits. All audits shall be certification, re-certification or surveillance audits.

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. Auditors that do not conduct audits within their designated food sector category (ies) within five (5) years, will be de-registered from the FSC(s) in which they do not have the minimum required auditing experience. 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. One (1) of the five (5) SQF system audits required for re-registration 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

Requirements for SQF Auditors

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.

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 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 Declaration of Sponsor Certification Body

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

2.5.5 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.

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 the “SQF Auditing SQF Systems” training course (4 days);

OR

- Successfully complete a registered “Management System Lead Auditor” training course of forty (40) hours duration AND the “Auditing SQF Systems” course (3 days);

OR

- Successfully complete a registered “Management Systems Lead Auditor” training course of forty (40) hour duration AND the “Auditing the SQF Code Requirements” virtual training course; 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
- Complete at least eighty (80) 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’ work experience in food safety and/or quality management (refer to 1.2); and
- Be employed or contracted with at least one designated licensed SQF Certification Body; and
- Attest to the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (refer attachment 2); and
- Have attained a university degree in food science, food technology or related discipline.

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 and Identification Card

Each successful applicant will receive a certificate 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).

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 (refer 2.5.3) within the candidate's registration year;
- Declaration of one sponsor from a licensed SQF certification body (refer 2.5.4); and
- Reaffirm the SQFI Professional Code of Conduct (refer 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 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 auditors and technical reviewers 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 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, 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.