

Food Safety Auditing 101

Ensuring the safety of the food supply is a shared responsibility among many different points in the global supply chain. The Food Safety Modernization Act was enacted to transform the nation's food safety system by shifting the focus from responding to foodborne illness to preventing it. Audits of food safety systems within registered food manufacturing facilities are used to determine if the right systems for preventive controls, monitoring and verification are in place and are being followed. These audits are commonly needed on annual basis by your customers to meet their external Supplier Control requirements.

Types of Audits:

First-Party internal audits are conducted routinely by internal, trained employees to evaluate existing food safety systems, identify points for improvement and determine readiness for an external audit. Consider advanced trainings for HACCP & PCQI certification.

Second-Party audits are conducted when an organization with a pre-existing relationship, such as a customer performs an audit of a supplier to verify the effectiveness of the supplier's food safety and quality management systems. These results help determine if new or continued use of these suppliers is acceptable practice. Visit <https://www.usdairy.com/about-us/innovation-center/food-safety/supply-chain> for Supplier Controls Guidance Document, Risk Assessment Calculator and Templates.

A Third-Party audit is when an external organization (third-party) undertakes an audit of an organization, where the external organization does not have a direct relationship to the Auditee organization (the organization being audited). These audits can be conducted by independent auditors or food auditing firms to perform a complete assessment of your food safety management system and operation status. This type of audit is commonly conducted to prepare for a certification or satisfy new food safety requirements. See Retail Level 1 audit for types of information commonly requested at <https://guides.cheesesociety.org/safecheesemakinghub/retailers>.

Accredited Third-Party Certification means that an independent organization has reviewed the manufacturing process of a product and has independently determined that the final product complies with specific standards for safety, quality, or performance. One such standard that requires a Third-Party Certification meet a number of customer requirements is GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative) certification. GFSI audits are considered pass/fail with any critical food safety findings causing a failure which then requires a follow up visit once the nonconformance has been corrected.

GFSI Certification:

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is an organization whose purpose is to enforce food safety through internationally-recognized benchmarked standards. Becoming GFSI certified helps food manufacturers and processors stay competitive, produce safer products, and improve performance in a number of key areas. There are a number of GFSI Audit Schemes such as SQF, BRC, or FSSC 22000 that can be utilized to meet customer certification requirements. Below are a couple of links that can help you determine which option is best for your needs when selecting an Audit Scheme and a Certification Body.

How to Acquire GFSI Certification:

Determine which certification is best for the organization. You can find the best programs for a company based upon the primary activities it conducts. (*This first step is critical and requires some research. You may want to utilize external resources such as a consulting firm or industry partners for additional guidance.*)

Contact a certification company.

Align your processes with the certification program.

Request an audit. (*Depending upon organization comfort with their established programs you may opt to have a third party pre-audit conducted for guidance prior to the certification session.*)

Maintain compliance.

Link to Potential Certification Schemes

<https://safetychain.com/blog/gfsi-schemes>

Link to Potential Certification Bodies

<https://www.sqfi.com/directories/certification-body-directory/>

Still Have Questions? Contact dairyfoodsafetycoach@cornell.edu or call 315-787-2600.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy® (IC), formed in 2008, to provide a forum for the dairy industry to work together pre-competitively. The IC Food Safety Team is comprised of over 100 industry experts from 50 organizations including the American Cheese Society, helping to keep dairy products safe by providing resources and training in all facets of dairy manufacturing. Learn more at: www.usdairy.com/foodsafety. If you have specific questions, please email us at: innovationcenter@usdairy.com.