

Introduction

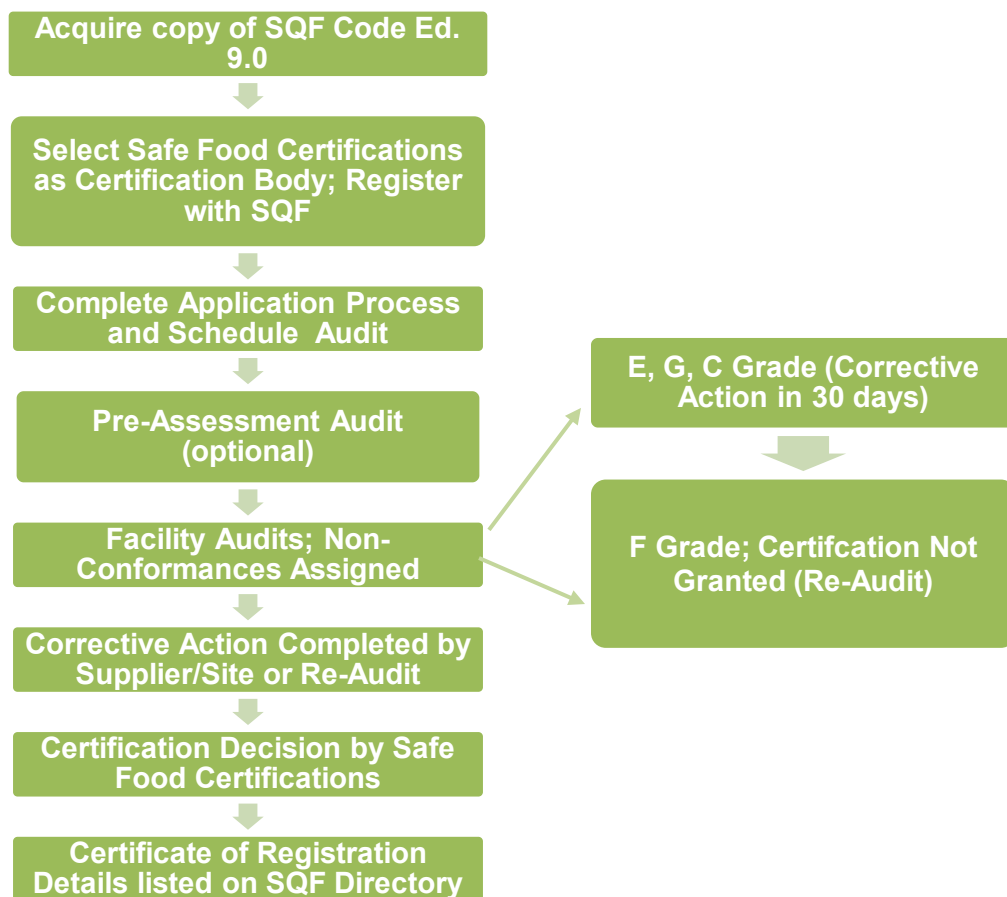
Safe Food Certifications, LLC provides certification services to Suppliers/Sites in accordance with the requirements of the SQF Code.

Safe Food Certifications fully complies with ISO/ IEC 17065 requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services.

Safe Food Certifications is committed to maintaining the following throughout the application, audit, and certification process:

- Impartiality
- Independence
- Confidentiality
- Objectivity

Overview of SQF Certification Process





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SQF Certification Guide- Food Safety Certification and SQF Quality Code Certification

Application Process

- ✓ Visit SQFI's website to learn about steps towards SQF certification and download SQF Code edition latest version and related supplier guidance documents.
 - <http://www.sqfi.com/suppliers/certification-steps/>
- ✓ Register with SQF and select Safe Food Certifications, LLC as your Certification Body.
- ✓ Contact Safe Food Certifications for the Company Profile Application, complete, and return.
- ✓ Upon application review, Safe Food Certifications shall:
 - confirm scope of certification.
 - determine audit category and audit duration.
 - assign a qualified auditor based on risk and audit category.
 - suggest tentative dates for audit based on scope and recertification timeframes where applicable.
 - provide quote for certification services using the SQF Facility Audit Duration Table

- ✓ Once the Supplier/Site accepts the quote for services and confirms date of audit, Safe Food Certifications shall inform the Supplier/Site of the assigned auditor and provide the Certification Service Agreement for approval by Supplier/Site.

Special Note: Suppliers/Sites are advised to read scope defined in agreement carefully and ensure accuracy as scope cannot be altered once the on-site audit begins.

- ✓ Suppliers/Sites may object to the assigned auditor in writing within 7 calendar days from date Agreement is provided to Supplier/Site only where a conflict of interest exists and request assignment of an alternate auditor. Objections to an auditor after 7 days of providing Agreement cannot be honored. Conflict of interest is defined as the following:
 - Auditor provided consulting for site within previous two years.
 - Auditor has a financial interest in site that would bias the auditor's ability for objective evaluation.
 - Auditor has a personal relationship with site personnel that would bias the auditor's ability for objective evaluation.

Conflict of interest must be disclosed when objecting to assigned auditor.

Audit Types (Announced and Unannounced)



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Announced Audit

It is conducted at a time agreed between the supplier and the certification body; audits in this category include initial and recertification audits.

Unannounced Recertification Audit

Within three (3) certification cycles, Safe Food Certifications will conduct one (1) unannounced re-certification audit of the supplier. The unannounced audit shall occur in the supplier's facility within the sixty (60) day re-certification window (i.e., the anniversary date of the initial certification audit \pm thirty (30) days). A defined black-out period will be established between the supplier and Safe Food Certifications.

The unannounced audit requirement went into effect from July 2014 with the introduction of SQF Code 7.2

Initial Certification Audit

The scope of the audit- products produced and manufacturing processes – shall be agreed between the supplier and Safe Food Certifications in advance of the audit to ensure the allocation of an auditor with the correct food sector category. The audit scope and an exclusions shall be clearly defined both on the audit report and any certificate issued (please refer to sections **Exclusion from Scope or Reduction of Scope** and **Extension of Scope** at the end of this document for additional clarification).

The facility audit is an assessment of the site's food safety code for food manufacturing, Edition 9.0 and SQF Quality Code Edition 9.0; both are audited separately as noted below.

New in Ed 9.0. The Quality Code audit can be done with SQF and with other GFSI Benchmarked Certification Programs such as BRCGS, FSSC 22000, etc.

The sites who wish to obtain Quality Certification, the certification audit can be:

- Either an extension of an existing certification or re-certification audit to the SQF Food Safety Code. In this instance, certification to the SQF Quality Code shall only be granted upon successful certification or recertification to the SQF Food Safety Code; or done with other GFSI Benchmarked Certification Programs such as BRCGS, FSSC 22000, etc.

- A standalone audit conducted at any time during the currency of the site's certification to the SQF Food Safety Code; and site certificated to other GFSI Benchmarked Certification Programs such as BRCGS, FSSC 22000, etc.



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- There is no score, or rating issued for the SQF Quality System audit. The score and ratings that apply to SQF Food Safety Certification audit, even if the quality system audit is conducted as an extension of the food safety audit.
- The quality recertification audit shall be conducted with thirty (30) calendar days either side of the anniversary of the last day of the initial quality certification audit or (when conducted with other certification programs) within the audit recertification window of other GFSI Benchmarked Certification Programs such as BRCGS, FSSC 22000, etc.
- When a site changes the scope of its food safety certification, the scope of its quality certification also changes.
- The Quality surveillance audit is conducted when the site has two (2) or more major deviations and/or ten (10) or more minor deviations raised at a certification or recertification audit. All deviations must be closed out with 30 days to achieve or maintain quality certification.
- In Quality, the hazards are noted as "threats" and violation as "deviation".
- Only minor and major quality deviations are raised against SQF Quality Code. No critical deviations are raised at and SQF Quality Code audit

NOTE: Refer to SQF Quality Code, Edition 9.0 for additional details and clarification

Compliance to the requirements of the standard is determined through the following activities. Objective evidence (i.e., procedures, records, interview responses, direct observations, etc.) resulting from activities described below shall be collected by the auditor for the purpose of documenting compliance or non-compliance to Code requirements in the audit report.

- opening meeting with key personnel
- document and records review
- site tour
- interviews with various staff at all levels in the organization
- direct observation of processes
- verification of the effectiveness of tests and records



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 An audit plan is provided to the Supplier/Site prior to the start of the certification audit.

Non-Conformances

Non-conformances against standard requirements are identified as minor, major, and critical. Specifics regarding each category of non-conformity and are detailed in SQF Code edition latest version.

Additionally, grade criteria resulting from identified non-conformances during the on-site audit and corresponding action regarding recertification are also detailed in SQF Code edition 9.0 (or latest version).

A list of agreed to non-conformances shall be provided during the closing meeting.

Summary of Grading Criteria and Recertification Requirements

Score	Rating	Certification*	Audit Frequency
96-100	E- Excellent	Certificate issued	12 monthly recertification audit
86-95	G- Good	Certificate issued	12 monthly recertification audit
70-85	C- Complies	Certificate Issued	6 monthly surveillance audit
0-69	F- Fails to comply	No Certificate Issued	Considered to have failed the SQF audit

Audit score and Rating

The calculation uses the following factors or point deductions:

- 1 Minor non-conformity – minor variation
- 10 Major non-conformity – does not meet the criteria.
- 50 Critical non-conformity – does not meet the criteria.

Corrective Action

Site completes non-conformity summary sheet provided by auditor with root cause and corrective actions and returns (via e-mail) completed non-conformity summary sheet along with corrective actions for each non-conformity and supporting documents to auditor or Certification Body within thirty (30) calendar days from the last day of audit.



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For both minor and major non-conformances assigned, the Supplier/site has thirty (30) calendar days from the last day of the audit to provide root cause, corrective action along with objective evidence of corrective action to auditor or certification body.

When a critical non-conformance is assigned or raised at an SQF Food Safety Code certification audit, the audit is treated as a failure, and site would need to start with surveillance audit.

Corrective action responses must fully correct the non-conformance to the requirement and evidence of the correction must be provided. Evidence may include updated procedures, records, work orders, purchase orders, photos, or other physical evidence demonstrating implementation of the correction. The auditor and certification body shall verify all corrective actions before closing out the non-conformance.

Supplier/site may request to Safe Food Certifications an extension for providing corrective actions. Requests for extension shall be submitted in writing to the Executive Director of Certification body. Safe Food Certifications' Executive Director may approve or deny request for extension.

Where satisfactory evidence is not provided and extension is not granted, Supplier/Site must contract for a subsequent full audit.

Re-certification Audit

Re-certification audits shall be conducted at twelve-month intervals for E and G ratings. Where a C rating is received, the Supplier/Site shall be required to undergo a six-month surveillance audit.

Re-certification audits are full audits performed according to SQF requirements for application, audit duration, evaluation, review, and certification.

Suppliers/Sites are responsible for re-registering with SQFI annually for continued certification and display of certificate of registration details on SQFI's website.

Suppliers/Sites are responsible for contacting Safe Food Certifications 90 days prior to the start of the re-audit period regarding scheduling the re-certification audit.

Failure of the Supplier/Site to allow re-certification or surveillance audits to be conducted at required frequencies may result in suspension or withdrawal of certification.

Surveillance Audit

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The surveillance audit is conducted when the supplier attains a "C - complies" rating at a certification audit or re-certification audit. The surveillance audit shall be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days either side of the six (6) month anniversary of the last day of the previous certification or re-certification audit. A new score and rating is issued at the surveillance audit, however the re-certification audit date is not affected.

Surveillance audits also refer to announced or unannounced visits for already certificates sites initiated by Safe Food Certifications or SQFI, which may be conducted as a full or partial audit to validate continued certification. Safe Food Certifications or SQFI shall notify Suppliers/Sites directly where surveillance audits are required.

NOTE: Refer to SQF Quality Code audits noted above or Refer to SQF Quality Code, Edition 9.0 for additional details and clarification for surveillance audit and grading.

Certification Decision

The SQF certification process requires certification bodies to assess conformity to the SQF standard. Safe Food Certifications' assigned technical reviewer- Executive Director, Technical Director or a designate - to conduct technical review of the report and initial recommendation for certification. Technical reviewers shall perform an independent, objective, and comprehensive review of the audit report, all audit findings, and corrective actions.

Technical reviewers shall independently and impartially make the Certification Decision to grant or deny certification within 45 calendar days of the last day of audit.

Certificate and Logo Use

Safe Food Certifications shall complete the audit review of the complete report, i.e., upon the corrective actions have been reviewed and approved by the auditor, and the root cause and corrective action have been documented in the word format checklist. Safe Food Certifications may grant or deny certification within 45 days of the last day of audit and generate the Certificate of Registration if the certification is granted. Basic information pertaining to certification is made available for public display. The Supplier/Site may elect to allow customers visibility to specific details of certification.

Upon certification, Suppliers/Sites receive:

- A final audit report.
- A SQF Certificate of Registration and guidance document regarding the Terms of Certification for use of the SQF Logo and or SQF Quality Shield.
- Information on Safe Food Certifications' Complaints and Appeals process

Exclusion from Scope or Reduction of Scope

The entire site, including all premises, support buildings, silos, tanks, loading and unloading bays and external grounds must be included in the scope of certification. If the supplier elects to exempt processes, products, or areas of the site from the scope of certification, the request must be submitted to Safe Food Certifications in writing prior to the audit and shall be listed in the facility description in the SQF assessment database. However, all parts of the premises and process that are involved with the production, processing and storage of product included in the scope cannot be exempted. Exempted products shall not be listed on the certificate and must not be promoted as being covered by the certification. Instances where promotion of exempted products or processes are identified and substantiated (either by regular audit or by other means) shall result in immediate withdrawal of the SQF certification.

All products produced, stored or processed on the site shall be included on the supplier certificate, unless exempted by the supplier.

Extension of Scope (Changing the Scope of Certification) during certification scheduling process or after the audit is completed.

The scope of certification, including site, food sector categories and products must be clearly identified and agreed upon between the supplier and Safe Food Certifications prior to the initial certification audit and included in the scope of the initial certification audit and all subsequent audits.

When activities are carried out in different premises but are overseen by the same senior, operational, and technical management, and are covered by the one SQF System, the site can be expanded to include those premises (e.g., off-site product warehouse). All premises must be listed in the facility description in the SQF assessment database.

When a supplier desires to add food sector categories or products to their scope of certification, the supplier shall request the increased scope of certification in writing to Safe Food Certifications during the scheduling process. Safe Food Certifications then will assign auditor with required FSCs (food sector categories) and determine whether or not an audit of the additional processes or products is required. This will depend on the product risk, similarities to the existing processes and products, and proximity to the next scheduled audit date. The following shall apply if supplier seeks to change the scope of certifications (For example, add/delete FSCs, add/delete product or processes, etc.) after the certification audit has been completed.

- Based on this determination, the certification body (Safe Food Certifications in this case) shall either issue a new certificate or advise the supplier in writing why the new certificate cannot be issued or advise the supplier in writing if a site visit / audit required.



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- When a new certificate is issued, Safe Food Certifications shall make the appropriate changes to the supplier record on the SQFI assessment database.

Extension of Scope (Changing the Scope of Certification audit) prior to the audit on site

When a supplier elects to expand a scope of certification onsite prior to the beginning of an audit, including but not limited to, adding packaging material, add process step, etc. without requiring to adding an additional food sector category or HACCP plan, must be discussed with the auditor prior to the audit begins. Auditor then shall contact (if warranted) Safe Food Certifications to approve such changes or shall approve such changes and document on the audit plan. The auditor and a representative of the auditee shall sign the change made on the audit plan with the same date prior to beginning the audit or later (if needed) as the change was discussed and approved.

References:

1. Criteria for SQF Certification Bodies, Edition 9 (March 2021)
2. Criteria for SQF Food Safety Auditors and Technical Reviewers, Edition 9.2 (March 2021)
3. SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacturing Edition 9.0 (2021)
4. SQF Quality Code, Edition 9.0 Effective from May 24, 2021