

# The SQF Program A Basic Guide



.....

Globally Trusted  
Food Safety and  
Quality Certification

.....





The SQF (Safe Quality Food) Program is a leading, global food safety and quality certification program and management system, designed to meet the needs of buyers and suppliers worldwide. The Program provides independent certification that a supplier's food safety and quality management system complies with international and domestic food safety regulations. This enables suppliers to assure their customers that food has been produced, processed, prepared and handled according to the highest possible standards, at all levels of the supply chain.



SQF is designed as a food safety program, but it also covers product quality, a feature that is unique to a certification program of this type. Assuring consistent quality and meeting buyer specifications are important aspects of the buyer-supplier relationship.

Launched in 1994, the SQF Program is administered by the SQF Institute (SQFI), a division of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI). SQF certifications have been issued to companies operating in Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and North and South America.

SQF certification is supported by an increasing number of U.S. and international retailers and foodservice providers who express a preference for suppliers who implement HACCP-based (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) food safety and quality management systems. In addition, the SQF Program is part of a landmark agreement among seven global retailers on mutual acceptance of global food safety systems.

SQF is the only certification system recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) that links primary production certification to food manufacturing, distribution and agent/broker management certification.



*Investing in food safety and quality assurance is vital for any supplier or buyer striving to remain competitive in today's global marketplace, where consumers want assurances that the food they buy is safe, no matter where it was grown, raised or processed.*

### Featured Program Components

- **The SQF 1000 Code** for primary production.
- **The SQF 2000 Code** for food manufacturing and distribution.
- **Certification** at three levels and on an annual basis.
- **Guidance documents and training programs** to assist with SQF system implementation.
- **Third-party audit** to verify the supplier is adhering to SQF's rigorous requirements.
- **Innovative optional modules** for responsible environmental, social and food defense practices.



### A Leading Choice of Buyers/Suppliers

**Compliance.** SQF certification meets government food safety and traceability requirements and enables suppliers and buyers to demonstrate due diligence in food safety matters.

**Confidence.** SQF certification protects brands, businesses and, ultimately, the consumer.

**Consistency.** SQF allows the implementation of one program and one standard to meet global market requirements.

**Convenience.** SQF provides controlled database access to supplier certification status and audit results.

**Credibility.** SQF is recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and an increasing number of key buyers worldwide.

**Enhanced Safeguards.** SQF focuses on risk assessment and prevention of food safety incidents and recalls.

**Global Reach.** SQF is an internationally recognized certification program.

**Time and Cost Efficiencies.** SQF reduces the inconsistencies and cost of multiple audits.

**Trust.** SQF auditors undergo a rigorous registration process to ensure competence and expertise.

## SQF Codes 1000 and 2000

The SQF Program provides two standards based on the type of food supplier: The SQF 1000 Code for primary producers and the SQF 2000 Code for the manufacturing and distribution sectors. Both are based on the HACCP method and principles.

The SQF Codes are divided into three certification levels. These levels provide suppliers with an opportunity for continuous improvement and make SQF certification obtainable for even the smallest companies. Suppliers are issued with an SQF certificate indicating the level of certification achieved.

### Levels of Certification

- **Level 1: Food Safety Fundamentals**

Suppliers must establish prerequisite programs incorporating fundamental food safety controls essential to providing a sound foundation for the production and manufacture of safe food. This level is appropriate for low risk products.

- **Level 2: Certified HACCP Food Safety Plans**

In addition to meeting Level 1 requirements, suppliers must complete and document a food safety risk assessment of the product and process using the HACCP method, and an action plan to eliminate, prevent or reduce food safety hazards. This is the minimum level for suppliers of high risk products.

- **Level 3: Comprehensive Quality Management Systems Development**

Suppliers are required to complete and document a food quality assessment of the product and its associated process to identify the controls needed to ensure a consistent level of quality. Level 1 and Level 2 certification are prerequisites to gaining a Level 3 SQF certificate. After achieving Level 3, an SQF-certified supplier is authorized to use the SQF 1000 or 2000 certification trademark (according to the type of certification achieved) to indicate their status as an SQF quality certified supplier.

At all levels, suppliers are required to meet buyer product specifications and the regulatory requirements of the country in which they operate and the countries to which they export products.



# SQF Innovation

## Enhanced Features

Additional innovative features support the program.

- **SQF Certification and Audit Data Management System**

This advanced data collection system allows SQF field auditors to enter audit results onsite. Suppliers can access the results via an online database and grant permission to retail and food service customers to review the audit results and certification status. This unique system provides buyers with a powerful resource tool that provides an added degree of assurance while enhancing market access for suppliers.

- **Voluntary Modules**

The voluntary modules — **Responsible Environmental Practice** and **Responsible Social Practice** — are provided as options for SQF 1000 and SQF 2000 suppliers whose markets require additional assurances of responsible environmental and social practice. A Food Defense module is also available to help SQF 2000 suppliers achieve higher levels of food supply integrity.

- **E-Learning Program**


The SQF Program's online learning tool is a cost-effective alternative to the two-day classroom format for the "Implementing SQF Systems" course. It enables suppliers to train and involve more staff and allows SQF training to be more accessible to suppliers in remote locations.



*It is increasingly difficult to track each ingredient from farm to table as more of today's food supply is sourced from around the globe. Simply tightening regulations and increasing government inspections is not enough to ensure the safety of our food supply. The solution lies in prevention. All suppliers must accept responsibility for safe food production and invest in programs designed to prevent food safety incidents.*

## How to Implement the SQF Program

### Ten Easy Steps

- 
- 1 The Buyer requests the desired level of certification to be achieved by the supplier.
  - 2 The Supplier designates a staff member as its SQF Practitioner to lead development of its SQF System, or hires an external SQF Consultant registered by The SQF Institute.
  - 3 The SQF Practitioner completes an Implementing SQF Systems training course either at a licensed SQF Training Center or via online courses.
  - 4 The SQF Practitioner conducts a gap analysis (self-assessment) of the supplier's current system.
  - 5 The Supplier amends their current system to meet the requirements of the SQF Code and implements any changes.
  - 6 The Supplier selects an SQF licensed Certification Body to perform a Certification Audit.
  - 7 A Certification Audit is conducted, consisting of a document review and on-site audit.
  - 8 An Auditor recommends certification if no critical or major non-conformities are found and the audit result indicates an acceptable rating.
  - 9 The Certification Body Review Council makes the final decision and the SQF Certificate and audit report are issued. The SQF Certificate is valid for 12 months.
  - 10 Recertification audits are conducted annually within 30 days of the certification anniversary date . Additional surveillance audits are also conducted, the frequency of which depends on the level of risk and the supplier's audit results.

For suppliers who already have adequate food safety procedures and systems in place, the move to SQF certification will be relatively simple. If a supplier's food safety and quality management systems are not well-documented or developed, system upgrades will be necessary to meet the SQF requirements. The SQF Program provides a variety of resources to help suppliers obtain expertise to implement their own SQF system.

### Program Costs

Many suppliers may need only to have their current system updated and validated and verified by an SQF Practitioner, since most food manufacturers already undergo some type of food safety auditing either internally or by third parties.

The cost for implementing and maintaining an SQF system varies by:

- Size of the operation
- Low or high risk product
- Complexity of the process
- Level of certification requested
- Use of external consultants and trainers
- Type of products grown, produced or manufactured



### For More Information

Visit [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com)

Email questions to [info@sqfi.com](mailto:info@sqfi.com) or call +1.202.220.0635

*Retailers prefer suppliers who have implemented food safety and quality management certification that focuses on prevention and risk analysis, and provides a higher degree of assurance that a supplier will maintain their commitment to food safety and quality every day.*



**Safe Quality Food Institute**

*A Division of the Food Marketing Institute*

2345 Crystal Drive  
Suite 800  
Arlington, VA 22202

TEL: +1.202.220.0635  
FAX: +1.202.220.0894

[www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com)

