



# SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment

## Program Requirements



## INTRODUCTION

### **A message from SQFI**

Congratulations! By using the SQF Program you are joining many thousands of sites globally that create, build, and assess their food safety program to meet the food safety standards set by regulators and buyers' requirements. SQFI can help you identify and address the food safety risks to your operation and build a culture of food safety in your organization. For more information, visit us at [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com).

### **What is SQF?**

The Safe Quality Food (SQF) program is recognized by retailers, foodservice providers, and buyers around the world as a rigorous, credible food safety management system. The program follows the requirements outlined by internationally recognized organizations such as the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI). SQFI uses stakeholder feedback to develop programs that help protect your brand. SQFI has a food safety solution for all industries and commodities, no matter where you are on your food safety journey. As a division of the Food Industry Association (FMI), the SQF program is the preferred program among retailers.

### **How to use the SQF Fundamentals Verification Program**

Welcome to the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment program, following Edition 1.1 of SQF Fundamentals for Manufacturing or Primary Plant Production. The SQF Fundamentals Code provides the essential requirements for building a robust food safety management system. The SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment process empowers you to acquire the food safety knowledge and competency required to establish appropriate food safety practices in the operation of your very small business.

This program is not recognized or benchmarked by GFSI and is not a certification. Food businesses that require an SQF Food Safety GFSI-benchmarked certification should visit the SQF website to get started. For more information on the GFSI and GFSI Global Markets toolkit, please visit the GFSI webpage at [www.mygfsi.com](http://www.mygfsi.com). To know if your business is eligible for the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment, please see Annex 2 of this document.

The Fundamentals Program is in two separate codes: Basic and Intermediate. Both programs include essential food safety requirements; however, Basic SQF Fundamentals focuses on developing good implementation tools for food safety, and Intermediate SQF Fundamentals builds on the Basic code, includes implementation tools, and adds more requirements regarding documentation.

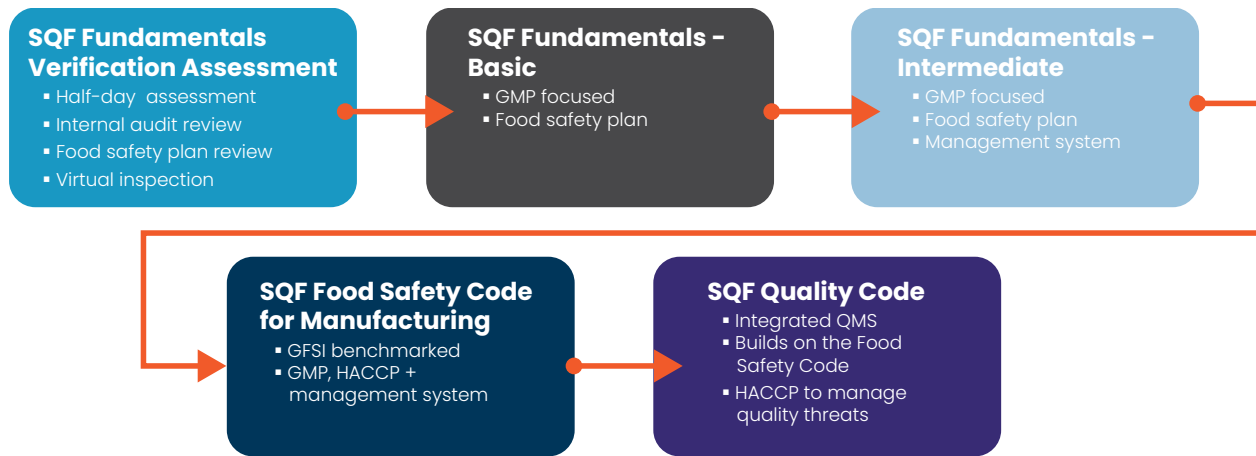
### **Building continuous improvement**

Food safety is a continuous improvement journey, and your retailer or buyer may want you to progress to a certification once you've completed the Verification Assessment and have grown your business. The SQF Codes were built to assist you as you improve your food safety management system. The SQF Basic and Intermediate Fundamental Codes align with the SQF Food Safety Code requirements, facilitating the process of advancing to the GFSI-recognized SQF certification in the future.

### **What is my pathway to certification?**

If you choose to pursue certification, SQFI has a series of programs to help you achieve the level of food safety assurance that you need. Each program builds on the previous one to provide a continuous improvement certification pathway. You can join the pathway at a level that best suits your business needs and those of your market. The choice is yours.

## INTRODUCTION



The table below can guide you on where you should begin your road to SQF certification.

IF	THEN
You are a <b>very small enterprise</b> and your customer will accept a third-party remotely conducted food safety assessment (not an audit or certification). See Annex 2 for details on requirements for FVA	Use the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment ½-day remote assessment (Declaration Letter Provided)
You need a program that is approved for small, medium sites and aligned with GFSI Global Markets Toolkit	Use one of the following SQF Fundamentals Certification Programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ SQF Fundamentals for Manufacturing, Basic</li> <li>▪ SQF Fundamentals for Manufacturing, Intermediate</li> </ul>
You need a certification program that is GFSI benchmarked	Use one of the following SQF Food Safety Codes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary Production</li> <li>▪ Manufacturing</li> <li>▪ Storage and Distribution</li> <li>▪ Manufacture of Food Packaging</li> </ul>
You need a Quality certification along with your GFSI-benchmarked certification program	Use one of the SQF Food Safety Codes AND the SQF Quality Code
You don't have a buyer requirement but want a program to measure your food safety program that is risk based and focused on GMPs and food safety hazard management	SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment (no letter) Use the SQF Fundamentals Program, Basic certification
If you don't have a buyer requirement but want a certification program that measures your food safety program based on CODEX HACCP principles	Use the SQF Fundamentals Program, Intermediate certification
If you don't have a buyer requirement but want a third-party certification program that is a full food safety management system framework following CODEX HACCP	Use one of the SQF Food Safety Codes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary Production</li> <li>▪ Manufacturing</li> <li>▪ Storage and Distribution</li> <li>▪ Manufacture of Food Packaging</li> </ul>

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# Part

## Preparing for Your Assessment

## 1.1 Learn about the SQF Basic and Intermediate Fundamentals

There are several ways to learn how to implement the SQF Fundamentals Codes within your site. The following options are available:

- Take the Implementing the SQF Fundamentals Code for Manufacturing online training course available from the Alchemy Academy.
- Attend a training course. The Implementing the SQF Fundamentals Code training course (refer Part A, 1.6) is available through a licensed SQF training center (recommended).
- Train yourself by downloading the SQF Codes from the SQFI website (sqfi.com) free of charge and read how to apply it to your industry sector.

## 1.2 Select the Relevant SQF Food Sector Categories

SQFI recognizes that food safety practices differ depending on the food safety risk to the product and the process and has designed the SQF Codes to meet the individual requirements of each industry sector.

The SQF food sector categories and applicable modules are listed in full in Appendix 1. It includes a more detailed description with examples, level of risk, and the relationship with industry scopes. A summary of relevant FSCs for food production and manufacturing is provided below.

SQF Basic and Intermediate Fundamentals Verification Assessment Remote food safety assessment for very small enterprises		
FSC	Category	Applicable GMP Modules
2	Indoor Growing and Harvesting of Fresh Produce and Sprouted Seed Crops	Module 18: GAP for Indoor Farming of Plant Products
3	Growing and Production of Fresh Produce and Nuts	Module 7: GAP for Farming of Plant Products (fruit and vegetables)
4	Fresh Produce, Grain, and Nut Packhouse Operations	Module 10: GMP for Pre-processing of Plant Products
8	Processing of Manufactured Meats and Poultry	Module 9: GMP for Processing of Food Products
10	Dairy Food Processing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
11	Honey Processing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
12	Egg Processing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
13	Bakery and Snack Food Processing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
14	Fruit, Vegetable, and Nut Processing, and Fruit Juices	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products

SQF Basic and Intermediate Fundamentals Verification Assessment Remote food safety assessment for very small enterprises <i>(continued)</i>		
FSC	Category	Applicable GMP Modules
16	Ice, Drink, and Beverage Processing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
17	Confectionary Manufacturing	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
18	Preserved Foods Manufacture	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
19	Food Ingredient Manufacture	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
20	Recipe Meals Manufacture	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
21	Oils, Fats, and the Manufacture of Oil or Fat-based spreads	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
22	Processing of Cereal Grains	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
25	Repackaging of Products Not Manufactured on Site	Module 11: GMP for Processing of Food Products
26	Storage and Distribution	Module 12: Good Storage and Distribution Practices

### 1.3 Use of SQF Consultants

Sites can choose to develop and implement their SQF Code using their own qualified resources, or they can utilize the services of a registered SQF consultant. All SQF consultants are registered by SQFI to work in specific food sector categories (refer Appendix 1). Sites are encouraged to confirm an SQF consultant’s registration details on the SQFI website (sqfi.com) before engaging their services. The criteria outlining the requirements necessary to qualify as an SQF consultant and the application forms are available on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). The SQF Consultant Code of Conduct outlines the practices expected of SQF consultants.

### 1.4 Food Safety Responsibility

Whether or not an SQF consultant is used, the SQF Code requires that every site has a suitably qualified employee to oversee the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of the SQF System, including the Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). The requirements for a qualified person responsible for understanding and implementing the SQF Fundamentals criteria include completion of HACCP or FDA Preventive Controls concepts training, completion of training requirements mandated by local health authority, or regulations for small food producing businesses.



## 1.5 SQF Fundamentals Training

SQF Fundamentals training is recommended for employees who are responsible for designing, implementing, and maintaining the requirements of the SQF Food Safety Fundamentals Code and are encouraged to participate in a training course to learn how to best implement the SQF Fundamentals Code. Training is available online or through the SQFI network of licensed training centers.

The SQF Fundamentals training options can be accessed from the SQFI website (sqfi.com). The online training solution is a web-based education portal where staff can enroll and complete SQF Systems training in their own time and at their own pace. Details about the training centers and the countries in which they operate are available on the SQFI website (sqfi.com). The dates and locations of the courses can be obtained by contacting the training centers.

The SQF Fundamentals Training is not mandatory for the person responsible for implementing and maintaining the SQF Code but is strongly recommended.

## 1.6 Document and Implement the SQF Code

To develop a strong food safety system, the site must document and implement the system elements and the GMP Modules (Part A, 1.2). This requires a two-stage process:

**Document the SQF System** – prepare policies, procedures, work instructions, and specifications that meet the system elements and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) modules of the SQF Code. In other words “say what you do.”

**Implement the SQF System** – implement the prepared policies, procedures, work instructions, and specifications, and keep records to demonstrate compliance to the relevant modules of the SQF Code. In other words “do what you say.” SQFI recommends that a minimum of two months of records be available before a site audit is conducted.

## 1.7 SQF Guidance Documents and Tip Sheets

Guidance documents and tip sheets are available for topics related to the food safety management system elements and requirements from the SQFI website (sqfi.com). These documents are available to help the site interpret the requirements of the SQF Code and assist with documenting and implementing an SQF System. The documents are developed with the assistance of food sector technical experts.

The guidance documents and tip sheets are available to assist the site with understanding and interpreting the code. Where there is a divergence between the guidance document and/or the tip sheet and the SQF Code, the SQF Code in English prevails.

## 1.8 Select an Assessment Provider

The SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment can only be conducted by certification bodies that are licensed by SQFI to conduct the assessments and issue the Verification Declaration Letter.

The site is required to always have an agreement with a certification body in place that outlines the SQF assessment, including the scope of the assessment (products, processes, FSC).

Contact SQFI to inquire about approved assessment providers at [info@sqfi.com](mailto:info@sqfi.com).

## 1.9 Conduct a Self-Assessment

A self-assessment, or internal audit, using the SQF Fundamentals Basic or Intermediate Criteria is a mandatory step in preparation for the assessment. The self-assessment helps your site identify gaps in your food safety system compliance and requires correction of any deficiencies prior to the third-party assessment. It can be conducted using internal resources or a registered SQF consultant.

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# *Part*

## The Verification Assessment Process

## 2.1 Selection of the SQF Assessor(s)

The SQF Fundamentals assessor must be employed by or contracted to an SQFI-licensed certification body and must meet the criteria for a SQF Fundamentals auditor, at minimum.

The certification body is responsible for ensuring all assessors meet the criteria established by SQFI and shall select the most appropriate qualified SQF food safety assessors(s) according to industry and auditing experience for the site's SQF verification assessment and must be proficient in remote assessment tools (Information and Communication Tools) and remote assessment techniques.

The certification body must advise the site of the name of the SQF Fundamentals assessor at the time that the SQF assessment is scheduled.

## 2.2 Identifying the Scope of Assessment

The scope of assessment shall be clearly identified and agreed upon between the site and certification body prior to the assessment. The scope of assessment shall determine the relevant SQF Fundamentals level selected (Basic or Intermediate) by the site and assessed by the certification body.

For requirements on changing the scope of assessment, refer to Part A, 4.1.

The scope of assessment shall include:

**The site.** SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment Verification Declaration Letter is site and product specific. The entire site, including all premises, support buildings, silos, tanks, loading and unloading bays, and external grounds, should be included in the assessment to evaluate the potential risk to products in the scope of verification. Where a site seeks to exempt part of the premises, the site must inform the certification body prior to the assessment to confirm the exemption is appropriate. All parts of the premises and process that are involved with the production, processing, and storage of products included in the scope cannot be exempted.

Exempted parts of the site or exempted products must not be promoted as being covered by the verification assessment. If the site is found to have inappropriately and intentionally promoted exempted products or processes as being covered by the scope of the assessment, the Verification Declaration Letter will be deemed invalid and the site will be removed from any public listing as a verified site.

## 2.3 Confirming the Scope of the Assessment

The site and the certification body shall agree on the assessment scope before the assessment begins. The scope of the assessment shall include:

- The agreed scope includes any approved exemptions (refer Part A, 2.2)
- The version and level of the SQF Fundamentals Code, Basic or Intermediate level
- The designated assessor
- The certification body's fees

## 2.4 Assessment Duration Guide

Once the certification body and site have agreed on the scope of assessment, and relevant information to support the scope, the certification body shall schedule the assessment.

The assessment is expected to take approximately 4-6 hours. Additional time may be required, which could potentially incur additional fees as determined by the certification body.

Factors that can impact the assessment duration include:

- i. Preparedness of the site for the remote assessment
- ii. Site's Wi-Fi or cellular connectivity constraints
- iii. Availability and cooperation of site's personnel to participate in the assessment
- iv. The ease of communication with company personnel (consider different languages spoken)
- v. The cooperation of the site's personnel

## 2.5 The Site Internal Audit or Self-Assessment

The site shall perform an internal audit or self-assessment against the SQF Fundamentals Basic or Intermediate criteria. An internal audit differs from a self-assessment depending on the responsibilities of the individual conducting the evaluation. An Internal Audit refers to the evaluation being conducted by a representative of the organization who is not functionally responsible for the operational policies and procedures being evaluated. The process is deemed a self-assessment if the person conducting it is responsible for the operational policies and procedures being evaluated – they are evaluating their own performance. Procedurally, the evaluation is conducted in the same manner; however, there is increased potential for bias with a self-assessment.

The evaluation shall cover all elements of the selected criteria, SQF Fundamentals Basic or Intermediate. Any requirement that is not applicable shall be noted as such with a justification. Any deficiencies shall be documented and categorized according to the non-conformity categories described in section 2.7. All critical or major non-conformities must be corrected and with documented evidence in advance of the third-party assessment. Any physical repairs or other corrections that are in progress but not completed by the time of the third-party assessment must be documented with a timeline for completion. Evidence of completion by the due dates shall be documented for future reference.

## 2.6 The Site Remote Assessment

The site assessment is conducted remotely via ICT (Information Communication Technologies, i.e. Zoom teleconference) by the SQF Fundamentals Verification assessor appointed by the certification body. It is conducted at a time agreed between the site and the certification body when the main processes are operating whenever possible. The site assessment must include a review of the entire site, including the inside and outside of the building, regardless of the scope of assessment and agreed exemptions. The site assessment shall include a review of all associated process flow charts, food safety plans, product specifications, and other related documentation necessary to assess the accuracy and completeness of the site's self-assessment or internal audit.

The site remote assessment determines if the site's self-assessment or internal audit accurately reflects the conformance of the site to the requirements of the SQF Fundamentals criteria.

It establishes and verifies the:

- i. Capability of the site to prepare a food safety plan that accurately identifies food safety hazards and risks
- ii. Effectiveness of the SQF food safety plan and hazard controls
- iii. Capability of the site to accurately self-assess conformance with the requirements
- iv. Capability of the site to effectively correct any deficiencies detected in the self-assessment or internal audit
- v. Level of commitment demonstrated by the site to maintaining conformance with the SQF Fundamentals criteria
- vi. The exempted products or areas of the site do not pose a food safety risk to the products covered under certification, or the effective control of any hazards introduced by exempted areas or products

## 2.7 Findings

Where the SQF Fundamentals assessor finds deficiencies with the SQF Fundamentals criteria, the assessor shall advise the site of the number, description, and extent of the findings of deficiency.

Findings of non-conformance against the SQF Fundamentals criteria shall be graded according to the definitions provided in the Glossary.

Timelines for the resolution of corrective actions are addressed in Part A, 3.2.

## 2.8 Assessment Report

SQFI provides the certification body with the electronic internal audit/self-assessment template for the site to conduct their self-assessment. The SQF Fundamentals Verification assessor reviews the site's self-assessment, documentation, and facility condition during the remote evaluation. The assessor utilizes the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment workbook provided by SQFI to complete the assessment. The SQF FVA workbook is designed to ensure the uniform application of SQF FVA review and reporting process. It is used by SQF Fundamentals assessor to record findings and evidence to determine the extent to which site operations comply with stated requirements (i.e. the assessment evidence record).

Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) module shall be assessed as part of the SQF Basic/ Intermediate Fundamentals Verification Assessment. Where an element is not applicable and appropriately justified, it shall be stated as "not applicable" (N/A) by the SQF Fundamentals assessor in the report.

Findings identified during the SQF FVA self-assessment and by the third-party assessor shall be accurately described in the workbook report and shall fully describe the clause number, requirement, and evidence of non-conformity. Report of findings shall be provided to the site by the SQF FVA assessor before the close of the assessment.

The assessment report is comprised of an assessment evidence record and a narrative executive summary and shall be completed by the SQF Fundamentals assessor and provided to the site for reference. Following approval of corrective actions for any major non-conformities within 30 days, the assessor shall make a recommendation to the certification body on the decision to issue the Verification Declaration Letter.

The SQF assessment reports shall remain the property of the site and shall not be distributed to other parties without the permission of the site

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# *Part*

The Initial Letter Decision



### 3.1 Responsibility for the Verification Decision

It is the responsibility of the certification body to ensure that assessments undertaken by their SQF food safety assessors are thorough, that all requirements are fulfilled, and the workbook and executive summary is complete. The report is in draft form, and the evidence is only recommended until technically reviewed and approved by the authorized representative of the certification body.

The decision shall be made by the certification body based on the evidence of compliance and non-conformity recommended by the SQF Fundamentals assessor during the SQF Remote Verification Assessment. Although SQFI provides guidance, the certification body is responsible for deciding if a letter is justified and granted based on the objective evidence provided by the SQF Fundamentals assessor.

Any decisions that are made outside the scope of this clause require the certification body to provide written justification to SQFI.

### 3.2 Site Assessment Corrective Actions

All non-conformities and their resolution shall be documented by the SQF Fundamentals assessor. The correction timeframe requirements for major and minor non-conformities are identified below.

- **A minor non-conformity** should be corrected promptly, no later than 30 days following the assessment, to mitigate risk to food safety. Evidence of correction is not required to be reviewed by the SQF FVA assessor prior to issuance of a Verification Declaration Letter. Minor NC corrective actions shall be reviewed at the next annual assessment, should the site choose to be evaluated annually.
- **A major non-conformity** shall be immediately corrected when identified to eliminate any immediate risk to food safety and appropriate corrective action taken and verified and approved by the SQF FVA assessor within thirty (30) calendar days of the completion of the site assessment.
  - » In circumstances where the corrective action involves structural change or cannot be corrected due to seasonal conditions or installation lead times, this period can be extended provided the corrective action time frame is acceptable to the certification body and temporary action is taken by the site to mitigate the risk to product safety. However, in such cases, the non-conformity corrective action plans shall be evaluated for appropriateness and approved by the SQF Fundamentals Verification assessor. The assessor shall document details of justification of any granted extension for completed correction actions, how the risk is being controlled in the meantime, and the agreed completion date.
  - » Corrective actions must be reviewed and approved by the assessor before any decision on verification can be made.

- **Critical Non-Conformity** If the SQF Fundamentals Verification assessor determines that a critical non-conformity exists during an assessment, the assessor shall immediately notify the site and the certification body. A critical non-conformity results in an automatic ineligibility for a Verification Declaration Letter. The assessment may be continued to completion if the site desires or the site may choose to discontinue the assessment.
- If the site fails to take effective corrective action within the time frame agreed with the certification body after the completion of the audit and technical review, or if the certification body deems that there is systemic falsification of records relating to food safety controls and the SQF System, a critical finding will be raised.
- The site is responsible for controlling any product effected by the critical issue and notifying any customers or other interested parties as required by law or contracted agreements. The certification body and SQFI are not responsible for notification to any party of a critical failure or contaminated or adulterated product. The site must reapply for a new SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment once the conditions leading to the critical issue are corrected and verified.

### 3.3 Assessment Score and Rating

There is no score or rating issued for SQF Basic or Intermediate Fundamentals Verification Assessments.

### 3.4 Decision to Grant SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter

The Assessor will make a recommendation to grant the Verification Declaration Letter if the site has demonstrated capability to identify and effectively manage applicable food safety hazards and effective corrective action has been take for all major non-conformities detected during the assessment within the required timeframes.

Where granted, the letter shall be issued by the certification body within forty-five (45) calendar days of the assessment date. The site shall be listed on a public directory of sites issued a SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter for interested parties to verify the validity of a letter presented by a site. If a directory is not functional, the site's status will be made available by the CB upon request by the public. The letter is valid for one year + 75 days following the issue date. If the site wishes to receive a new verification letter annually, the site must conduct a new self-assessment or internal audit and reapply to request the assessment from an SQF-approved certification body.

The letter shall be in a form approved by the SQFI according to Appendix 4, SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment Verification Declaration Letter Requirements.

### 3.5 Failure to Comply

Where a site fails to close out non-conformities within the required timeframe or receives a Critical non-conformity, the site is considered to have failed the SQF Code assessment. The site may reapply for another site assessment.

### 3.6 Withdrawal and Invalidating a Verification Declaration Letter

The certification body shall withdraw and invalidate the SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter if the site:

- i. is sold to new owners and will undergo management changes.
- ii. is required to recall products due to food safety system failure at its site.
- iii. in the opinion of the certification body, the site fails to maintain the requirements of the SQF Code, based on evidence made available to the CB or SQFI by an interested party (i.e. customer of the site).
- iv. fails to pay the certification body the fees due for services provided.
- v. personnel conduct is deemed to threaten the welfare and safety of an assessor or any interested party.

Where the site's letter is withdrawn and invalidated, the certification body shall immediately amend the site details on the public directory to delist the site, and notify the site and SQFI in writing of the reason for the withdrawal of the letter.

A site that has their letter withdrawn shall inform interested parties of the change in status and shall not represent its company or product as Verified according to the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment. The certification body reserves the right to decline to provide future services, and SQFI reserves the right to disqualify a site from future eligibility for the SQF Fundamentals Verification or SQF Certification if the Verification Declaration Letter is withdrawn due to willful misconduct or negligence.

**A4**

# Part

## Obligations of Sites and Certification Bodies

## 4.1 Changing the Scope of SQF Fundamentals Verification

When a site wishes to add food sector categories or new products to their scope of certification, the site may request the increased scope of SQF Fundamentals Verification in writing to the certification body. The CB shall determine the necessary duration and appropriate evaluation activities for a scope extension and determine appropriate fees for service. Scope extensions may only be granted by the CB who issued the currently valid Verification Declaration Letter.

The certification body shall conduct a new SQF FVA assessment of the additional process or products and shall either issue an updated letter or advise the site in writing why the new letter cannot be issued.

## 4.2 Notification of Product Recalls and Regulatory Infringements

Upon identification that a certified site initiates a food safety event that requires public notification (such as Class I or Class II recall, or the receipt of a regulatory warning letter), the site shall notify the certification body within 24 hours of the event.

The site's certification body shall be listed in the site's essential contacts lists as defined in system element 2.6.3 of the SQF Code. The certification body shall assess the nature of the recall to determine if it meets the criteria to withdraw the Verification Declaration Letter (section 3.6).

## 4.3 Compliance and Integrity Program

To meet the requirements of SQFI's Compliance and Integrity Program, SQFI may from time to time monitor the activities of the certification bodies and their assessors. These monitoring techniques include, but are not limited to, review of assessment reports, assessor qualifications, site directory status, and requirement of the CB to report on a quarterly basis all SQF FVA conducted.

## 4.4 Change of Ownership

When a verified site's business has been sold to new ownership and management or location, the site must notify the CB of the planned sale and change in management. The CB is required to withdraw and invalidate the letter. The site under new ownership may apply for a new SQF FVA.

If the ownership change does not change the management or location of the site operations, with or without a name change, the letter may be retained with any necessary updates to the letter and public listing of the site's new business name. The letter's expiry date will not be changed.

## 4.5 Language

The SQF FVA will be conducted in English. The site must provide a translator and translated copies of documents if necessary to facilitate an assessment where the site is not able to communicate in English. The certification body may agree, but is not required, to provide the necessary translation resources at additional cost to the site. If neither option is possible, the site will not be eligible for the SQF FVA.

The site may request a copy of their SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter in a language other than English at an additional fee determined by the CB; however, English is the official version in case of dispute.

## 4.6 Conflict of Interest

The certification body shall ensure that all assessment activities are conducted without conflict of interest. It shall preclude any prospective Fundamentals assessor from undertaking any audit in relation to the SQF FVA that constitutes a conflict of interest as outlined below or any other condition that could lead to a conflict of interest.

The assessor is permitted to provide guidance and suggestions to the site on improving their food safety plan and program during the SQF FVA.

SQF food safety assessors shall not be assigned to any SQF FCA anywhere they are related to anyone at the site, have a financial interest in the site, or have participated in a consulting role involving the site in question, within the last two (2) years (considered to be participating in an active and creative manner in the development of the SQF System to be audited, including the development of food safety plans). Prior consulting includes, but is not limited to, activities such as:

- i. Producing or preparing food safety plans, manuals, handbooks, or procedures.
- ii. Participating in the decision-making process regarding SQF System.
- iii. Giving advice toward the design, documentation, development, validation, verification, implementation, or maintenance of SQF System; and
- iv. Delivering or participating in the delivery of an “in-house” food safety training service at which advice and instruction on the development and implementation of food safety plans and SQF System for eventual certification is provided.

The certification body shall ensure that an SQF Fundamentals assessor discloses any existing, former, or proposed link between themselves or their organization and the site.

A site can refuse the service of an SQF Fundamentals assessor when they consider the assessor has a conflict of interest, or for other reasons. In such circumstances, the site shall outline the reasons in writing to the certification body.

## **4.7 Complaints, Appeals, and Disputes**

SQFI does not intervene in complaints, appeals, or disputes related to delivery of the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment program, and they will be managed according to the certification body's internal policy and procedures for resolution between the CB and the site. Records shall be maintained by the CB.

When upon investigation of a complaint it is determined that there has been a substantiated breakdown of a site's SQF System or any other condition not in accordance with the SQF Fundamentals Code and/or other supporting documents, the certification body shall withdraw and invalidate the Verification Declaration Letter as outlined in Part A, 3.6.

The CB shall make available any records of Complaints, Appeals, and Disputes to SQFI upon request.

# Approach



# Appendix 1: SQF Food Sector Categories

FSC	Category (Site Scope of Certification)	GFSI Industry Scopes	Applicable SQF Code Modules	Description	Example of Products	Level of Risk
1	<b>Production, Capture, and Harvesting of Livestock and Game Animals:</b>  Free Range Animal Production  Intensive Animal Production  Dairy Farming  Game Animals  Egg Production	AI: Farming of Animals	System elements  Module 5: GAP for farming of animal products	Applies to the capture, transport, holding, intensive animal husbandry, and free-range farming of animals, but does not include seafood.	Includes:  Deer, cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, poultry, ostrich, emu, etc.  Cattle, veal, lamb, pigs, poultry, eggs  Cattle, sheep, and goats  Buffalo, wild pigs, emu	Low risk
2	Not In use					
3	<b>Growing and Production of Fresh Produce and Nuts:</b>  Fresh fruit, vegetables, and nuts  Ready-to-Eat (RTE) Produce and nuts	BI: Farming of Plant Products	System elements  Module 7: GAP for farming of plant products	Applies to the production, harvesting, preparation, field packing, transport, and controlled temperature storage of fresh whole fruit, vegetables, and nuts. Includes all products grown under broad acre and intensive horticulture production system, including orchards, viticulture, and hydroponics production and nursery operations.	All fruit and vegetable and nut varieties including:  Tropical and temperate tree fruits, carrots, beets, potatoes, wine grapes  Table grapes, strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, all forms of leafy greens, spring mix, tomatoes, peppers, herbs and spices and tomatoes, green onions, baby spinach, lettuce, melons, etc.	Generally low risk. Some products are classified as high risk
4	<b>Fresh Produce and Nuts Pack House Operations</b>	D: Pre-processing of Plant Products	System elements  Module 10: GMP for pre-processing of plant products	Applies to the cleaning, shelling, packing, sorting, grading, controlled atmosphere temperature storage, and transport of fresh and pre-packaged whole unprocessed fruits, vegetables, and nuts for retail sale or further processing.	Includes all fruit, vegetable, and nut varieties that are packed in pack houses, and which may undergo controlled atmosphere storage and transport.	Low risk

**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Extensive Broad Acre Agriculture Operations</b>	BII: Farming of Grains and Pulses	System elements  Module 8: GAP for farming of grains and pulses	Applies to the production, harvesting, preparation, transport, and storage of broad-acre crops including pulses, cereal, and other grains.  Also includes growing and harvesting of animal feed crops.	All grain and cereal varieties for human consumption and animal feed including but not limited to wheat, oats, pulse crops, soy, legumes, maize, corn, cotton, pasture, silage, and hay.	Generally low risk, although some products and processes are classified as high risk
<b>6</b>	<b>Harvest and Intensive Farming of Seafood</b>  Wild Caught Fish  Aquaculture and RTE Seafood.	All: Farming of Fish and Seafood	System elements  Module 6: GAP for farming of seafood	Applies to the harvest and wild capture and intensive farming of freshwater and marine fishes and shellfish, including purification, transport, and storage and extends to gilling, gutting, shucking, and chilling operations at sea.	All fresh and saltwater fish and shellfish species including:  Tuna, salmon, snapper, bass, catfish, and other fish spp.  Oysters, mussels, shrimp, lobster, crab, and other shellfish spp.	Generally low risk, although some products and processes are classified as high risk
<b>7</b>	<b>Slaughterhouse, Boning and Butchery Operations</b>  Red Meat  Poultry Meat	C: Pre-process Handling of Animal Products	System elements  Module 9: GMP for pre-processing of animal products	Applies to the slaughtering, dressing, processing, transport, storage, chilling, freezing, and wholesaling of all animal species and game animals for consumption and extends to all meat cuts.	Includes uncooked poultry, pork, and red meat animal species prepared in retail butcher shops, boning rooms, and meat wholesale markets, including ground (minced) meats.  Bone in and whole muscle fillet for pork and red meat species including ground (minced) red meat.  Bone in and whole muscle poultry fillet and ground (minced) poultry meat.	Low risk

**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Processing of Manufactured Meats and Poultry</b>	El: Processing of Perishable Animal Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, manufacture, transport, and storage operations where meat (all red meat species and poultry) is the major ingredient including all value-adding operations (i.e. cook-chill, crumbing, curing, smoking, cooking, drying, fermenting, and vacuum packing) and chilling and freezing operations, but not canning of meat or poultry product.	Includes poultry, pork, and red meats blends and raw heat-treated and fermented poultry, pork, and red meats including salami, hot dogs, sausages, bacon, pepperoni, and meat pastes etc..	High-risk product and process knowledge required
<b>9</b>	<b>Seafood Processing:</b>  Raw Seafood and Seafood Products  Uncooked RTE Seafood  Cooked RTE Seafood	El: Processing of Perishable Animal Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, manufacture, transport, and storage of all fish and seafood species and extends to value-adding operations including dismembering, fermenting, crumbing, smoking, cooking, freezing, chilling, drying, and vacuum packing, but not canning of seafood product.	Includes whole fish, fish fillets, reformed fish cakes, coated fish portions uncooked fish product, sashimi, sushi, and raw uncooked shellfish such as oyster and mussels, surimi smoked cooked fish products chilled or frozen that require no further cooking prior to consumption.	Some products are classified high risk.  Uncooked RTE product is high risk and process knowledge required.
<b>10</b>	<b>Dairy Food Processing</b>	El: Processing of Perishable Animal Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, transport, and storage of food products from all species used for milk collection and extends to all value-adding operations including freezing, pasteurizing, ultra-filtration, evaporation/concentration, fermentation, clarification, culturing, and spray drying of milk but not UHT operations. (refer to FSC 15).  Includes milk substitutes where the technology is essentially the same.	Includes all milk collection and includes milk and cream, butter, cottage cheese, sour cream, all forms of cheese, yogurt, ice cream, and dried milk.  Also includes milk substitutes such as soymilk and tofu, and infant formula.	High-risk product and process knowledge required

**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Apiculture and Honey Processing</b>	EI: Processing of Perishable Animal Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to apiculture and the processing, transport, and storage of food products from all species used for honey collection including value-added operations. Includes clarifying and treatment operations.	Includes apiculture, honey, honeycomb, pollen, and royal jelly.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>12</b>	<b>Egg Processing</b>	C: Pre-process Handling of Animal Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the grading, cleaning, processing, transport, and storage of food products from all species used for egg collection and processing.	Fresh shell eggs including value-added products where egg is the major ingredient.	High-risk product; Generally low-risk process
<b>13</b>	<b>Bakery and Snack Food Processing</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, transport, and storage of extruded snack foods and cake mix formulations and extends to all bakery operations.	Includes baked items such as meat pies, custard pies, bread, cookies, cakes and mixes and all varieties of snack food.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>14</b>	<b>Fruit, Vegetable, and Nut Processing, and Fruit Juices</b>	EII: Processing or Perishable Plant Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, transport, storage, and distribution of all processed fruit and vegetable varieties including freezing, fermenting drying, slicing, dicing, cutting, and modified atmosphere processing of all fruits and vegetables, and the roasting, drying, and cutting of nuts.  Does not include canning of fruits & vegetables.	Includes frozen, fermented, dried, sliced, diced, cut, and modified atmosphere packaged (MAP) fruit, vegetable, and nut products including prepared and deli salads.  Includes fresh and pasteurized fruit and vegetable juices.	Some high-risk process knowledge required

**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Canning, UHT, and Aseptic Operations</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing of low-acid canned foods, and sterilization (retorting) UHT, or other high-temperature or high-pressure processes (HPP) not covered elsewhere and the manufacture of the associated hermetically sealed containers.	Includes the commercial sterilization of fish, meats, fruits, and vegetables and other low-acid soups and sauces in metal or glass containers or retort pouches.  Does not include pasteurization of dairy, fruit, or vegetable juices, but does include UHT treatment of Pasteurized canned and chilled crab meat. • Milk or milk products; or • Egg or egg products; or • Fruit or vegetable juices. • Canned pet food	High-risk product and process knowledge required
<b>16</b>	<b>Ice, Drink, and Beverage Processing</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to fermentation, concentration, aseptic filling, or drying operations processes. Does not include powdered milk and pasteurization and UHT treatment of milk or milk products or fruit and vegetable juicing operations.  Does not apply to dry beverage ingredients (e.g. tea, coffee).	Includes carbonated soft drinks, carbonated and non-carbonated waters, mineral water, ice, wine, beer, and other alcoholic beverages.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>17</b>	<b>Confectionary Manufacturing</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the preparation, transport, and storage of all types of confectionary and extends to all chocolate and imitation chocolate-based processing.	Includes all confectionary products which undergo refining, conching, starch molding, compression, extrusion, and vacuum cooking.	Some high-risk process knowledge required

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<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Preserved Foods Manufacture</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, transport, and storage of all foods preserved under high-temperature processes not covered elsewhere, compositionally preserved foods that are not high-temperature processed or other alternative acceptable methods not covered elsewhere.	Includes dressings, mayonnaise, sauces, marinades, pickled foods, peanut butter, mustards, jams, and fillings.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>19</b>	<b>Food Ingredient Manufacture</b>	L: Production of Bio-chemicals	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, blending, repackaging, transport, and storage of dry food ingredients, cultures, and yeast, but does not include dairy products, fermented meats, or other fermented products mentioned elsewhere.	Includes starter cultures used in cheese, yogurt, and wine manufacture and cultures used in the baking industry and other products such as vinegar used for the preservation of foods. Additional products include additives, preservatives, flavorings, colorings, soup mixes, sauces, dehydrated culinary products, salt, sugar, spices, and other condiments.  Applies to dried tea and coffee products.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>20</b>	<b>Recipe Meals Manufacture</b>	EIII: Processing of Perishable Animal and Plant Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing, receipt, controlled temperature storage, and transport of foods prepared from a range of ingredients (mixed foods) that require cooking, heating, freezing, or refrigerated storage prior to serving.  Includes sandwiches, wraps, and high-risk desserts for distribution to food service (if they are made on site and RTE, then fsc 23 applies).	Includes RTE chilled meals and desserts, frozen meals, pizza, frozen pasta, soups, and meal solutions, sous vide products, and freeze-dried and dehydrated meals.  Includes sandwiches, wraps, and high-risk desserts for distribution to food service.	High-risk product and process knowledge required

**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>21</b>	<b>Oils, Fats, and the Manufacture of Oil or Fat-based Spreads</b>	EIII: Processing of Perishable Animal and Plant Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the manufacture of all animal and vegetable oils and fats and to the manufacture of margarine. Includes clarifying and refining processes.	Includes shortening (animal and vegetable), oils (olive, peanut, corn, vegetable, sunflower, safflower, canola, nut, seed), and oil-based spreads such as margarine and oil-based spreads.	Low risk
<b>22</b>	<b>Processing of Cereal Grains</b>	EII: Processing or Perishable Plant Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the processing of cereals of all varieties, including sorting, grading, picking, handling of bulk grains, milling, and extruding.	Includes wheat, maize, rice, barley, oats, millet, pasta, breakfast cereals.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>23</b>	<b>Food Catering and Food Service Operations</b>	G: Catering	System elements  Module 15: GRP for Retail	Applies to all on-site food preparation and service activities, including transport, storage, and distribution undertaken with mixed foods that are ready-to-eat and do not require further treatment or processing by the consumer.  Only applies to products prepared on site that are RTE.	Includes food service caterers, retail delicatessen/self-serve facilities, restaurants, fast food outlets, delicatessens, school cafeterias (canteens), hospital/institution meal services, childcare centers, and mobile and home delivery food services.  Includes sandwiches, wraps, and high-risk desserts that are prepared on site and are RTE.	High-risk product and process knowledge required
<b>24</b>	<b>Food Retailing</b>	H: Retail/ Wholesale	System elements  Module 15: GRP for Retail	Applies to the receipt, handling, storage, and display at retail level of stable or pre-processed and packaged foods and/ or food intended for further preparation by the consumer.  Retailers that prepare RTE foods shall include fsc 23 as well.	Includes all foods distributed and sold through retail outlets.  Does not include foods that are prepared on site and are RTE.	Low risk



**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Repackaging of Products Not Manufactured on Site</b>	EIV: Processing of Ambient Stable Products	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Assembling whole produce and packaged products (e.g. nuts, hard candy, dried fruit, and beef jerky) that are manufactured elsewhere (e.g. gift baskets, etc.).  Applies to products not covered elsewhere.	Includes gift baskets, Christmas hampers, and presentation packs.	Low risk
<b>26</b>	<b>Food Storage and Distribution</b>	JII: Provision of Transport and Storage Services – Ambient Stable Food and Feed	System elements  Module 12: GDP for transport and distribution of food products	Applies to the receipt, storage, display, consolidation, and distribution of perishable fresh produce and general food lines including chilled, frozen, dry goods, stable or pre-processed and packaged foods, and/or food intended for further preparation by the consumer at wholesale level.	Includes all transportation, storage, and delivery of perishable and shelf-stable foods sold through markets, retail, and food service facilities.  Includes transportation, storage, and delivery of all varieties of fresh unprocessed fruit, vegetable, and nut products.	Low risk
<b>27</b>	<b>Manufacture of Food Packaging</b>	M: Production of Food Packaging	System elements  Module 13: GMP for manufacture of food packaging	Applies to the manufacture, storage, and transport of food sector packaging materials.  Includes items that may be used in food manufacturing or food service facilities, including paper towel, napkins, disposable food containers, straws, stirrers.	Includes all food-grade packaging materials including flexible films, paperboard-based containers, metal containers, flexible pouches, glass containers, plastic, and foam containers (PET, polystyrene, etc.), and single-use foodservice products (e.g. paper towel, napkins, disposable food containers, straws, stirrers).	Low risk
<b>28</b>	<b>Not in use</b>					
<b>29</b>	<b>Not in use</b>					
<b>30</b>	<b>Not in use</b>					



**APPENDIX 1: SQF Food Sector Categories**

<b>FSC</b>	<b>Category (Site Scope of Certification)</b>	<b>GFSI Industry Scopes</b>	<b>Applicable SQF Code Modules</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example of Products</b>	<b>Level of Risk</b>
<b>31</b>	<b>Manufacture of Dietary Supplements</b>	L: Production of Bio-chemicals	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the manufacture, blending, transport, and storage of dietary supplements.	Includes vitamins, probiotics, and label supplements.	High-risk product and process knowledge required
<b>32</b>	<b>Manufacture of Pet Food</b>	Fl: Production of Compound Feed	System elements  Module 4: GMP for processing of pet food products	Applies to the manufacture of pet food intended for consumption by domestic animals and specialty pets.	Includes dry and moist pet foods and treats, semi-raw, chilled, or frozen product.  Does not include canned pet food.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>33</b>	<b>Manufacture of Food Processing Aides</b>	L: Production of Bio-chemicals	System elements  Module 11: GMP for processing of food products	Applies to the manufacture, storage, and transport of chemicals and aides used in the food processing sectors.	Includes food grade lubricants, processing aides, and chemicals for clean-in-place systems.	Low risk
<b>34</b>	<b>Manufacture of Animal Feed</b>	Fl: Production of Single Ingredient Feed	System elements  Module 3: GMP for animal feed production	Applies to the manufacture, blending, transport, and storage of animal feeds.	Includes compounded and medicated feeds.	Some high-risk process knowledge required
<b>35</b>	<b>Not in use</b>					

# Appendix 2: Glossary

## Definition of terms applicable to the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment Program Requirements\*

\*Refer to the SQF Fundamentals Code - Basic and Intermediate, for definitions applicable to the Code requirements.

### A

**Annually:** As in Frequency; *occurring once per year, or as in Timeframe; the entirety of one calendar year*

**Assessment:** A systematic and independent examination of a site's SQF food safety and/or quality system by an SQF food safety and/or quality assessor to evaluate whether the site's food safety policies, procedures, and practices are in conformance with the requirements of the applicable SQF Code, and to verify whether these arrangements are implemented effectively.

**Assessment Checklist:** The list of SQF Code elements, customized for the site's assessment scope, and available for use by the SQF food safety and/or quality assessor when conducting an SQF food safety and/or quality assessment.

**Assessor:** A person who is qualified and approved by a licensed SQF certification body to perform SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessments according to the program requirements for assessor qualifications.

### C

**Certification Body:** An entity that has entered into a license agreement with the SQFI authorizing it to assess or certify a site's SQF System in accordance with the applicable program requirements.

**Correction:** Action to eliminate a detected non-conformity. Shall have the same meaning as "corrected."

**Corrective Action:** Action to eliminate the cause of a detected non-conformity or other undesirable situation. Corrective action shall include:

- a) Determine/document any immediate action required/taken.
  - i. Determine the cause of the problem.
  - ii. Evaluate action needed on the identified cause.
  - iii. Determine if the problem exists elsewhere in the system and implement actions needed.
- b) Document the actions taken and the results of the action taken.

Review/verify and document effectiveness of action taken with objective evidence.

## E

**Exempt:** A term applied to elements of the SQF Code that the site does not wish to be included in the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment and has submitted a written request to the certification body to exclude, prior to commencement of any scheduled assessment activity.

In the SQF Code, mandatory elements of the system elements cannot be exempted. The

certification body will confirm the reasons for exemption as part of the site assessment.

The term also applies to products, processes, or areas of the site that the site wishes to exclude from the assessment. A request is to be submitted to the certification body in writing prior to the assessment activity.

## F

**Facility:** The site's premises at its street address. The production, manufacturing, or storage area where product is produced, processed, packaged, and/or stored, and includes the processes, equipment, environment, materials, and personnel involved. The facility must be managed and supervised under the same operational management. The facility is the site assessed during an assessment (refer to "site").

**Finding Food:** An observation by the assessor of the site's conformity with the program requirements.

Any substance, usually of animal or plant origin, intentionally consumed by humans, whether processed, partially processed, or unprocessed.

May include water, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, materials included in a processed food product, and any other substance identified by regulation (legislation) as a food.

**FMI:** The Food Marketing Institute, a not-for-profit corporation, having its principal offices at 2345 Crystal Drive, Suite 800, Arlington, VA 22202, United States of America.

**Food Safety Fundamentals:** An entry-level Code for new and developing businesses that covers basic Good Agricultural or Aquaculture Practices (GAPs), Good

Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), or Good Distribution Practices (GDPs) and defines the essential elements that must be implemented to meet relevant legislative and customer food safety requirements. The code is used as the basis for the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment (SQF FVA) and SQF Fundamentals Certification. Sites that comply with the SQF FVA Program Requirements received a Verification Declaration Letter. Sites that comply with the SQF Code certification requirements for the Food Safety Fundamentals Code receive an accredited certificate from an SQFI-licensed certification body.

**Food Safety Plan:** As described in the SQF Food Safety Code, the plan shall be prepared based on the CODEX HACCP method, include process controls at control points in production to monitor product safety, identify deviations from control parameters, and define corrections necessary to keep the process under control.

**Food Sector Category (FSC):** A classification scheme established to assist in a uniform approach to management of the SQF Program and means those food industry, manufacturing, production, processing, storage, wholesaling, distribution, retailing and food service activities, and other food sector services and auditor and consultant registration as defined by the SQFI.

## G

**Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs):** Practices on farms that define the essential elements for the development of best-practice for production, incorporating integrated crop management, integrated pest management, and integrated agricultural hygienic practices.

**Good Distribution Practices (GDPs):** Practices distribution centers that define the essential elements for the development of best-

practice for distribution center management for the maintenance of food safety of products handled at and distributed from the center.

**Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs):** The combination of management and manufacturing practices designed to ensure food products are consistently produced to meet relevant legislative and customer specifications.

## H

**HACCP:** The Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system refers to the HACCP guidelines developed and managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization's CODEX Alimentarius Commission. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application – Annex to CAC/RCP 1 – 1969, Rev. 4-2003), – “A system, which identifies, evaluates and controls hazards which are significant for food safety.”

**HACCP Method:** The implementation of prerequisite programs and the application of HACCP principles in the logical sequence of the twelve steps as described in the current edition of the CODEX Alimentarius Commission Guidelines. The SQF Food Safety and Quality Codes utilize the HACCP method to control food safety hazards and quality threats in the segment of the food chain under consideration.

**HACCP Plan:** A document prepared in accordance with the CODEX HACCP method to ensure control of hazards that are significant for food safety or the identification of quality threats for the product under consideration.

**HACCP Training:** Training that meets the guidelines outlined in the Food and Agriculture Organization's CODEX Alimentarius Commission. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application – Annex to CAC/RCP 1 – 1969, Rev. 4-2003), – “A system, which identifies, evaluates and controls hazards which are significant for food safety.” And this training shall be:

1. Recognized as a HACCP training course used extensively in a country.
2. Administered and delivered by an institution recognized as a food safety training center of excellence.
3. A minimum of two days (16 hours) in duration, or equivalent.
4. The acquired knowledge of the candidate shall be assessed as part of the training program.

## L

**Legality:** Legality refers to national federal, state, and local regulations applicable to the certified product in the country of manufacture and intended markets.

**Licensed Certification Body (LCB):** An entity that has entered into a license agreement with the SQFI authorizing it to manage the auditing and certification of site's SQF System.

## M

**Mandatory Elements:** System elements that must be implemented and audited for a site to achieve SQF certification; system elements that cannot be exempted during a certification/recertification audit.

## N

**Non-conformity (or Non-conformance):** Refers to the following definitions:

A minor non-conformity is an omission or deficiency in the SQF System that produces unsatisfactory conditions that if not addressed may lead to a risk to food safety and/or quality but not likely to cause a system element breakdown.

A major non-conformity is an omission or deficiency in the SQF System producing unsatisfactory conditions that carry a food safety and/or quality risk and likely to result in a system element breakdown.

A critical non-conformity is a breakdown of control (s) at a critical control point, a prerequisite program, or other process step and judged likely to cause a significant public health risk and/or where product is contaminated.

A critical non-conformity is also raised if the site fails to take effective corrective action within the timeframe agreed with the certification body, or if the certification body deems that there is systemic falsification of records relating to food safety controls and the SQF System.

Critical non-conformities cannot be raised at desk audits.

**N/A :** Stands for "not applicable" and may be reported during the SQF food safety and/or quality audit by the food safety and/or quality auditor when an element does not apply immediately but the site is still responsible for the element.

N/A may also be reported to avoid double debiting, for example where a non-conformity has been raised against a similar, but more appropriate element. In this case, the element will be reported as "N/A."

## P

**Pests:** Vermin, including birds, rodents, insects, or other unwanted species that can carry disease and pose a risk to packaging, feed, or food.

**Plan:** As defined by ISO 9001, a document(s) used to establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with customer requirements and the organization's policies. (Refer to Food Safety Plan, Food Quality Plan.)

**Prerequisite Program:** A procedural measure that when implemented reduces the likelihood of a food safety hazard or a food quality threat occurring, but one that may not be directly related to activities taking place during production.

**Primary Producer or Producer:** A sole entity involved in the pre-farm gate production, field packing, storage, and supply of food produced and/or harvested under their exclusive control.

**Processing:** The processing of food through one or more steps in which the nature of the food is changed. Processing includes but is not limited to repacking, over bagging and re-labeling of food, slaughtering, dismembering, sorting, grading, cleaning, treating, drying, salting, smoking, cooking, canning, purifying, and the pasteurization of food.

**Product:** Those products that apply to a specific food sector category as defined by the SQFI.

**Program:** A plan(s) used to establish the objectives and processes necessary to deliver results in accordance with customer requirements and the organization's policies. Examples include allergen management program or an environmental monitoring program.

**Purity:** The absence of contaminants that could cause a food safety hazard.

## Q

**Quality:** A measure of exceeding customer or corporate expectations and a state of being free from defects, deficiencies, and significant variation.

**Quality Threat:** See threat.

## R

**Recoup:** Product that is intact and requires no further processing or handling but is repackaged for distribution. For example, mixing partial cases to build one complete case. May also be referred to as "repack."

**Rules of Use:** The rules and procedures contained in SQF Logo and/or Quality Shield Rules of Use and includes the certificate schedule and any modification, variation, or replacement of the SQF trademark rules of use.

## S

**SQFI Select Site:** Recognition stated on the SQFI certificate for sites that have undergone an annual unannounced recertification audit.

**Senior Site Management:** Individuals at the highest level on site responsible for the business operation and implementation and improvement of the food safety and quality management system.

**Site:** Any food business involved in the production, manufacture, processing, transport, storage, distribution or sale of food, beverages, packaging, animal feed, or pet food, or providing support services to the food sector and run by a person, company, cooperative, partnership, joint venture, business, or other organization that has, or agrees to have, a licensed SQF certification body carry out assessments and certification of its SQF System.

**Site Assessment:** The evaluation of the site that reviews the site's program documentation, internal audit or self-assessment, products, and processes during the remote SQF FVA to determine the capability of the site to effectively identify and manage pertinent food safety hazards.

**SQF Assessor:** The same meaning as assessor.

**SQF Consultant:** A person who is registered by the 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.

**SQF Logo:** The SQF logo depicted in SQF Logo Rules of Use.

**SQF Practitioner:** An individual designated by a site to oversee the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of that site's own SQF System. The SQF practitioner responsibilities will be verified by the SQF FVA assessor during the SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment as meeting the following activities:

- i. Oversees the development, implementation, review, and maintenance of the SQF System, including food safety fundamentals outlined in 2.4.2, and the food safety plan outlined in 2.4.3.
- ii. Takes appropriate action to ensure the integrity of the SQF food safety system.
- iii. Communicates to relevant personnel all information essential to ensure the effective implementation and maintenance of the SQF food safety and/or quality System.
- iv. Ensures that site personnel have the required competencies to carry out those functions affecting products, legality, and safety.

**SQF Program:** The SQF Food Safety and/or Quality Code and all associated Systems, rules, quality shield, intellectual property, and documents.

**SQF System:** A risk management and preventive system that includes a food safety plan implemented and operated by a site to assure food safety aligned with the SQF FVA program requirements. It is implemented and maintained by an SQF practitioner, assessed by an SQF food safety assessor to be verified as effectively identifying and capable of managing applicable food safety hazards, aligned with the SQF Fundamentals Code.

**SQFI:** The SQF Institute, a division of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI).

**System Elements:** The SQF food safety management requirements applied by all sites throughout the supply chain for SQF certification.

**Standard:** A normative document and other defined normative documents, established by consensus and approved by a body that provides for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines, or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context.

**Supplier:** The entity that provides a product or service to the SQF-certified site.



T

**Threat:** An identified risk that has the potential, if not controlled, to affect the quality of a product.

**Trademarks:** A recognizable label, logo, or mark that identifies a raw material or finished product with a particular producer, manufacturer, or retailer.

V

**Verification:** As defined in the Food and Agriculture Organization's CODEX Alimentarius Commission. Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application – Annex to CAC/RCP 1 – 1969, Rev. 4-2003), – “A system, which identifies, evaluates, and controls hazards which are significant for food safety. Essentially verification as applied to control measures seeks to prove that the control measure was done according to its design.”

**Verification Schedule:** A schedule outlining the frequency and responsibility for carrying out the methods, procedures, or tests additional to those used in monitoring, to determine that the HACCP study was completed correctly, that the relevant SQF System is operating in compliance with the relevant food safety and/or food quality plan and that the plan continues to be effective.

**Vision and Mission Statement:** A statement issued by senior site management outlining the site's quality goals and objectives. It may be combined with or separate from the site's food safety policy.



# Appendix 3: SQF Logo Rules for SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment Program



PMS 3005C

CMYK: C=100, M=34, Y=0, K=2

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The SQF logo is owned by SQFI. Sites obtain no property in the SQF logo.
- 1.2 Sites obtain no property in the SQF logo.
- 1.3 Sites that have been issued a Verification Declaration Letter **are not** authorized to use the SQF logo in any marketing, promotions, packaging, or communications.
- 1.4 SQFI delegates any or all its functions described herein to a SQFI-licensed certification body (CB).
- 1.5 These rules of use regulate the use of the SQF logo by verified sites only. These rules of use do not regulate the use of the SQF logo by SQFI, CBs, or other entities licensed by SQFI to use them, unless otherwise provided for in this or another instrument.

## 2 Conditions for Use

- 2.1 Sites may only use the SQF logo in the context of sharing or displaying the Verification Declaration Letter in a physical form or digital form on the company website. The SQF logo may only appear on the letter itself as it is issued by the certification body and not in any other form or position.
- 2.2 A site shall, for the duration of its Verification Letter, prove to the satisfaction of the CB that its SQF System satisfies the requirements set forth in the current edition of the SQF FVA program; and
- 2.3 A site must only use the SQF logo in accordance with these rules of use.

## 3 Reproduction

- 3.1 The site may not reproduce the SQF logo.

## **4 Obligations of a Site**

4.1 A site must:

- a. comply fully with these rules of use.
- b. direct any queries regarding their intended use of the SQF logo to the CB who issued the letter.
- c. discontinue any use of the SQF logo to which SQFI or the CB reasonably objects.
- d. give SQFI, a CB and/or their agents access to examine publicity material and all other such items bearing or indicating the SQF logo for the purpose of confirming compliance with these rules of use and the certificate; and
- e. pay within the specified time any fees set by the CB.

## **5 Disclaimer**

5.1 SQFI may from time to time alter these rules of use or make new rules, but no such alteration or new rule shall affect the use of the SQF logo by a site until six (6) months have expired from the date the alteration or new rules of use are first published by SQFI on its website (sqfi.com) unless specified by SQFI.

# Appendix 4: SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter Requirements

The Certification Body shall issue the Verification Declaration Letter, and the document shall be formatted in a manner not to be confused with the official SQF Certificate of Conformity for the SQF Fundamentals or SQF Food Safety Code certification.

## The Declaration Letter shall include the following:

- Title or Heading:  
**SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment – Verification Declaration Letter**
- The registered site legal entity name and address, which shall match the site’s name in the Site Directory when the site is registered
- Unique Facility ID assigned by the CB for identification
- Scope of operational processes and products assessed and SQF Food Sector Categories
- Grading criteria scored against (Basic or Intermediate)
- The date of the assessment
- The expiration date of the Declaration (1 year from the date of the assessment +75 days from the assessment)
- The following Declaration must appear verbatim:

*This site has undergone a fully remote evaluation of their self-assessment against the SQF Fundamentals program criteria. The site has demonstrated the capability to identify food safety hazards associated with the processes and products evaluated as identified in the scope declaration and implemented procedures appropriate to maintain necessary operating conditions and control of the identified hazards. This Declaration is not a continuing guarantee nor does the certification body or SQF guarantee performance of the site in its ongoing operations or delivery of products or services.*

### Signature of CB authority to issue Declaration Letter

Name and Title of CB authority

LOGO of Licensed SQF Certification Body



The following SQF Logo shall be displayed in the lower-right position of the page.



# ANNEX 1: Technical Assessment Policies and SOP – Guidance for Certification Bodies

## Verification Assessor Qualifications:

- The assessor must be contracted or employed by an SQFI-licensed certification body.
- The assessor must meet the certification body competency requirements for lead auditor based on knowledge, skill, and abilities.
- The assessor must meet the requirements of an SQF Fundamentals auditor or SQF Food Safety Auditor, approved at minimum for SQF Fundamentals audits.
- The assessor must be competent and qualified by the CB to conduct Information and Communications Technology (ICT) audits.
- The assessor must be competent to assess the FSC applicable to the scope of the SQF FVA assessment.
- Assessor shall have 5+ years third-party auditing experience comprised of a minimum of 15 food safety audits (or 120 audit hours) meeting any of these criteria:
  - » HACCP/Preventive Controls based food safety management system certification audits
  - » GFSI-benchmarked or recognized certification audits
  - » GFSI global markets toolkit-based CPO certification programs such as SQF Fundamentals

Assessor must shadow at least one SQF FVA assessment and be supervised conducting at least one SQF FVA by a qualified assessor (supervision being a review of the assessor's work product and conclusions and should include direct observation by the supervisor during the remote assessment activities).

## Assessment Process

Assessor shall provide notification of the assessment plan for the assessment day to the site approximately two weeks prior to the scheduled date.

The assessor shall prepare for the remote verification by conducting an initial phone call (expected to require 30 minutes or less) with the applicant to verify company information, scope of assessment, and to request any required documentation.

The assessor will pre-plan for the remote assessment by completing a review of the completed self-assessment and required documentation. This documentation must be provided to the CB in advance to ensure assessment timing can be met.

The assessor will complete the remote assessment by reviewing mandatory requirements and sampling the remainder of the requirements using the SQF Fundamentals verification points, according to the self-assessment level completed by the site (basic or intermediate).

Documents required for SQF FVA assessment preparation:

- completed SQF Fundamentals self-assessment, including non-conformances identified and corrective actions taken with evidence
- product and process descriptions
- documented food safety risks and control measures
- process flow charts, facility map, sanitation procedures, pest control procedures
- regulatory inspection report issue in the past 24 months where applicable (federal, state, or local reports), and the associated corrective actions (remote audits included)
  - » including evidence of corrective measures such as pictures, work orders, and documents and records
- corrective action evidence if applicable
- qualifications of the person responsible for the food safety plans

### **Assessing the Internal Audit/Self-Assessment**

All non-conformances identified by the site during its self-assessment or internal audit shall be corrected and corrective and preventive action plans implemented before the start of the third-party remote assessment by the assessor.

Plans for corrective and preventive action whose timeline for completion is a future date after the assessment will be reviewed by the assessor to confirm the plans are appropriate and effective. The site may be required to revise their plans based on assessor conclusions.

The site must demonstrate ability to identify known and foreseeable hazards and food safety risks associated with the product, process, and facility operations, aligned with commonly understood FDA Preventive Controls or HACCP methodology for identification, controls, and monitoring.

The assessor must verify sanitary operating conditions through objective evidence such as photographs, records, and ICT tools that provide evidence of conditions in all areas of the facility.

### **Verification of Regulatory Oversight**

The assessor shall confirm the site is registered with the FDA, USDA, or applicable governing federal food safety authority.

The Assessor must review any regulatory reports, warning letters, or other records of inspection relating to local, state, or federal health and food safety authorities issued to the site within the last two years. The assessor shall verify that any identified concerns have been corrected and procedures are in place to prevent reoccurrence.

Failure to have a current registration with the FDA or to correct findings issued by a regulatory body will result in a major non-conformance.

### **Non-conformance and Corrective Action:**

Any major non-conformance identified by the assessor during the assessment must be resolved by the site with approval by the assessor within 30 days of the remote assessment.

Any minor non-conformance identified by the assessor during the assessment shall be followed up for correction by the site within 30 days, for review and verification of records of closure by the assessor at the next annual assessment.

#### Example Assessment Plan

- Introductory phone call (30 minutes)
- Preparatory documentation review (60 mins)
- Opening meeting (10-15 mins)
- Virtual Tour (45-75 mins)
- Assessment Part 1 – Mandatory Requirements (30-90 mins)
- Assessment Part 2 – System Sampling Requirements (60-90 mins)
- Closing meeting (10-15 mins)
- Time to write an executive summary and NCRs (10-15 mins)
- Non-conformance corrective action review (30 mins)

*\*\*All times are estimates based on the client being prepared, providing data in advance, and proficient use of Remote Technology.*

### **Issuance of SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter**

The certification body shall issue a verification declaration letter to the site when it has determined the site has demonstrated conformance with the program expectations and corrected any findings to meet the requirements of the SQF Fundamentals verification criteria.

The declaration will conform to the requirements of Appendix 4. SQF Fundamentals Verification Declaration Letter Template

## ANNEX 2: Eligibility Determination

The site must provide evidence that it is a registered facility with the FDA or USDA. If the site meets the criteria for FDA “Qualified Facility,” they must attest as such to the FDA by visiting the website and creating the account. The site must create an account and select the box **“FURLS Qualified Facility Attestation (QFA)”** to register. (For reference only, this link is current at the time of publication of this document: <https://www.fda.gov/food/registration-food-facilities-and-other-submissions/qualified-facility-attestation>)

Per FDA, “Since October 1, 2018, facilities have been able to submit the qualified facility attestation forms electronically at <https://www.access.fda.gov/> via the Qualified Facility Attestation Module. Please note that facilities must have a valid food facility registration to submit their attestation.”

If the site is regulated by USDA or another regulatory body outside the USA, the site must attest to the CB directly that they meet these same criteria established for SQF FVA eligibility, outlined below. The CB will provide the necessary attestation documentation for the applicant to complete.

Applicants (domestic US and foreign product or ingredient suppliers) are eligible for the SQF FVA if they meet the following criteria:

The site meets the definition of a Qualified Facility per 21 CFR Chapter 1 Subchapter B Part § 117.3

**Qualified facility** means (when including the sales by any subsidiary; affiliate; or subsidiaries or affiliates, collectively, of any entity of which the facility is a subsidiary or affiliate) a facility that is a very small business as defined in this part, **or** a facility to which both of the following apply:

- (1) During the 3-year period preceding the applicable calendar year, the average annual monetary value of the food manufactured, processed, packed, or held at such facility that is sold directly to qualified end-users (as defined in this part) during such period exceeded the average annual monetary value of the food sold by such facility to all other purchasers; and
- (2) The average annual monetary value of all food sold during the 3-year period preceding the applicable calendar year was less than \$500,000, adjusted for inflation.

**Very small business** means, for purposes of this part, a business (including any subsidiaries and affiliates) averaging less than \$1,000,000, adjusted for inflation, per year, during the 3-year period preceding the applicable calendar year in sales of human food plus the market value of human food manufactured, processed, packed, or held without sale (**e.g.**, held for a fee).

## ANNEX 2: Eligibility Determination

The Certification Body shall provide the applicant with an eligibility questionnaire aligned with the following template. The CB may choose to use form template as their own. The certification body will verify eligibility using the completed form and obtain records of attestation or other evidence as needed for verification, and will retain this form with applicant records:

### SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment Eligibility Form Template

**Applicant business name:** [Company]

**Applicant business address:** [Company Address]

1. In the past three years, on average annually, did the facility have more annual revenue from direct-to-consumer sales than to retail? Yes  or No
2. And, in the past three years, did the facility make less than \$500,000 in sales, on average, annually? Yes  or No

If both answers are yes, the site is eligible for SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment

**Or**

1. Over the past three years, did the site produce less than \$1,000,000 worth of products annually, on average? Yes  or No

If yes, the site is eligible for SQF Fundamentals Verification Assessment.

If the site is not eligible, advise the site to apply for SQF Fundamentals Certification or SQF Food Safety Code Certification.



