

Free Guide

SQF: Safe Quality Food



Skills management software
for frontline workers

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What is a Safe Quality Food certification?

Safe Quality Food is a certification program designed by the Safe Quality Food Institute (SQFI) and recognized by the GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative).

There are five SQF certification programs, each aimed at a different type of operation or organization. They include the following:

- **Food safety program.** Helps organizations implement food safety practices
- **Fundamentals program.** Focused on food safety requirements for businesses that supply food to local and global food markets
- **Quality program.** Addresses process controls for food quality management
- **Food service program.** Food safety for businesses in the food service industry
- **Food retail program.** Focused on operational transparency and internal processes for food retail brands

Who needs SQF certification?

The SQF program is a voluntary auditing system, and is not necessarily mandatory. However, different types of organizations will need different SQF certifications, which may be required for certain markets.

Here's a quick rundown of the types of operations that will need the different SQF certifications.

- **Food safety** – food producers
- **Fundamentals** – small and medium-sized enterprises
- **Quality** – organizations that already have a food safety plan
- **Food service** – businesses in the food service industry
- **Food retail** – food retailers

How to earn a Safe Quality Food certification

Earning a SQF certification is a comprehensive process that involves several steps. Details are available on the SQFI's website, however, this process generally involves the following:

- Registering with SQFI
- Appointing an internal SQF practitioner
- Determining the scope of certification
- Documenting and implementing an SQF system
- Third-party auditing
- Certification

Renewal requirements for SQF certifications

SQF certifications are valid for one year. After that time, organizations must undergo a re-registration audit to renew their certification.

The benefits of SQF certification

Earning an SQF certification offers several benefits to organizations. Some key advantages include the following.



Improved process management

SQF certification enhances process management through robust risk identification and mitigation strategies. Your organization will be able to better identify potential hazards, enabling proactive measures for quality control and operational efficiency.



Reduced recalls and withdrawals

Adhering to SQF standards ensures thorough product evaluation, leading to enhanced safety protocols. This improves consumer trust, brand reputation, and overall food safety – leading to cost savings and a potential competitive edge.



Improved traceability

SQF-certified organizations use advanced tracking mechanisms and keep detailed records that allow for the rapid identification and containment of product issues.

Challenges in earning an SQF certification

Earning SQF certification may pose several challenges to organizations. They include the following.



Comprehensive documentation

SQF certification requires organizations to keep meticulous documentation of processes, procedures, and quality management systems. Developing, organizing, and maintaining these records may be time- and resource-intensive.



Infrastructure upgrades

Meeting SQF certification requirements often involves upgrading facilities and equipment to meet strict food safety and quality standards. This poses challenges in terms of identifying necessary upgrades, scheduling downtime for installations, and managing associated costs without disrupting operations.



Training and skill development

SQF certification often requires employees to undergo specialized training on food safety protocols and quality management practices. Ensuring that all staff members receive proper training, comprehend new procedures, and consistently adhere to can pose a challenge to organizations.

Tips and strategies for preparing for SQF certification

Here are a few tips for preparing for SQF certification:

- Familiarize yourself with the [SQF code required for your certification](#)
- Find the [certification body that is the best fit](#) for your operations
- Attend an [SQFI-backed certification course](#)

Resources for SQF certification

For more information and guidance on SQF certification, you can refer to the following resources.

The [Safe Quality Food Institute \(SQFI\)'s website](#) provides organizations with everything they will need to get started working toward an SQF certification, including SQF codes, a database of certification bodies, certification courses, and more.

Food & beverage skills matrix template. Our [free food & beverage industry skills matrix template](#) can help you track and manage the skills, competencies, and certifications necessary for SQF certification, or for your F&B operations as a whole.

ISO 22000 certification guide. Our [free certification guide for ISO 22000](#) may prove valuable when implementing a food safety management system, which is necessary for SQF certification.

HACCP certification guide. Our [free certification guide for HACCP](#) may also be a useful resource, as one of SQF's levels involves implementing an HACCP-based food safety plan.

Skills management for Safe Quality Food certification

AG5 stores all certifications in the cloud, providing all authorized personnel with access to the right version of approved certifications. This helps you easily keep track of all data and documentation related to an SQF certification across your organization.

Using AG5's skills management software, you can monitor the status of any type of certification that is relevant to your workforce, leveraging intuitive dashboards that provide you with a clear understanding of exactly what is needed to keep your employees skilled and safe.

[Book a demo](#)

FAQs about Safe Quality Food certifications

What is the scope of SQF certification?

SQF certification encompasses the entire supply chain for food products, as well as various areas of food production.

Is SQF certification mandatory?

It is not mandatory, but is globally recognized.

How long does it take to obtain an SQF certification?

It typically takes a few months for organizations that are adequately prepared.

What are the cost considerations for SQF certifications?

Cost considerations include auditing fees and registration fees.

What is the validity period of an SQF certification?

SQF certifications are valid for one year.

Can an SQF be integrated with any management systems?

Yes, SQF certifications can be integrated with food safety plans such as HACCP and ISO 22000.

How can you learn more about SQF certification?

Visit the [Safe Quality Food Institute \(SQFI\)'s website](#).

Sources

- [Safe Quality Food Institute \(SQFI\)](#)
- [Global Food Safety Initiative \(GFSI\)](#)
- [International Organization for Standardization \(ISO\)](#)
- [FDA \(HACCP\)](#)

(Sources checked 8.3.2024)

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