

# Certification Manual for SQF Code

*Food and Agricultural Services (SCS-FAS)*



**SCS**global  
SERVICES

*Setting the standard for sustainability™*

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## SQF Certification

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Thank you for your interest in SCS Global Services (SCS) Safe Quality Food (SQF) program. We are pleased that you are considering SCS as your certifier. SCS offers fast turnaround, competitive rates, attentive service and value for your money. We have a dedicated team of professionals and skilled auditors ready to assist you with all your SQF certification needs.

The first step in pursuing certification will be to complete an SCS Application located at: <http://www.scsglobalservices.com/food-safety> and our SQF Info Request for Audit Preparation. Upon receipt of your application and Info Request for Audit Preparation, we will scope and source the services requested by your company and shortly thereafter provide you with our proposal. The SQF Code is based on HACCP methods and principles, and provides a risk management system with reduced paperwork and audit burdens.

We recommend that you review the relevant Codes (SQF Food Safety Fundamentals (formerly Level 1), SQF Food Safety Code for Primary Production (formerly Level 2), SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacturing (formerly Level 2), SQF Food Safety Code for Food Retail (formerly Level 2), SQF Food Safety Code for Storage and Distribution (formerly Level 2), SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacture of Food Packaging (formerly Level 2), SQF Quality Code (formerly Level 3), and modules which contain the requirements for certification based on the SQF Food Sector Category (FS) you select to comply with in order to obtain certification. The Modules are found at <http://www.sqfi.com/documents/>, in document SQF Program Food Sector Categories. For example:

- For SQF Producer/Grower Certification:
  - FS-3, Growing and Production of Fresh Produce
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 7; GAP for farming of plant products (fruit and vegetables).
  - FS-4, Fresh Produce and Nut Packhouse Operations
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 10: GMP for pre-processing of plant products
  - FS-5, Extensive Broad Acre Agriculture Operations
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 8: GAP for farming of grains and pulses
- For SQF Manufactures/Processors:
  - FS-13, Bakery and Snack Food Processing
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 11: GMP for processing of food products
  - FS-14, Fruit and Vegetable Processing
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 11: GMP for processing of food products
  - FS-22, Processing of Cereal Grains
    - Modules 2: System elements and Module 11: GMP for processing of food products

In addition, SCS recommends that you review the rules for use of the SQF Quality Shield and Logo Rules which can be found in the relevant SQF Code at Appendix 3 and Quality Code at Appendix 5. (<http://www.sqfi.com/documents/>)

In pursuing certification, key determinants of timely processing include submitting the SCS Application & Info Request for Audit Preparation, obtaining a working knowledge of the SQF Code, submitting your documents for the Desk Audit and coordinating closely with SCS to set an on-site audit date.

Our fees for SQF certification are based on our commitment to making certification services cost-effective for all prospective clients, both large and small. Our charges are reflective of actual work performed, within a limited sliding scale fee structure. To prevent any potential conflict of interest, SCS charges for its certification reviews whether or not a certification is ultimately granted. This policy ensures that there is no incentive to issue certifications that are not earned.

## Key Terms

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SQFI has an extensive Program Vocabulary document that can be found at <https://www.sqfi.com/wp-content/uploads/Program-Vocab.pdf>

**Certification** — Certification by a Certification Body of a Supplier's (client) SQF Systems as complying with the SQF Code, as appropriate, following a Certification Audit, or Recertification, and Certify, Certifies and Certified shall have a corresponding meaning.

**Certification Audit** — an Audit of a Supplier's (Client) entire SQF System, including Desk Audit, where the Producer/Supplier of SQF Systems:

- a) has not been previously certified; or
- b) has been previously certified but requires certification as the earlier certification has been revoked or voluntarily discontinued by the Supplier.

**Certification Cycle**-The annual period between certification audits.

**Contract manufacturer**-Facilities that are contracted by the SQF certified supplier to produce, process, pack and /or store part of all of one or more products included in the supplier's SQF product scope. In some cases, a product may be manufactured interchangeably at the supplier's site and at a contracted facility. In other cases, a contract manufacturer may only be used intermittently to fulfill or supplement the supplier's production. Contract Manufacturers must follow the requirements outlined in the SQF Code.

**Corrective Action Plan (CAP)** — Plan prepared by the client on how to resolve non-conformities.

**Desk Audit** - A review of a Supplier's (client) SQF System documentation, part of and the initial stage of the Certification Audit. A desk audit ensures the system documentation substantially meets the requirements of the SQF Code, as appropriate.

**Exempt**-A term applied to elements of the SQF Code that the supplier does not wish to be included in the SQF System assessment, and has submitted a written request to the certification body to exclude, prior to commencement of any scheduled audit activity, Mandatory elements in Module 2 cannot be exempted. The certification body may confirm the reasons for exemption during the facility audit.

**HACCP Method** - Implementation of the Pre-requisite Programs and the application of HACCP Principles in the logical sequence of the 12 steps as described in the current edition of the CODEX Alimentarius Commission Guidelines, or the current edition of the HACCP guidelines developed and managed by the NACMCF. The SQF Code and the SQF Codes use the HACCP method to control food safety and other quality hazards in the segment of the food chain under construction.

**High-risk Process**-A facility or segregated room or area that requires specific controls and/or a higher level of hygienic practice to prevent food contamination.

**Non-Conformity** - A failure to meet the requirements of the Standard. Non-conformities are divided into three types; minor, major and critical.

**Re-Certification Audit** - an audit of a Supplier's (client) SQF System within 30 days of the anniversary of the certification.

**Scope of Certification** – Outlines the Food Sector Categories and those Products to be covered by the Certificate of Registration.

**Surveillance Audit** - means a six monthly Audit (or more frequently as determined by the Certification Body (SCS)) of part of a Supplier's SQF System where that system has previously been Certified or Re-Certified and whose Certification is current. Multi-site Certification requires Surveillance Audits every six months at a minimum.

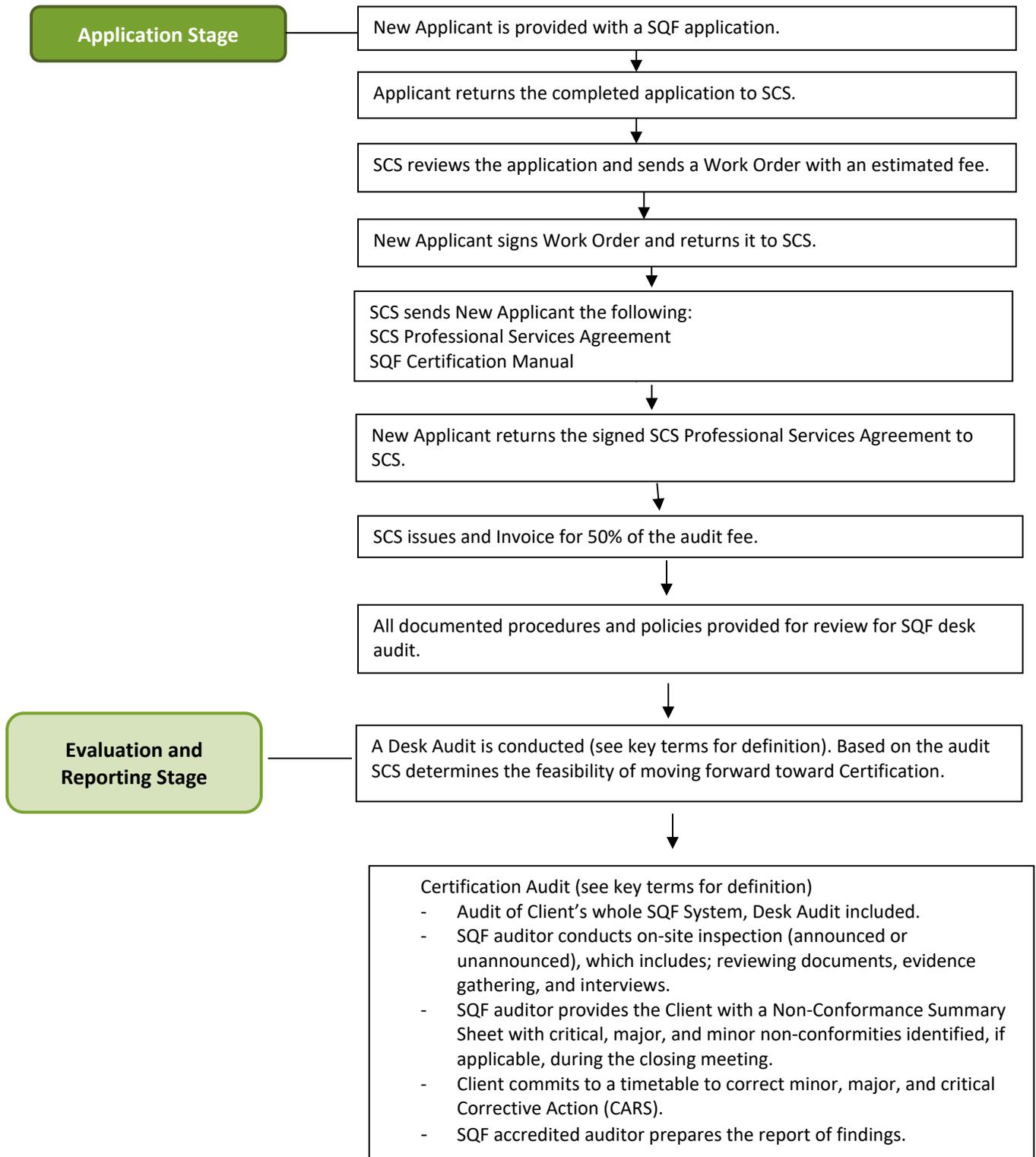
**SQF Practitioner**-Whether or not an SQF consultant is used, the SQF Code requires that every supplier have a suitably qualified SQF Practitioner on site to oversee the development, implementation, review and maintenance of the SQF System, including the food safety fundamentals, food safety plans (at level 2) and food quality plans (at level 3)."

**Multi-Sites** - Multi-site program. Multi-site certification involves an entity certified to the SQF Code (i.e. manufacturer, packer, warehouse), or eligible for such certification, that has a network of primary supplier sub-sites that are eligible for certification to the SQF Code and are all involved in the same low risk activity. The central site and all sub-sites are all located in the one country and operate under the same food safety legislation.

**N/A**-Stands for 'not applicable' and may be reported during the audit by the auditor when an element does not apply immediately but the facility is still responsible for the element. N/A may also be reported to avoid double debiting, e.g. 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."

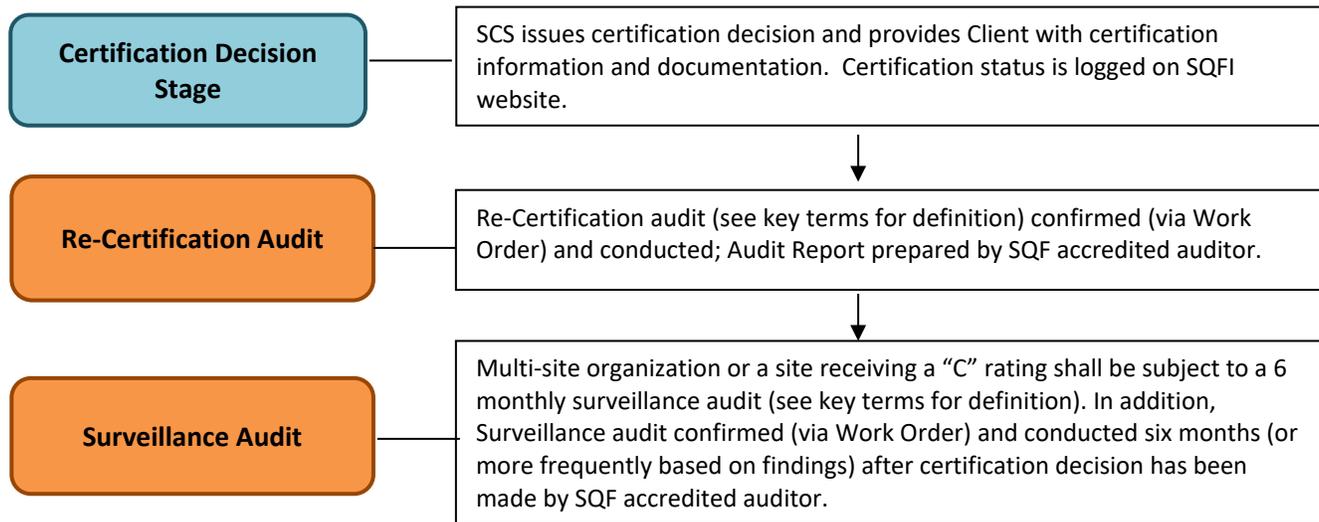
**Unannounced Audit**-A re-certification audit that is conducted once within every three certification cycles and thirty (30) days either side the recertification audit date without prior notice to the SQF certified facility.

## SQF Code (Food Safety) – Certification Program Process Diagram



## SQF Code (Food Safety) – Certification Program Process Diagram (cont.)

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## Certification Process

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Applicants enter into a 3-stage certification process, the **Application Stage, Evaluation and Reporting Stage, and Certification Decision Stage.**

### Application Stage:

- During the Application Stage, the **SCS Application Form** is completed and submitted. Completed form can be emailed, mailed or faxed.
- Upon receipt of the SCS Application Form, SCS will provide the Applicant with a **Work Order** and an estimated fee and the **SCS Professional Services Agreement**. Applicant signs and returns both documents.
- SCS issues an **invoice** for 50% of the audit fee. Client must remit payment before evaluation can proceed.
- The SQF Application Form must be completed and returned to SCS prior to the audit.

### Evaluation and Reporting Stage:

- For Clients entering the Evaluation and Reporting Stage, a **Certification Audit** will be scheduled. The Certification Audit will include both a **Desk Audit** (Off-Site) and an **On-Site Inspection**,
  - o Internal Audit: The Client must conduct an internal audit using the relevant SQF Self-Assessment Checklist.
  - o Desk Audit (or Document Review Audit): This audit is conducted offsite. The Client must submit pertinent food safety documents to SCS. Please review the SQF Standard to learn more about the SQF desk audit and the certification process. See Part A section 2 of the

relevant SQF Code. SCS shall notify Client of corrections or corrective actions, necessary. The onsite certification audit cannot begin until all corrections or corrective action for major and minor non-conformities from the document review part of the audit have been closed out and approved by SCS.

- o **On-Site Inspection:** SCS will work with the client to schedule the on-site Certification Audit. An Audit Plan will be sent by SCS prior to the inspection after all major, and/or minor nonconformities are closed.
- o **Unannounced Recertification Audit:** Within three (3) certification cycles the certification body shall conduct one (1) unannounced re-certification audit of the supplier. The unannounced audit shall occur in the supplier's facility within the sixty (60) day re-certification window (i.e., the anniversary date of the initial certification audit +/- thirty (30) days). Currently certified SQF suppliers shall be required to undertake one (1) unannounced audit within the three (3) year certification cycle.
  - i. The supplier's certification cycle begins with the initial certification audit date. Unannounced re-certification audits shall occur once in every three (3) certification cycles.
  - ii. Unannounced audits shall not be conducted on the initial certification audit or on a surveillance audit.
  - iii. If a supplier changes certification bodies, the supplier's unannounced re-certification audit schedule shall not change.
  - iv. The unannounced re-certification audit shall follow the protocol under the SQF Code, Part A, section 4.3 and 4.4.
  - v. Multi-site suppliers are exempted from unannounced audits.
  - vi. The date of the unannounced audit shall be determined by the certification body within the 60 day re-certification audit window. The unannounced audit year shall be determined between the supplier and certification body.
  - vii. A defined blackout period shall be established by negotiation between the supplier and their certification body that prevents the unannounced re-certification audit from occurring out of season or when the facility is not operating for legitimate business reasons.
  - viii. Immediate suspension of the supplier certificate will occur in facilities that refuse entry to the auditor for an unannounced audit.

### **Certification Decision Stage:**

- During the Certification Decision Stage, the SCS auditor prepares a report of findings at the time of the inspection, validating the criteria that have been met and identifying areas where additional work is needed under a series of non-conformities. (Refer to the ***Evaluation of Findings Addendum*** at the end of this document for a process flow chart.)

- The SCS auditor completes the audit checklist and non-conformance summary sheet where details of corrective actions and types of nonconformities are documented. Nonconformities may be minor, major and critical, requiring a timeframe for correction.
- The Client prepares the Corrective Action Plan (CAP).
- The **Final Decision** to issue new Certification, extend an existing Certification, or deny/suspend/revoke an existing Certification is made by SCS.
  - For Food Safety Fundamentals, Food Safety Code, and Quality Code: The SQFI Logo shall be issued.
  - For Quality Code: The SQFI Quality Shield shall be used.
  - Suppliers consent to have their certification or registration details displayed on the SQFI website.

## Maintaining Certification & Audit Frequency

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To maintain certification, a Client is required to attain a “C” (Comply) Audit rating or greater, ensure the number and type of nonconformities detected during the Audit does not exceed the threshold level and ensure all nonconformities are corrected within the timeframe specified.

Audit Frequency is determined by the Client’s SQF System rating and the type/number of nonconformities detected during a Certification or Re-Certification Audit. Refer to section 3.3 Audit Score and Rating of the SQF Code found at: <http://www.sqfi.com/documents/>

Generally, SQF **Re-Certification Audits** are conducted annually. A 60 day period (30 days either side of the initial date of certification) is provided to allow SCS to complete the audit. Before Re-Certification, the Client is required to correct any non-conformances found during the audit and SCS shall close out the non-conformances and post the Client’s certification details on the SQFI database. This audit verifies the continued effectiveness of the Client’s SQF System in its entirety. The Re-Certification Audit shall provide for a review of past performance of the SQF System and is conducted annually on the anniversary date of the issue of the initial Certification.

### **Notification of Product Recalls and Regulatory Infringements:**

Upon identification that a certified supplier initiates a food safety event that requires public notification (such as Class I or Class II recall), the supplier shall notify the certification body and the SQFI in writing at [foodsafetycrisis@sqfi.com](mailto:foodsafetycrisis@sqfi.com) within twenty-four (24) hours of the event. The supplier’s selected certification body and the SQFI shall be listed in the supplier’s essential contacts lists as defined in module 2, element 2.6.3 of the SQF Code. The certification body shall notify the SQFI within a further forty-eight (48) hours of any action they intend to take to ensure the integrity of the certification.

### **Change of Ownership:**

When a certified supplier's business has been sold and the business name is retained, the new owner shall, within thirty (30) calendar days of the change of ownership, notify the certification body and apply to retain the SQF certification and the existing certification number. In such cases, the certification body is required to complete a full facility audit.

In cases where the ownership of a certified supplier changes but the staff with major responsibility for the management and oversight of the SQF System has been retained, the certification body may retain the existing audit frequency status. In making this application, the certification body shall determine that staff with major responsibility for the management and oversight of the SQF System has been retained through confirmation by site audit within sixty (60) days of change of ownership. If there are significant changes in site management and personnel, the certification body shall complete a certification audit and issue a new certificate of registration and a new certification number. The audit frequency applicable to a new certification shall apply.

### **Relocation of Premises:**

When a certified supplier relocates the business premises, the supplier's certificate of registration is no longer valid until a successful re-certification of the new premises is conducted.

## **Rights & Responsibilities**

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SCS Clients have a right to non-discriminatory policies and procedures. Procedures shall not be used to impede or inhibit access to applicants. SCS shall make its services available to all applicants whose activities fall within our declared field of operation. Access shall not be conditional upon the size of the Client's operations, nor shall certification be conditional upon the number of certificates already issued.

The criteria against which the production or handling practices of a Client are evaluated shall be those outlined in the specified Standard. SCS shall confine requirements, evaluation and decision on certification to matters specifically related to the scope of the certification scheme(s) being considered.

SCS reserves the right to suspend, withdraw or terminate certificates. Reasons for suspension, withdrawal and termination include, but are not limited to: unwillingness or inability to correct nonconformities, unwillingness or inability to meet financial or contractual arrangements; misusing or damaging the integrity of the SCS or relevant trademarks; intentional violation of requirements; or association with fraud.

For a complete description of rights and responsibilities please refer to the SCS Professional Services Agreement.

For additional information concerning SCS Client rights and responsibilities, please visit:  
<http://www.scsglobalservices.com/about-scs>