



QUICK START GUIDE

for
SQF
Implementation

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Food processors, and food packaging manufacturers, and others in the industry are becoming certified to meet customer demands and to stay competitive in the marketplace.

WHAT IS SQF?

SQF stands for Safe Quality Food and is a food safety certification scheme. Once your company implements a food safety system that meets the requirements of the SQF Code, you will be audited by a Third-Party Certification Body. Once they verify that you are meeting the requirements, they will provide your company with your SQF Certification.

SQF, by the SQF Insititute, is recognized by GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative). This gives you the recognition you need to supply products to leading manufacturers and retails worldwide. More and more retailers and manufacturers are asking for GFSI recognized certification. Food processors, and food packaging manufacturers, and others in the industry are becoming certified to meet customer demands and to stay competitive in the marketplace.

SQF Guidance Documents

SQF Documents can be downloaded at the SQFI Website and include:

- SQF Code
- Guidance for Developing, Documenting and Implementing SQF
- Additional guidance documents

The two main things SQF can do for your organization are to:

- Provide a rigorous system to manage food safety risks and provide safe products for use by companies in the food industry.
- Provide a recognized food safety certification. This allows your customers to have confidence in your food safety program and know that you have a rigorous food safety system in place.

Becoming certified can help you stay competitive and qualified to work with your current customers as well as to gain access to new ones.

BENEFITS OF SQF

The top reasons cited by our customers and visitors for investigating and pursuing certification are:

Managing Risk

First and foremost, building an SQF System will provide your company with effective management of food safety hazards by creating an environment capable of producing safe product and a management system to continually manage, monitor, validate and improve the system.

Maintain Current Customers

Statistics show that approximately 1 out of 4 certified companies are asking their suppliers to achieve certification. Chances are that if you have not been asked yet, you will be asked in the near future. Becoming certified can help you stay competitive and qualified to work with your current customers as well as to gain access to new ones.

Increase your market reach

Large retailers and multinational manufacturers or processors are also demanding certification of their suppliers. Having SQF Certification means you are qualified to supply these organizations or their suppliers, opening up a large market for your products.

Prepare to comply with FSMA

Countries across the globe are making changes to food safety regulations, including the United States and its Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). SQF prepares your organization to meet many or most of the FSMA requirements.

SQF LEVELS

Companies can select from 3 different levels of SQF Certification.

Food Safety Fundamentals

(Previously called Level 1)

Focused on food safety fundamentals, this is the most basic level with the fewest requirements. It is most appropriate for low risk operations. It does not require HACCP. It is not benchmarked by GFSI.

This level is not recognized by GFSI.

Food Safety Code

(Previously called Level 2)

This level includes food safety fundamentals and a HACCP approach to managing risks and hazards. This level is comparable to the ISO 22000, FSSC 22000 and BRC standards and registration schemes.

New in Edition 8: Instead of using 2 documents (module 2 + another module), you will use one. So, for example:

- if you are using Module 2 + Module 11 in 7.2, you will use Food Safety Code for Manufacturers in Edition 8.
- if you are using Module 2 + Module 13 in 7.2, you will use Food safety Code for Manufacture of Packaging Materials in Edition 8.

This level is recognized by GFSI.

Quality

(Previously called Level 3)

This will include system elements relating to quality. The results of your quality audit will not affect the score of your food safety audit.

This level is also recognized by GFSI.

*Read more about
the available
industry sectors in
the SQF Code*

SQF INDUSTRY SECTORS

There are 5 sectors.

Primary Production (modules 5, 6, 7, 7H, 8) now referred to as Food Safety Fundamentals)

Manufacturing (Modules 3, 4, 9, 10, 11). Now includes Pet Food and Animal Feed.

Storage and Distribution (Module 12)

Manufacture of Packaging Materials (Module 13)

Retail (new, Module 15)

IMPLEMENTING SQF AND PREPARING FOR CERTIFICATION

In a nutshell, here is a list of things you will need to do in order to become certified to SQF.

Download the Code and Guidance documents free at <http://www.sqfi.com/documents/>.

Select the applicable modules for your industry segment and activities.

Register in the SQF database (<http://www.sqfi.com/suppliers/assessment-database/>).

Select a certification body.

Begin implementation:

- Designate and train your SQF Practitioner.
- Designate teams to design, document and implement the required processes and food safety fundamentals.
- Train your internal audit team.
- Run your system, collect records, perform internal audits, management review and HACCP team meetings.
- Make corrections and improvements to your system.
- Schedule and complete your audits.



ASSIGN YOUR PEOPLE RESOURCES

SQF Practitioner

An SQF certified company must designate an SQF Practitioner. This person will be responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the system, as well as the maintenance of the SQF Program. They must be an employee of the company and be trained on SQF and HACCP.

“Senior site management shall designate an SQF practitioner for each site with responsibility and authority to:

- i. Oversee 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. Take appropriate action to ensure the integrity of the SQF System; and*
- iii. Communicate to relevant personnel all information essential to ensure the effective implementation and maintenance of the SQF System.*

2.1.2.5 The SQF practitioner shall:

- i. Be employed by the site as a company employee on a full-time basis;*
- ii. Hold a position of responsibility in relation to the management of the site’s SQF System;*
- iii. Have completed a HACCP training course;*
- iv. Be competent to implement and maintain HACCP based food safety plans; and*
- v. Have an understanding of the SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacturing and the requirements to implement and maintain an SQF System relevant to the site’s scope of certification.*

Becoming a Practitioner

To become an SQF Practitioner there are 3 requirements. You will need to:

- 1. Be a full time employee** in a position of responsibility for the management of the SQF System. The practitioner may not be a consultant or contract position.

2. Complete a HACCP Course. This course does not have to be approved by SQFI, but the practitioner must be competent to implement and maintain the HACCP system

3. Be trained on and understand the SQF Code. You have options for the training:

◇ Online Training on the SQF Code

We recommend our [Online Complete Training Package for the Practitioner](#) or our [Premium Online Implementation & Templates Package](#). Both of these programs meet requirements for training the practitioner. The Premium Online All-in-One also includes online training sessions for additional employees and internal auditors.

◇ Classroom Training Programs

For example Implementing SQF Systems, a 2 day classroom training (www.sqfi.com).

Use the team approach for an efficient implementation.

Implementation Teams

Our years of experience assisting companies with Management Systems Implementation have resulted in a very effective method of implementation using a team approach.

As we explain this method, think about how big your organization is; for smaller organizations we have used “teams” as small as one or two people. For larger organizations, teams are typically 5 to 7 people.

We recommend using several teams.

SQF Steering Team

Made up of top management and the SQF Practitioner to lead the project and accomplish management tasks during the implementation.

HACCP Team

As required by the standard to complete HACCP and Prerequisite requirements, and led by the SQF Practitioner.

SQF Task Teams

Several Task Teams to design, document and implement the SQF Food Safety Management System procedures to complete your system.

The Task Teams that are set up will each look at the requirements for their process and procedure. They will be responsible for comparing the requirements of the standard to the current process used at your company. They will:

- Design a new process, or modify the current process so the company will be meeting SQF requirements.
- Write a procedure for the new process, and give it to the SQF Steering Team to review.
- Once the procedure is approved, they will introduce it to employees, training as needed. The company will then start using the new process/procedure.

By using the team approach for implementation appropriate individuals from all parts of the organization are involved in the project, leading to an effective and efficient Food Safety Management System.

SQF Steering Team

We use one Team to lead the project, and call this the SQF Steering Team. The function of the team is very important.

This team will meet on a regular basis during the project to complete management tasks, monitor progress of the project, resolve questions from the other teams, allocate the resources needed for the implementation and coordinate the design of the new Food Safety Management System (FSMS).

The SQF Steering Team will be made up of top management representing each of the areas of your company. For example, include:

- a production manager
- a quality manager
- an administrative manager
- an engineering manager and
- an executive manager

This will give the team the knowledge and authority it needs to make decisions and devote resources to the project.

The SQF Practitioner and/or project manager for the implementation project should lead this team. The team leader will schedule meetings, prepare agendas, and collect information to bring to the meetings.



IMPLEMENTATION: STEP-BY-STEP

The steps outlined here are recommended steps based on our experience implementing management system. Adapt them as needed for your organization. The training programs and documents we have referenced are all available on our website: www.22000-tools.com. They are available individually and in our [Online Complete Training Package for the Practitioner](#) or our [Premium Online Implementation & Templates Package](#).

Practitioner is Trained on Requirements of SQF

The Practitioner should understand the SQF Requirements for both the System Elements (Module 2) and the applicable Food Safety Fundamentals (the Module that applies to your type of business).

Practitioner and Management Prepare Project Plan

The practitioner works with the management team to prepare the project plan. This is detailed in the next section of the quick start guide.

Identify Steering Team

Management identifies the “SQF Steering Team”. See the example SQF Steering Team first team meeting agenda and information in the SQF Steering Team section

Conduct the Gap Analysis

The SQF Practitioner takes the “Conducting the Gap Analysis” training, downloads the checklists from the training and plans and leads the Gap Analysis Audit. The Gap Analysis is much like an Internal Audit. It compares the system you have in place to the SQF requirements. The requirements that you don’t yet meet need to be addressed. The Gap will identify those areas.

Identify Task Teams

Based on the Gap Analysis results, the SQF Steering Team identifies the Task Teams needed to address changes or implementation of processes for each of the SQF System Elements. For example:

- Management Commitment
- Document Control and Records
- Specifications and Product Development

- Contract Service Providers and Contract Manufacturers
- Food Legislation
- Good Manufacturing Practices
- Food Safety Plan
- Approved Supplier Program
- Control of Nonconforming Product and Equipment
- Rework
- Finished Product Release
- Validation and Verification
- Corrective and Preventive Action
- Product Sampling Inspection Analysis
- Internal Audits
- Product Identification Trace Withdrawal and Recall
- Food Defense and Food Fraud
- Allergen Management
- Training

Train Task Team Members

Identify training requirements for those assigned to the Task Teams. *Introduction to SQF* is our recommended training for those team members.



Use the video tutorials that are provided in the *Templates and Tutorials Package*, the *Complete Training Package*, the *Premium Training Package* and *Corporate Training Package*. There is a tutorial provided for each topic listed below and will educate your team about the tasks ahead and how to complete them.

Train HACCP Team

Identify training requirements for the HACCP Team. *Introduction to SQF* is our recommended training for the HACCP team members. Team members will also need HACCP Training.

Complete Detailed Project Plan & Timeline

The SQF Steering Team completes the Gantt chart or the project plan provided in the *Complete Training Package* with the projected dates and timelines for the task team activities.

Document Processes

The Task Teams meet as scheduled to complete the changes to and implementation and documentation of the new processes. Use the document templates, forms and implementation plans from The *Templates and Tutorials Package*, the *Complete Training Package*, the *Premium Training Package* and *Corporate Training Package*.

Review and Approve Documentation

The SQF Steering Team reviews and approves all the procedures and documentation developed by the task teams.

Identify Internal Auditors

The SQF Steering Team identifies individuals to be Internal Auditors, and prepares an initial internal audit schedule. The individuals complete *Internal Auditor Training*

Conduct Internal Audits

Start the internal audits when the SQF System Elements processes are completed.

Management Review Meetings

Hold management review meetings, conduct internal audits and complete corrective actions. Follow the new SQF Procedures that the task teams developed, maintain records and make improvements.

Run Your System

You will run your system, conduct internal audits and hold management review meetings for about 3 months. Then you will be ready for your certification audit.

CERTIFICATION AUDIT

Initial Certification to SQF

Choose an accredited certification body for your organization. Certification companies are listed on the [SQFI website](#). Once you have implemented the system your certification body will perform a Document Review to determine readiness for your next step, the on-site Audit.

If the audit identifies areas of the system that do not comply with the SQF Code, you will need to correct nonconformances before you will be recommended for certification. Once those are corrected and verified your company will be recommended for certification. The system will then be monitored by your auditor through surveillance audits.

The SQF Certification Audit

During the certification audit the SQF Auditor will examine your SQF System to determine:

- Whether the system has been implemented effectively
- Whether there is evidence of Management Commitment to the maintenance and improvement of the system
- Whether activities comply with regulatory, customer and SQF requirements

APPENDIX

Use these sample documents as a reference as you implement your SQF system.

THE PROJECT PLAN

It is important to prepare a project plan to help organize and manage the project. A sample project plan template is provided on the next page. Lets look at how to prepare the plan.

First, identify your project goals. Answer the questions:

1. When will you begin your project? Consider the date of the Gap Analysis as the beginning date.
2. What is your target date for having the SQF Certification? You will work backwards from this date as you prepare your project timeline. Your date should be reviewed later. This will be your schedule, but as you perform the gap analysis and develop the task list, you can determine whether that date is realistic. It will depend on the status of your current food safety management system and the resources available to you as you complete the system.

Second, identify responsibilities for the project.

1. Identify the SQF Practitioner. The SQF Practitioner should act as project manager for the implementation project.
2. Identify who makes up Senior Management.
3. Identify the SQF Steering Team. As you saw in the steps in the previous section, the SQF Steering Team plays a key role in managing the project. The SQF Practitioner should be the team leader, and senior management should make up the rest of the team.

Third, start to fill in the timeline for the project.

1. Schedule training for the SQF Practitioner.
2. Schedule the Gap Analysis. Remember that the SQF Practitioner should complete the Gap Analysis Training and download checklists before the Gap Analysis.
3. Plan anywhere from 2 to 5 days for the Gap Analysis. It will depend on the size of your company, the number of auditors and the number and complexity of your processes.
4. Schedule the SQF Steering team meeting to assign the task team members, and schedule training for the team members.
5. Schedule training for the task team members.
6. Announce your project to all employees. Plan a meeting or meetings to make employees aware of the project, what

SQF Certification is, and why it is important to the organization.

7. Document your target completion date and target dates for your certification audits.

SQF PROJECT PLAN

Project Goals

Start Date _____

Target for completion _____

Responsibilities

SQF Practitioner _____

Senior Management _____

SQF Steering Team _____

Timetable

Step	Start Date	Completion Target
SQF Practitioner completes oneline training		
Conduct Gap Analysis		
SQF Steering Team Meetings		
Task Team Members are Trained		
Announce Project to All Employees		
System Complete		
Desk Audit		
Certification Audit		
Certificate in Hand		

THE GAP ANALYSIS

Once you have outline the project timeline, it is time to complete the Gap Analysis and identify the specific tasks that will need to be done to build your SQF System. The gap analysis will identify where your current system meets requirements, and where changes and additions to your system must be designed and implemented.

The outcome of the gap analysis will be a task list for your project. You will assign the tasks to the task teams that you have identified.

1. Complete the “Gap Analysis Checklist & Training” session to learn how to plan and conduct the gap, what to do with your results, and download checklists for your audit. Note that this training is included in the Complete Training Package.
2. Identify any other auditors that will be involved, and brief them on the audit plan and techniques.
3. Inform employees that the audit will be taking place, and the purpose of the audit. You want employees to feel comfortable answering auditors questions; understanding the purpose of the audit will help establish their comfort with the process.
4. Conduct the audit and document findings on the checklists.
5. Create a task list, or use the list provided in the SQF Templates and Implementation Tools or Complete Training Package. Where ever you identify requirements that are not yet being complied with, document a task on the list.
 - ◇ The SQF Templates and Implementation Tools and Complete Training Packages provide both an overall project task list, and individual team task lists. If you have purchased the package, simply add the tasks to the lists provided. Many common tasks are already on the individual team task lists as well as information on the process requirements and a place to assign timelines.
6. Provide the appropriate task list to each task team.

THE SQF STEERING TEAM

Once the Gap Analysis has been completed, start your SQF Steering team meetings. During the first team meeting discuss the responsibilities of the SQF Steering team. If there are members that were not involved in creating the project plan, review the project plan and list of steps to implementation.

Proposed agenda for the 1st SQF Steering Team meeting:

1. Review the list of steps to implementation.
2. Review the responsibilities of the SQF Steering Team (these responsibilities will not all be completed in the first meeting, but should be reviewed to clarify the purpose of the team.)
 - ◇ Identify task teams and members
 - ◇ Identify training requirements for task team members, HACCP team members and employees. Use the Premium Training and Templates Package to provide multiple training sessions to train the SQF Practitioner, HACCP Team, Internal Auditors and others.
 - ◇ Meet regularly to monitor the project timeline and task team activities and provide resources as needed to meet project goals.
 - ◇ Choose a certification body, and schedule the certification audit.
 - ◇ Review procedures and other documentation created by the task teams.
 - ◇ Review and customize the Management Responsibility procedure. Complete tasks assigned to management.
 - ◇ Assign internal auditors and create an audit schedule.
 - ◇ Resolve issues as they arise.
3. Identify task teams, team leaders and members. Assign timelines for each team to meet. See our example table in Appendix A.

THE TASK TEAM MEETINGS

The team leader is responsible for scheduling the meetings according to the timeline on the gantt chart. During the first team meeting discuss the purpose of the SQF Steering Team and Task Teams. Give an introduction to the purpose of the individual Task Team that is meeting.

Proposed agenda for the first team meeting:

1. View the video tutorial.
2. Review the Master Project Plan Task List and the Implementation Plan.
3. Review the list of steps for the implementation project.
4. Provide a copy of the procedure and forms templates for the SQF System Elements process that the team has been assigned.
5. Review the procedure and forms.
6. Provide a copy of the teams task list. Discuss the tasks that have been assigned.
7. Discuss the proposed timeline that was assigned by the SQF Steering team for the task team, and start to assign dates and responsibilities for the individual tasks on the list.
8. Determine the frequency of the team meetings, and schedule the next meeting. Prepare the next meetings agenda, and identify action items to be completed before the next meeting. Assign responsibility for the action items.

Subsequent meetings:

1. Watch the tutorial in the online training package as a team.
2. Review the requirements of the SQF Code, and the responsibilities listed in this plan.
3. Review the example procedure and forms. The procedure describes a process that can be used to address the tasks on the Master Project Plan. You will use that as a starting point, and make changes to customize the process for your organization and method of doing things.
4. Review the tasks on the Master Implementation Plan form for your team.
5. Set up a team meeting schedule to assign and complete

these tasks. Meeting weekly or every other week at the same time is an effective method.

Future Action Items:

1. When the items have been addressed, or plans are in place to address them, work to revise the procedure to reflect your new, compliant process. Revise the forms as needed.
2. When completed, submit your new documentation (Procedure, Related Forms, List of Records) and your completed plan to the SQF Practitioner for review and approval.
3. List any additional records (not listed in the procedure already) that should be retained for your process on the table below so they can be incorporated into the records table. Share this table with the Document Control and Records team.

SAMPLE PROJECT TIMELINE

Use the timeline on the next page as a sample for creating your own to plan and track your project progress.

