

## WHAT FOOD SAFETY SCHEME IS RIGHT FOR MY COMPANY?

### MY CUSTOMER TOLD ME I NEED HACCP TO SUPPLY THEM, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) is a systematic and preventive approach to controlling food safety hazards during the manufacture of food products through a foundation of effective preventive controls/prerequisite programs such as conditions respecting the establishment, sanitation, training/competency, hygiene, conveyances and equipment, etc. HACCP is specific to the product and process. This includes the entire food supply chain, from harvesting and receiving to packaging and distribution.

Proper development and implementation of a HACCP plan is proven to produce a consistently safe, quality product and protect the health and safety of your consumers. In addition, it can save money through reduced rework, waste and product returns and can reduce your customer complaints. It may also protect your company from legal liability and shows due diligence (the company has done everything in its control to produce a safe food for its customers). This is shown through a properly documented food safety program. Having a well-documented and implemented HACCP plan can be a marketing tool.

Clarify with the customer exactly what they are looking for. Do they simply want to see a written HACCP plan and know the company is following it; or do they want the company to be second or third-party audited to a certain preferred standard?

### MY CUSTOMER/RETAILER IS ASKING FOR HACCP CERTIFICATION, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Clarify with the customer whether they require your company to have a HACCP certification or do they mean a HACCP-based food safety management program. Some certification bodies offer HACCP certification and GMP (Good Manufacturing Practices) audits and may have local auditors. These audits verify that your company is committed to following a HACCP-based food safety management program.

### MY CUSTOMER/RETAILER IS ASKING FOR GFSI, WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is an industry driven initiative providing leadership and guidance to oversee food safety standards to protect the food supply chain. Your customer wants to know that your company meets a GFSI benchmarked scheme. Common GFSI schemes are SQF, BRCGS, CanadaGAP, FSSC 22000, IFS, and GlobalG.A.P.

## DOES THE AUDIT NEED TO BE A THIRD-PARTY AUDIT, OR CAN IT BE A SECOND PARTY AUDIT?

This is up to you or to your customer. Ask what they require. A number of companies require a second party audit as a component of their Approved Supplier Program. This type of audit can be done by the customer or through a contracted organization on behalf of the customer.

Third-party audits are independent from the customer; free of any conflict of interest and are carried out by an audit organization or through audits by an accredited certification body. The auditor should supply you with a written audit report and may also provide a certificate. Typically, re-certification must be conducted annually.

## WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS FOR THIRD-PARTY AUDITS?

There are many options for third-party audits. Some common audits are listed below.

**Supplier Assurance Audits:** Standard consists of preventive controls/prerequisite programs, HACCP plans, food defence, and crisis management. This standard is common among local processors; it is also widely accepted by major retailers and the supply chain.

**Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP):** Standard consists of premises, storage and distribution, equipment and maintenance, training and personnel management, sanitation and pest control, recall and traceability and product protection such as foreign material, allergens, and presence of a HACCP plan. Small to medium sized companies tend to sign up for this.

**Good Distribution Practices (GDP):** This standard is specific to distribution centers and storage facilities. The audit is similar to the GMP audit mentioned above and includes the following preventive controls/prerequisite programs: premises, storage and distribution, equipment and maintenance, transportation, training and personnel management, sanitation and pest control as well as traceability and recall.

## GFSI (GLOBAL FOOD SAFETY INITIATIVE)

**Safe Quality Food (SQF):** This standard encompasses food safety codes across the whole food supply chain, from primary production to ingredient manufacturing and product packaging and distribution. SQF also offers a Quality Code. This standard is administered by the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) – The Food Industry Association; as a result, the program receives continuous retailer feedback.

**Brand Reputation through Compliance Global Standard (BRCGS):** This standard is applicable to all food processing facilities where products are handled, processed, or packed including fresh produce, slaughter facilities, processing plants and ready to eat products. BRCGS also has a packaging materials standard and storage and distribution standard. This standard is divided into nine sections: senior management commitment, food safety plan - HACCP, food safety and quality management system, site standards, product control, process control, personnel, high-risk, high-care and ambient high-care production risk zones, and requirements for traded products.

**FSSC 22000:** This standard encompasses the whole food supply chain as defined in ISO/TS22003. This scheme offers standards for both food and feed supply. FSSC 2200 offers a quality option as well.

**CanadaGAP:** A standard for the production, handling and brokerage of fresh fruit and vegetables. Manuals, self-assessments, guidance, audit, and training materials are available online at [www.canadagap.ca](http://www.canadagap.ca)

**GlobalG.A.P.:** This standard is for all sub scopes of crops, livestock, and aquaculture. Their goal is safe and sustainable agriculture worldwide. There are several program options however only two are GFSI; Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) for crops, livestock and aquaculture, Produce Handling Assurance (PHA) for post-harvest activities for fruits and vegetables. The IFA standard encompasses food safety and traceability, environment, worker's health, safety, and welfare, animal welfare, integrated crop management (ICM), integrated pest control (IPC), quality management system (QMS) and HACCP. The Produce Handling Assurance (PHA) provides stand-alone food safety and traceability certification.

**IFS Food (International Featured Standards):** This food manufacturing standard covers six sections: governance and commitment, food safety and quality management system, resource management, operational processes, measurements, analysis and improvements, and food defence plan.

## WHAT FOOD SAFETY OPTION IS RIGHT FOR ME?

This truly depends on your product, process, and customer requests as well as how committed company management is to establishing or strengthening the current food safety program. Management commitment and resources are necessary to create and maintain a successful food safety program. Think carefully when choosing a scheme; before you begin to develop and implement a scheme make sure that it will be accepted by your primary retailers/customers (although all GFSI standards are fundamentally the same and should be accepted worldwide).

## I NEED A FOOD SAFETY PROGRAM, NOW WHAT?

Identify what is already in place. Current written programs, documents and best practices that are already in place may help you comply. The best way to determine where you stand is to complete a self-assessment or an internal audit to the GFSI standard you wish to comply with. Your company may prefer to use a reputable food safety consultant to conduct a gap analysis or pre-audit assessment.

## I THINK I AM READY; HOW DO I GO ABOUT BEING AUDITED?

- Get a copy of the audit standard of your choice.
- Become familiar with the standard requirements and/or attend a training session.
- Register with a certification body; there are several different options. To save costs ask if they have local auditors in the Maritimes.
- Designate a Food Safety Team Leader, if not already in place.
- Conduct your own self-assessment to the audit standard or have a gap analysis or pre-audit assessment done by a reputable food safety consultant.
- Close the gaps and correct any deficiencies identified in your assessment (such as premises, equipment, written program, etc.) before the audit. If you need help with program development, implementation or training, contact a food safety consultant.