

A71VA02

Procedure for SQF certifications



Completely revised document no tracking of changes

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1 Purpose

In the procedure A71VA02 – as a supplement to the procedure A00VA02 and A22VA02, the specific requirements in accordance to SQF Edition 8 and Criteria for SQF Certification Bodies 8th Edition October 2017 are laid down.

2 Area of application

This documented procedure applies for TÜV NORD CERT GmbH (TN CERT) as well as all international proceedings which make use of TN CERT GmbH accreditations, approvals, notifications etc. and/or when delivering TN CERT GmbH services.

SQF Food Safety Fundamentals (for small businesses)

The SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacturing and the applicable Modules

The SQF Food Safety Code for Storage and Distribution

The SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacture of Food Packaging

The SQF Retail/Wholesale Grocery Code

The SQF Quality Code

The SQF Certification is site specific. The entire site, including all premises, support buildings, silos, tanks, loading and unloading bays and external grounds must be included in the scope of certification.

3 Definitionen

See A00VA02

4 Responsibilities

See A00VA02

5 Process Description

Please find additional information about drafting of offer and audit preparation are described in A00VA02 and A22VA02

5.1 Audit planning

Voluntary pre-assessment audits checking the supplier's implemented SQF system can be conducted. A pre-assessment audit can assist in identify-

ing gaps in the supplier's SQF system so that corrective action can occur before TN CERT is engaged for a full certification audit. It can be conducted using internal resources, an SQF consultant, or an SQF auditor.

The SQF auditor must be registered for the same food sector category(ies) as the supplier. No auditor shall conduct audits of the same supplier **for more than three consecutive** certification cycles. TN CERT must advise the supplier of the name of the SQF auditor at the time that the SQF audit is scheduled.

The supplier registers with SQFI through the ReposiTrak registration. ReposiTrak registration sends an email to the selected Certification Body notifying them that the supplier has registered and has selected them.

The supplier and TN CERT shall agree on the audit scope before the certification audit begins. Once the audit scope is agreed between the supplier and TN CERT, it cannot be changed once the audit has commenced. TN CERT shall provide the supplier with an estimate of the time it will take to complete the certification audit as soon as the scope is agreed upon.

The TNCert office exports the audit report template for the scheduled audit and forwarded this to the SQF auditor.

The Technical Expert to assist a SQF auditor in the performance of a SQF audit is permitted provided the supplier has been notified before the Audit and accept. The Technical Expert signs a deed confidentiality. The user of an Expert must be notified SQFI and petition the SQFI for approval on the use of the Technical Expert.

5.1.1 Exemption

Where a site seeks to exempt part of the premises, the request for exemption must be submitted to TN CERT in writing prior to the certification audit, detailing the reason for exemption. If approved by the TN CERT, exemptions shall be listed in the site description in the SQFI assessment database and in audit reports(s). However, 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.

5.1.2 Stage 1

The SQF certification audit consists of **two stages**, the **desk audit (stage 1)** and the **site audit (stage 2)**.

The stage 1 audit is only undertaken upon initial certification undertaken to verify that the supplier's SQF System

- An appropriately qualified SQF practitioner is designated;
- The food safety plan and the associated critical control point (CCP) determinations, validations and verifications are appropriately documented and endorsed by the SQF practitioner;
- The documented System is relevant to the scope of certification.

TN CERT shall notify the supplier of corrections or corrective action, or any aspects of the SQF system that require improvement or adjustment. TN CERT will also verify that all corrections or corrective actions for major and minor non-conformances have been addressed before proceeding with a site audit.

5.1.3 Stage 2 (site audit)

The site audit is conducted on site and determines the effective implementation of the supplier's documented SQF system. It is conducted at a time agreed between the supplier and TN CERT, when the main processes are operating. The site audit must include a review of the entire site, including the inside and outside of the building, regardless of the scope of certification.

Where a supplier operates under seasonal conditions (a period in which the major activity is conducted over five consecutive months or less) the certification audit shall be completed within 30 days from the start of the season.

The SQF auditor conducting the audit can competently communicate in the oral and written language of the supplier being audited.

In circumstances where a translator is required, the translator shall be provided by TN CERT and shall have knowledge of the technical terms used during the audit; be independent of the supplier being audited and have no conflict of interest. The supplier shall be notified of any increase in audit duration and cost associated with the use of a translator.

5.1.4 Corporate Audits

Where a site is part of a larger corporation and some food safety functions are conducted at a corporate head office (i.e. an office that does not process or handle products), an optional corporate audit can be conducted by the certification body of the Code elements managed by the corporate office.

The decision on whether a separate corporate audit is required shall be made by mutual agreement between TN CERT and the site and communicated to SQF certified sites managed by the corporate office.

Where a corporate audit is conducted, the audit evidence shall be reviewed and all identified corporate non-conformities closed out before the site audits are conducted. Any open non-conformities shall be attributed to the site or sites.

The SQF food safety auditor shall also audit the application of the corporate functions relative to the site's scope of certification during the audit of each site managed by the corporate office. All mandatory and applicable elements of the SQF food safety Code shall be audited at each site irrespective of the findings of the corporate audit.

Corporate head office audits do not apply to designated central sites within an SQF multi-site program

5.1.5 Seasonal Products

Audit shall be conducted during the peak operational part of the season.

Where sites seek to include products from more than one season within their scope of certification, the site and TN CERT shall agree to conduct the initial certification audit during the highest risk and/or highest volume production operation. Documentation and records for other seasonal production shall be reviewed as part of the certification audit.

5.1.6 Audit evaluation

Based on the evidence collected by the auditor, each applicable aspect of the SQF site is automatically scored when the audit report is uploaded to the SQF assessment database. Desk audits are not scored.

The calculation uses the following factors:

Evaluation:

- 0 Aspect meets the criteria
- 1 Aspect does not meet the criteria due to minor variations (minor non-conformity)
- 10 Aspect does not meet the criteria (major non-conformity)
- 50 Aspect does not meet the criteria (critical non-conformity)

5.1.7 Audit rating

A single rating is calculated for the site audit as $(100 - N)$ where N is the sum of the individual rating criteria allocated. The rating provides an indication of the overall condition of the supplier's site against the SQF Code, and also provides a guideline on the required level of surveillance by the certification body. The audit frequency at each rating level is indicated as follows:

Score	Rating
96 – 100	E - excellent
86 – 95	G – good
70 – 85	C – complies
0 - 69	F – fails to comply

5.2 Non-conformities and corrective actions

Where the auditor finds deviations from the requirements of relevant modules of the SQF Code, the auditor shall advise the supplier of the number, description, and extent of the non-conformities. Non-conformities shall be graded as follows:

- 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 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 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 pre-requisite 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 supplier fails to take effective corrective action within the timeframe agreed with TN CERT, or if TN CERT deems that there is systematic falsification of records relating to food safety controls and the SQF System.

Critical non-conformities cannot be raised at desk audits.

All non-conformities and their resolution shall be documented by the auditor.

A minor non-conformity shall be corrected, verified and closed within 30 calendar days of the completion of the site audit. Extensions may be granted by TN CERT where there is no immediate threat to product safety and quality, and alternative, temporary methods of control are initiated. The supplier shall be advised of the extended timeframe. The SQF food safety auditor shall document all details of justification of the extension, how the risk is being controlled, and the agreed completion date.

A major non-conformity shall be corrected and appropriate corrective action verified and closed out within 30 calendar days of the completion of the site audit.

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 shall be closed out and the SQF food safety auditor shall document all details of justification of the extension, how the risk is being controlled, and the agreed completion date. A documented root cause analysis shall be submitted by the site as part of the corrective action evidence for every major non-conformity.

If the SQF auditor considers that a critical non-conformity exists during a site audit, the auditor shall immediately advise the supplier and notify TN CERT. A critical non-conformity raised at a certification audit results in an automatic failure of the audit, and the supplier must re-apply for certification.

5.3 Audit documentation

The audit results are documented on the SQF audit template. Provided from ReposiTrak.

Mandatory elements are designated with an "M" in Module 2 of the SQF Code and must be reported for the audit report to be submitted. Deviations identified during the SQF audit shall be accurately described in the audit report and corrective action requests raised which fully describe the clause of the SQF Code and the reason for the non-conformity.

The audit report must be completed by the auditor and forwarded to TN CERT for technical review (pre-veto) within 7 calendar days and before sending to the supplier. TN CERT shall make the audit report available to the supplier within 10 calendar days from the last date of the audit. Any changes made by the TN CERT to the draft audit report during the veto process must be communicated to the Supplier and the Auditor. The technical reviewer may choose to click 'Populate Stats in Sections' to override and update what is currently listed in Section VII Non Conformities, Section VIII Root Cause Analysis and Section IX Corrective Actions.

The SQF Audit report shall remain the property of TN CERT's client and shall not be distributed to other parties without the permission of that client.

To complete the draft audit report, the auditor/audit team provide the following information in *Section V Audit Duration* :

- i. Actual start date and time
- ii. Actual end date and time
- iii. Hours spent on the document review or in the site (as appropriate)
- iv. Hours spent completing the audit report that is additional to time reported in (iii).

(Note: only additional time as that indicated as document review or site audit time)

1. Hours spend must only be listed as the numeric value (no words should be added to these fields)

Required documents for the review process and uploaded by the branch office into the SAP System

- Audit plan stage 1 and stage 2
- Contract with supplier
- Calculation and ATEA (Audit team and effort approval)
- Audit report stage 1 and 2
- NC Management
- Declaration of independence
- List of Participants
- Handwritten records (are archived in the branch offices and are available on request)
- Approval Protocol
- Certification order
- Checklist / Documentation on Certificate Transfer Food / Feed

5.4 Certification issue, surveillance and re-certification

Score	Rating	Certification ¹	Audit frequency
96 – 100	E - excellent	Certificate issued	12 monthly re-certification audit
86 – 95	G – good	Certificate issued	12 monthly re-certification audit
70 – 85	C – complies	Certificate issued	6 monthly surveillance audit
0 - 69	F – fails to comply	No certificate issued	Considered to have failed the SQF audit

¹ Certification also requires that all major non-conformities are closed out within 14 calendar days and minor non-conformities within 30 calendar days.

Certification of the SQF System shall be awarded to suppliers that achieve a “C – complies” audit rating or greater with no outstanding non-conformities. The certification decision shall be made within 45 calendar days of the last day of the site audit. Once SQF certification is granted, the SQFI issues a unique certification number which is specific to that supplier’s site.

Within ten calendar days of granting certification, the certification body shall provide an electronic and/or hard copy of the supplier’s certificate to the

supplier.

5.4.1 Certification issue, surveillance and re-certification

The certificate is valid for 75 days from the anniversary of the initial certification audit date and shall be in a form approved by the SQFI. The certificate shall include:

1. The name, address and logo of the certification body;
2. The logo of the accreditation body, and the certification body's accreditation number;
3. The heading "certificate;"
2. The phrase "(site name) is registered as meeting the requirements of the SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacturing, edition 8;"
3. The scope of registration – food sector category (ies) and products;
4. Dates of audit (last day), date of next re-certification audit, date of certification decision, and date of certificate expiry;
5. Indication of unannounced re-certification audit (where applicable)
6. Signatures of the authorized officer and issuing officer; and
7. The SQF logo

5.4.2 Transfer of certificate from other certification bodies

A supplier can change its certification body after one certification cycle and only when there has been closure of all outstanding non-conformities, provided that the certification is not suspended or under threat of suspension or withdrawal.

Suppliers that require a surveillance audit are permitted to change certification bodies only after the surveillance audit is conducted or by written approval from the SQFI senior technical director.

When a supplier changes certification bodies, the certificate issued by the old certification body remains valid until the expected expiration date. The certification number and re-certification date are transferred with the supplier to the new certification body.

The new certification body shall undertake a pre-transfer review of the supplier's certification to:

- confirm the certificate is current, valid and relates to the SQF System so certified
- confirm the supplier's food sector category falls within the new certifier's scope of accreditation
- confirm any complaints received are actioned
- review the supplier's audit history (where the supplier can demonstrate such history to the satisfaction of the new certifier by way of copies of audit reports completed by any former certifier) and the impact of any outstanding non-conformities

5.4.3 Issue, withdrawal and maintenance of the certification

Where a supplier achieves an “F – fails to comply” rating at a certification audit, the supplier is considered to have failed the SQF audit. The supplier must then re-apply for another site audit.

When a supplier’s re-application occurs within six months of the last audit date, and with the same certification body, a site audit shall be scheduled but a desk audit is not required. If the re-application occurs after six months from the last audit, or with a new certification body, then a desk audit and site audit are required.

To maintain SQF certification, a supplier is required to attain a “C – complies” audit rating or greater at re-certification audits, ensure that surveillance and/or re-certification audits occur within the required timeframe, ensure that no critical non-conformities are raised at surveillance or re-certification audits, and that all major and minor non-conformities are corrected within the time frame specified.

5.5 Surveillance audit

The surveillance audit is conducted when the site attains a “C - complies” rating at a certification audit or re-certification audit. The surveillance audit shall be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days either side of the six (6) month anniversary of the last day of the previous certification or re-certification audit.

A new score and rating is issued at the surveillance audit, but the re-certification audit date is not affected.

The surveillance audit is a full SQF System audit. In particular, the surveillance audit is intended to:

- i. Verify the continued efficacy of corrections and corrective actions closed out at previous audits;
- ii. Verify that the SQF System continues to be implemented as documented;
- iii. Consider and take appropriate action where changes to the site’s operations are made and the impact of those changes on the site’s SQF System;
- iv. Confirm continued compliance with the requirements of the SQF food safety Code for manufacturing;
- v. Verify all critical steps remain under control; and
- vi. Contribute to continued improvement of the site’s SQF System and business operation.

5.5.1 Surveillance audit seasonal suppliers

Seasonal suppliers that attain a “C” rating at a certification or re-certification audit are subject to a surveillance audit within 30 days either side of the six month anniversary of the last day of the previous certification or re-certification audit.

Where the due surveillance audit date falls within the operational season, the conditions of 4.4 apply. Where the due date of the surveillance audit falls outside the operational season, the surveillance audit shall comprise a full review of corrective actions from the last audit, to ensure preparedness for the next re-certification audit.

5.6 Re-certification audit

The re-certification audit of the SQF System is undertaken to verify the continued effectiveness of the supplier's SQF System in its entirety.

The re-certification audit shall be conducted within 30 calendar days either side of the anniversary of the last day of the initial certification audit. The re-certification audit score is calculated in the same way as the initial certification audit, and the same rating applied.

Written approval by the SQF senior technical director is required to issue a temporary extension to a supplier's re-certification audit timeframe and certificate expiry date including instances in extreme circumstances such as acts of nature or extreme weather.

Situations that require a permanent change to the re-certification audit date require written approval by the SQF senior technical director and the supplier's new re-certification date may be moved earlier than the anniversary and the new re-certification date fixed as the new initial certification audit date.

All extension requests shall come from the certification body that issued the supplier's SQF certificate.

The requirements for the re-certification audit are the same as the ones for a regular certification audit, with the following exceptions:

- An independent desk audit is not required as part of a re-certification audit. However, an integrated desk and site audit shall be conducted at each re-certification. The supplier's documentation shall be reviewed as necessary as part of the site audit.
- If the supplier fails to permit the re-certification or surveillance audit within the agreed timeframe, the certification body shall immediately suspend the supplier's certificate.
- If the supplier receives an "F – fails to comply" rating at the re-certification or surveillance audit, TN CERT shall immediately suspend the supplier's certificate.

If the supplier fails to close out non-conformities within the agreed timeframe, TN CERT shall immediately suspend the supplier's certificate.

5.6.1 Re-certification audit seasonal suppliers

The re-certification audit of seasonal suppliers shall follow the requirements of section 4.5. However, where there is a significant change in seasonal operations whereby the re-certification audit 60 day window cannot be met, the certification body and supplier shall temporarily reset the re-certification audit date so that it falls during the peak operational part of the season.

If the supplier wishes to permanently change the re-certification audit date due to seasonal conditions, the request must be made to SQFI in writing.

5.6.2 Unannounced re-certification audit

Within three certification cycles, TN CERT shall conduct one unannounced re-certification audit of the supplier. The unannounced audit shall occur in the supplier's site within the 60 day re-certification window (i.e. the anniversary of the initial certification audit +/- 30 days).

Unannounced audits shall not be conducted on the initial certification audit or on a surveillance audit.

If a supplier changes certification bodies, the supplier's unannounced re-certification audit schedule shall not change.

The day of the unannounced audit shall be determined by TN CERT within the 60 day re-certification audit window. The unannounced audit year shall be determined between the supplier and TN CERT.

A defined blackout period shall be established by negotiation between the supplier and TN CERT that prevents the unannounced re-certification audit from occurring out of season or when the site is not operating for legitimate business reasons.

The Auditor Conduct a tour of the site within the first 60 minutes of arrival at the site.

Immediate suspension of the supplier's certificate will occur in facilities that refuse entry to the auditor for an unannounced audit.

A site may forgo the three year certification cycle requirement and voluntarily elect to have annual unannounced re-certification audits. If annual unannounced recertification audits are conducted by the site then the protocol outlined for the three year certification cycle audit shall be followed. Sites with annual unannounced re-certification audits shall be recognized on the SQF certificate as an "SQFI select site."

5.7 Withdrawing certification

TN CERT shall suspend the SQF certificate if the supplier

- fails to permit the re-certification or surveillance audit,
- receives an "F – fails to comply" rating,
- fails to take corrective actions,
- fails to permit an unannounced audit
- fails to take corrective action within the timeframe specified, or
- in the opinion of TN CERT fails to maintain the requirements of the SQF Code.

Where the site's certificate is suspended, TN CERT shall immediately amend the supplier details on the SQFI database to a suspended status indicating the reason for the suspension and the date of effect, and in writing:

- inform the supplier of the reasons for the action taken and the date of effect;
- copy the senior technical director of SQFI on the notice of suspension sent to the supplier,
- request that the supplier provides to TN CERT, within 48 hours of receiving notice of suspension, a detailed corrective action plan outlining the corrective action to be taken.

When the supplier's certificate is suspended, TN CERT shall upon receipt of the detailed corrective action plan:

- verify that the immediate correction has been taken by the means of an on-site audit and within 30 calendar days of receiving the corrective action plan;
- when corrective action plan has been successfully implemented, re-instate the site status on the SQFI database and give written notice to the supplier that their certificate is no longer suspended;
- not more than six months after suspension, TN CERT shall conduct a surveillance audit to verify the effective implementation of the corrective action plan and that the site's SQF System is achieving stated objectives, and
- copy SQFI on the notice indicating lifting of the suspension sent to the site.

6 Multisite Certification

TÜV NORD CERT is currently not registered for Multi-Site Certification. This chapter is not applicable

7 Annex

A00VA02	Management System Certification
A22VA02	Procedures for certification of safety systems in the Food and Non-Food sector
A22VA02A3	Man-day Calculation Table for international Food Standards
A22F500e	Checklist / Documentation on Certificate Transfer Food/Feed
A71VA01	Requirement for the competence and appointment of SQF Auditors
A00F100Annex FSMS	Company Data FSMS
A00F202e	Declaration of Independence
A22F234	Food Release Protocol
A71F002	SQF Open and Closing Meeting Summary
A71F003	SQF Auditor Checklist
A71F300	SQF Service Description

8 Other relevant documents

SQF Code Edition 8

Criteria for SQF Certification Bodies 8th Edition October 2017