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Do you have any questions about this performance description? We will be pleased to help.

Please contact us via mail to info.tncert@tuev-nord.de or by telephone 0800 245 74 57 (Free-phone from within Germany) or +49 511 9986-1222 from abroad.

TÜV NORD CERT GmbH
Langemarckstraße 20
45141 Essen

www.tuev-nord-cert.de

The rules and performance description regarding SQF certification form an integral part of the offer. They are supplementary to the General Conditions of Certification.

The standard as well as other applicable documents and rules can be found on the SQFI website (www.sqfi.com)

The auditors are selected by TÜV NORD CERT based on their authorisation for the sector and their qualifications.

1 CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

1.1 Audit preparation

If desired, a voluntary pre-assessment audit can be carried out. It is not mandatory, but recommended to provide a “health check” of the supplier’s implemented SQF system. A pre-assessment audit can assist in identifying gaps in the supplier’s SQF system so that corrective action can occur before engaging TN CERT for a full certification audit. It can be conducted using internal resources, an SQF consultant, or an SQF auditor.

Before the certification audit begins, the supplier registers with SQFI through the ReposiTrak registration <https://www.ac.parkcitygroup.com/>. 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. The scope of the audit shall cover the required level of certification, the food sector categories, and the products listed under the scope of certification for a site. The audit scope shall cover all processes under the control of the supplier including from raw material receipt to shipment of finished product.

Once the audit scope is agreed between the supplier and TN CERT, it cannot be changed once the audit has commenced.

1.2 Certification audit

The SQF certification audit consists of two stages:

- I. The desk audit is undertaken to verify that the supplier’s SQF System documentation meets the requirements of the SQF Code.
- II. The facility audit is conducted on site and determines the effective implementation of the supplier’s documented SQF System.

1.2.1 The Desk Audit

For initial certification, an independent desk audit is conducted. The desk audit is conducted by a registered SQF auditor appointed by TN CERT, and ensures:

- i. An appropriately qualified SQF practitioner is designated;
- ii. The food safety plan (at level 2) and the associated Critical Control Point (CCP) determinations, validations and verifications are appropriately documented and endorsed by the SQF practitioner;
- iii. The food quality plan (at level 3) and the associated Critical Quality Point (CQP) determinations, validations and verifications are appropriately documented and endorsed by the SQF practitioner;

- iv. The documented system is relevant to the scope of certification and the products processed there under.

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-conformities have been addressed before proceeding with a facility audit.

1.2.2 The Facility Audit

The facility audit is conducted on site by the SQF auditor appointed by TN CERT. It is conducted at a time agreed between the supplier and TN CERT, when the main processes are operating. The facility audit must include a review of the entire facility, including the inside and outside of the building, regardless of the scope of certification. The facility audit determines if the SQF System is effectively implemented as documented. It establishes and verifies the:

- i. Effectiveness of the SQF System in its entirety;
- ii. Food safety hazards (level 2) and food quality hazards (level 3) are effectively identified and controlled.
- iii. Effective interaction between all elements of the SQF System; and
- iv. Level of commitment demonstrated by the supplier to maintaining an effective SQF System ant to meeting their food safety regulatory and costumer requirements.

1.2.3 Seasonal Production

Where a supplier operates under seasonal conditions (a period in which the major activity is conducted over five (5) consecutive months or less) the certification audit shall be completed within thirty (30) days from the start of the season.

Initial certification audits for suppliers involved in seasonal production (i.e. a period in which the major production activity is conducted over not more than five consecutive months) shall be conducted during the peak operational part of the season.

Where suppliers seek to include products from more than one season within their scope of certification, the supplier 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.

1.3 Surveillance Audit

The surveillance audit is conducted when the supplier attains a “C – complies” rating at a certification audit or recertification 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 recertification audit. A new score and rating is issued at the surveillance audit; however, the recertification audit date is not affected.

The purpose of the surveillance audit is 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 supplier's operations are made and the impact of those changes on the supplier's SQF System;
- iv. Confirm continued compliance with the requirements of the SQF Code;
- v. Verify all critical steps remain under control; and
- vi. Contribute to continued improvement of the supplier's SQF System and business operation.

1.4 Issue of the certificate

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 forty-five (45) calendar days of the last day of the facility audit. Once SQF certification is granted, the SQFI issues a unique certification number which is specific to that supplier's site.

Within ten (10) calendar days of granting certification, TN CERT shall provide an electronic and/or hard copy of the supplier's certificate to the supplier. 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.

For level 3 suppliers, TN CERT shall provide an electronic copy of the SQF quality shield containing the certification body name and the supplier certification number.

Details of the supplier's certificate will be made available on the SQFI web site for public display as follows:

Supplier name, country, certificate type and number, accreditation body logo and accreditation number, audit date, date of next audit, date of issue, certification expiry date, food sector category(s), product(s) covered by the certificate

2 RECERTIFICATION AUDIT

The re-certification audit shall be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days either side of the anniversary of the last day of the initial certification audit.

The purpose of the re-certification audit is 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 supplier's operations are made and the impact of those changes on the supplier's SQF System;
- iv. Verify all critical steps remain under control and the effective inter-action between all elements of the SQF System;
- v. Verify the overall effectiveness of the SQF System in its entirety in the light of changes in operations;
- vi. Verify that the supplier continues to demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the effectiveness of the SQF System and to meeting regulatory and customer requirements; and
- vii. Contribute to continued improvement of the supplier's SQF System and business operation.

The requirements for the re-certification audit are the same as those described in 1.2 (certification audit), with the following exceptions:

- i. An independent desk audit is not required as part of a re-certification audit. However, an integrated desk and facility audit shall be conducted at each re-certification. The supplier's documentation shall be reviewed as necessary as part of the facility audit.
- ii. If the supplier fails to permit the re-certification or surveillance audit within the agreed timeframe, TN CERT shall immediately suspend the supplier's certificate.
- iii. 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.

3 UNANNOUNCED RE-CERTIFICATION AUDIT

Within three (3) certification cycles TN CERT 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 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 TN CERT within the 60-day re-certification audit window. The unannounced audit year shall be determined between the supplier and TN CERT.
- vii. 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 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.

4 TAKEOVER OF CERTIFICATIONS 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 body, the certificate of registration issued by the former CB remains valid until the expected expiration date. The certification number and re-certification date are transferred with the supplier to TN CERT.

TN CERT shall undertake a pre-transfer review of the supplier's certification to:

- i. Confirm the Certificate of Registration is current, valid and relates to the SQF System certified;
- ii. Confirm the supplier's food sector category falls within the new certifier's scope of accreditation;
- iii. Confirm any complaints received are addressed;
- iv. 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 nonconformities; and
- v. Confirm the sage of the current certification cycle.

Certificates with outstanding critical or major nonconformities that have not been closed out, or certificates known to have been suspended or withdrawn or under threat of suspension or withdrawal shall not be accepted for transfer until they are closed out to the satisfaction of the former certifier.

Where a decision is made to proceed with certification TN CERT shall:

- i. Conduct the required audit (re-certification or surveillance) which was described by the former CB within timelines consistent with the SQF program audit frequency and certification requirements;
- ii. Issues a new certificate of registration under TN CERT and issue a new SQF Quality Shield (at level 3) that includes the name of the new TN CERT; and
- iii. Ensure the supplier retains its unique certification number.

5 MANAGEMENT OF DEVIATIONS AND NONCONFORMITIES

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

Deviations identified during the 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.

TN CERT will verify that all corrections or corrective actions for major and minor non-conformities detected during the desk audit have been addressed before proceeding with a facility audit.

5.1 Facility Audit Corrective Actions

A minor non-conformity shall be corrected, verified and closed out in the SQF assessment database within thirty (30) calendar days of the completion of the facility audit. Extensions may be granted where there is no immediate threat to product safety and quality, and alternative, temporary methods of control are initiated.

A major non-conformity shall be corrected and appropriate corrective action verified and closed out in the SQF assessment database within fourteen (14) calendar days of the completion of the facility 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 TN CERT and temporary action is taken by the supplier to mitigate the risk to product safety or quality. However, in such cases, the non-conformity must still be closed out on the SQF assessment database and the auditor shall document all details of justification of the extension, how the risk is being controlled, and the agreed completion date.

If the SQF auditor considers that a critical non-conformity exists during a facility 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.

6 CERTIFICATE SUSPENSION AND WITHDRAWAL

TÜV NORD CERT is the owner of the SQF certificates and can suspend or withdraw them at any time. Not more than six months after suspension, TN CERT shall conduct a surveillance audit to verify the effective implementation of the corrective action and that the supplier SQF System is achieving stated objectives.

When the supplier's certificate is suspended, the company receives a letter describing the reasons for the suspension and the measures that are necessary, with deadlines, in order to cancel said suspension. During the suspension, the supplier may not advertise with the SQF certificate. The permission to use the SQF logo is suspended if the supplier's certification is suspended and will cease to be used within the operation if the supplier's certificate is withdrawn. Moreover, the status of the operating/production site is changed in the SQFI Database. The operating/production site is no longer included in the public list of certified companies.

6.1 Audits announced at short notice

If the supplier becomes aware that a claim could be brought in relation to the safety or legality of a product, he must inform TN CERT immediately from its side, TN CERT will instigate suitable steps for assessment of the situation and its impact on the certification and will take suitable action.

If TN CERT becomes aware of incidents that could have an impact on the safety or legality of the product, it is entitled to perform announced and also unannounced audits at any time and, depending on its assessment of the situation and its impact, to withdraw the certificates.

In the case of a product recall, the supplier shall notify TN CERT in writing at TNCert-Food-Recall@tuev-nord.de and the SQFI in writing at foodsafetycrisis@sqfi.com within twenty-four (24) hours of the event TN CERT will take corresponding steps for assessment of the situation and its impact on the certification and take suitable measures.

TN CERT will notify the SQFI within a further forty-eight (48) hours of any action they intend to take.

7 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 TN CERT and apply to retain the SQF certification and the existing certification number. 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, TN CERT may retain the existing audit frequency status. In making this application, TN CERT will determine that staff with major responsibility for the management and oversight of the SQF System has been retained.

If there are significant changes in site management and personnel, TN CERT will complete a certification audit and issue a new certificate and a new certification number. The audit frequency applicable to a new certification shall apply.