



What is the GFSI Guidance Document Sixth Edition?

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Introduction

In January 2011, the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) published version 6 of the GFSI Guidance Document, continuing an iterative process that started in 2001 with the first Version.

GFSI is a non-profit foundation, managed by the Consumer Goods Forum, charged with providing continuous improvement in food safety management systems to ensure confidence in the delivery of safe food to consumers worldwide.

The GFSI Objectives are to:

- Reduce food safety risks by delivering equivalence and convergence between effective food safety management systems, as outlined in the Guidance Document,
- Manage cost in the global food system by eliminating redundancy and improving operational efficiency,
- Develop competencies and capacity building in food safety to create consistent and effective global food systems,
- Provide a unique international stakeholder platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange and networking.

The GFSI Guidance Document has been developed primarily to meet the first of these objectives. It defines the process by which food safety schemes may gain recognition by GFSI and gives guidance to schemes seeking compliance. In so doing, it also assists in meeting the remaining GFSI objectives:

- In encouraging convergence between food safety management systems, GFSI seeks to drive down costs by focusing industry on robust recognised systems with key food safety elements in common;
- GFSI requires competence and capacity not only within certified food businesses, but also the Scheme Owners, Certification Bodies, auditors, and Accreditation Bodies that assess the GFSI benchmarked schemes;
- GFSI's network of Technical Working Groups, stakeholders and industry experts provides extensive input to the development and ongoing improvement of the Guidance Document

What is the GFSI Guidance Document?

“Scheme” in the food safety certification industry is a term used to define a commercial food safety programme that includes an auditable and certifiable food safety standard and a governance and management system.

The GFSI Guidance Document defines the process by which food safety schemes may gain recognition by GFSI and gives guidance to schemes seeking compliance. It also specifies the requirements that a food safety scheme must implement to be considered for GFSI recognition, and defines the key elements for

the production of safe food and/or feed that must be included in the standard. These elements were developed by members of the GFSI Technical Working Groups (TWGs) and other experts who advised on sector specific requirements. They are firmly based on the food safety principles laid down by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Foods (NACMCF), relevant ISO standards, and International Codes of Practice where appropriate.

What the Guidance Document is Not

It is important to recognise that the GFSI Guidance Document is not in itself a food safety standard. Food businesses cannot be audited or certified to the GFSI Guidance Document and GFSI is not involved in any certification or accreditation activities. The GFSI Guidance Document does not dictate policy for food retailers, manufacturers or scheme owners, or prescribe requirements for food quality, animal welfare, environmental standards, or any other area outside the scope of food safety.

Instead the GFSI Guidance Document provides a template against which food safety management schemes can be benchmarked and recognised as science-based, contemporary, and rigorous. It is a tool which fulfils one of the main objectives of GFSI, that of determining equivalency between food safety management systems.

GFSI is responsible for the publication and maintenance of the Document, which is available free of charge on the GFSI website (www.mygfsi.com).

The Revision Programme

Publication of version 6 concluded a revision programme that commenced in January 2010 with the formation of a Steering Committee to oversee the process. Through a series of working group meetings and two rounds of stakeholder consultation over twelve months, the GFSI Foundation Board approved Version 6 as better able to fulfil the GFSI objectives.

After publication, the GFSI Guidance Document remains subject to review and revision by the GFSI TWGs and there are sections of the document which shall be further reviewed and developed by specific TWGs over coming years. Stakeholders are invited to submit comments and proposals for changes, which will in turn be presented to the TWGs for consideration. A full review of the GFSI Guidance Document will be undertaken at least every four years, although addenda may be added at any time with the approval of the GFSI Board.

Through this process of continuous improvement, GFSI provides and manages the process, through which food safety management schemes achieve international recognition and acceptance by global retailers, manufacturers and food service operators. The decision as to which GFSI recognised scheme(s) to apply is dependent on company policy, food industry scope, customer requirements, general regulatory requirements, due diligence obligations and product liability.

What Has Changed Since Version 5?

Version 6 of the GFSI Guidance Document has a very different format to previous versions. It is more prescriptive than earlier versions; particularly in the areas of scheme management and food safety

requirements, and intentionally so. As GFSI benchmarked schemes expand internationally into new and emerging markets, the integrity and governance applied to scheme ownership is central to achieving and maintaining the GFSI Vision and Mission.

Version 6 has a new modular format divided into four distinct parts:

- Part I: The Benchmarking Process outlines the key procedural steps and timelines that apply to new food safety schemes that have not previously been benchmarked, schemes applying for an extension of scope, and the re-benchmarking process for existing schemes, which is required every four years.

When schemes are completely aligned with the GFSI Guidance Document Version requirements, this results in an increase in confidence in the benchmarked schemes, which can then provide comparable audit results for users of third party certification.

In Version 6, the benchmarking process is more clearly defined, more open, and transparent. Scheme application guidelines are now formalised, as are the benchmarking criteria and the timeframes for the benchmarking processes. The terms of reference for Benchmarking Committees and Chairs are described in detail.

- Part II: Requirements for the Management of Schemes prescribes the governance and management requirements that must be implemented for a food safety scheme to be considered for benchmarking. These include, but are not limited to:
 - Evidence of the legal entity that owns and manages the scheme;
 - The documented process by which the scheme was developed and will be maintained;
 - The technical competence of key stakeholders who developed and maintain the scheme;
 - Procedures to prevent or manage conflicts of interest;
 - A food safety management standard based on the principles of ISO/IEC Guide 65 or ISO/IEC 17021 with a clearly defined scope of activity;
 - Procedures for managing Certification Bodies that operate within the scope of the scheme;
 - Evidence of procedures to register and manage food safety auditors;
 - Documented arrangements with Accreditation Bodies to oversee the licensed Certification Bodies;
 - Defined requirements for audit management, including audit frequency, audit duration, audit reporting, management of certification, and data management
 - Evidence of how scheme owners communicate with GFSI
- Part III: Scheme Scope and Key Elements. Arguably the major change in Version 6 is the expansion of the document to cover primary production and processing in a more robust way, taking a scope specific approach to cover eventually all parts of the food supply chain. It has also been recognised that food safety requirements differ between the various parts of the food supply chain, and an exhaustive exercise was undertaken with sector-specific experts to define the food

safety management system, Good Practice (GAP, GMP) and HACCP requirement in a number of industry scopes.

Figure 1 outlines the food industry scopes identified by GFSI. The first issue of Version 6 details the specific elements required for the following industry scopes:

- Farming of animals, fish, plants, grains and pulses;
- Pre-processing of plant products
- Processing of animal, plant, and ambient stable products
- Production of biochemical.

Scheme owners are now required to apply for recognition against one or more of the GFSI defined scopes and meet the detailed requirements for each scope included in their application.

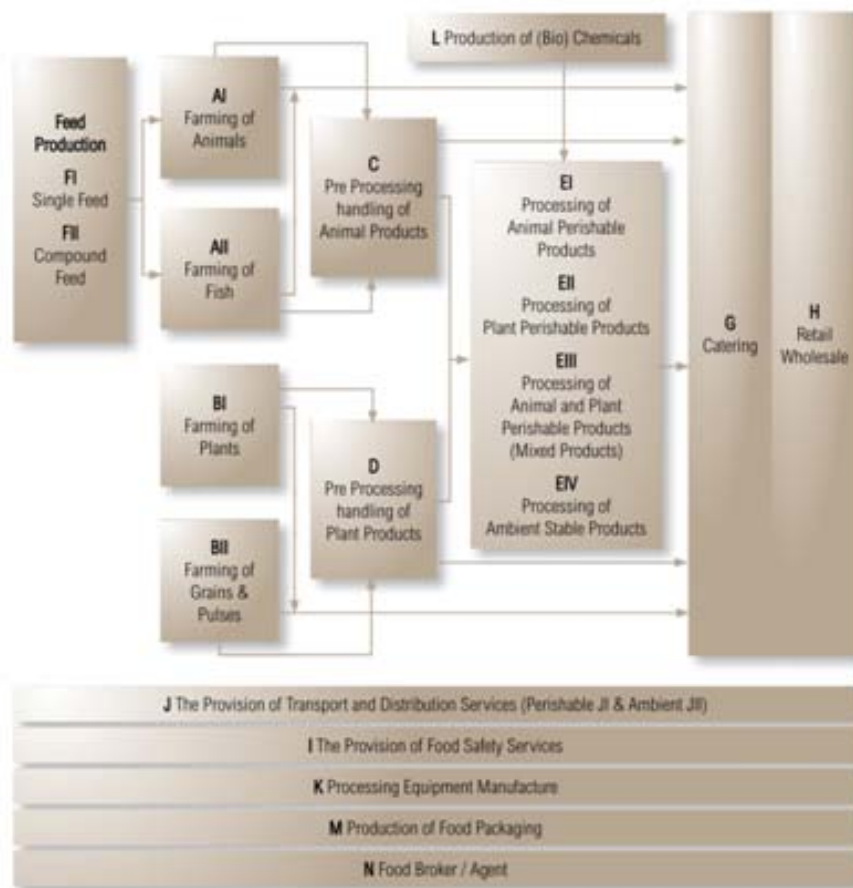


Figure 1

Over the next four years, working groups will be convened to specify the scope requirements for the recognition of food safety schemes for each of the remaining scopes not yet included in Version 6.

- Part IV: Glossary, lists the terms and definitions used in the GFSI Guidance Document

Transitional Arrangements

Applications for benchmarking to Version 6 commenced on 1st January 2011 and new schemes are encouraged to apply providing they meet all the new requirements. Applications to Version 5 are no longer accepted.

Existing schemes (a current list of GFSI benchmarked schemes is available on the GFSI web site www.mygfsi.com) are required to apply for re-benchmarking to Version 6 by 31st December 2011 or they will lose their GFSI recognition.

What are the Benefits of GFSI Recognition?

The Consumer Goods Forum is an independent parity-based consumer goods network of over 650 members. The Board of the Consumer Goods Forum comprises CEOs from 25 major international retailers and 25 major international manufacturers. The Global Food Safety Initiative is one of the key strategic pillars of the Consumer Goods Forum.

In 2000, when GFSI was formed, food safety was top of mind with retailers, manufacturers and consumers due to several high-profile recalls, quarantines, and the associated negative publicity. The CEOs of the major retailers and manufacturers agreed that consumer trust needed to be strengthened and maintained, while making the supply chain safer, through the harmonisation of food safety standards and driving cost efficiency.

Over the years, lead by a Foundation Board of senior industry personnel with a practical, commercial understanding of the application of food safety, and supported by scientific, academic and technical expertise, GFSI has built a considerable body of work on the requirements for food safety across the food supply chain.

The GFSI Guidance Document and benchmarking process is a key platform in achieving the GFSI goals, and Version 6 is an example of the collaborative approach used to improve the integrity and rigour of food safety management schemes.

GFSI recognition offers the industry the knowledge that benchmarked schemes are based on a foundation of contemporary food safety principles. It offers healthy competition between benchmarked schemes, and drives continuous improvement in the delivery of food safety standards.

GFSI provides a global network of recognised food safety standards that provide retailers, manufacturers and food service operators with confidence in sourcing, comparable audit approaches, and above all, safer food for the consumer.

Conclusion

The GFSI Guidance Document, Version 6 is a multi-stakeholder document that specifies the process by which food safety schemes may gain recognition and gives guidance to schemes seeking compliance.

More prescriptive, detailed, and transparent than earlier versions, Version 6 now differentiates between the key elements required for the production of safe food in different industry sectors. Definition of the



benchmarking process has been improved and scheme governance and management requirements enhanced.

All food safety schemes currently recognised by GFSI are required to re-apply for benchmarking during 2011, and any new applicants will only be assessed against Version 6. The scheme's standard, auditor competence requirements, certificate audit programme and management system will be assessed against the requirements of Version 6 by the GFSI Benchmark Committee to verify compliance and, if successful, the scheme will achieve formal recognition by GFSI. Existing and new schemes that fail to meet the new criteria will not receive GFSI recognition.

Through this process, GFSI continues to provide a rigorous, scientifically based method that recognises competent food safety schemes and allows food businesses to select a food safety management system that not only fits their needs, but is recognised by retailers and manufacturers internationally, and has itself been exposed to a demanding peer assessment.