



From Executing GFSI Requirements to Building a Value-Add Food Safety Program

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GFSI-recognized certification has become an increasingly important framework for driving consistency, credibility, and market confidence across the food supply chain. As benchmarked scheme requirements and related market expectations have evolved, food and beverage manufacturers have had to translate those changes into stronger coordination, clearer evidence, and more consistent execution across facilities.

GFSI's updated food safety culture work and continued emphasis from the underlying schemes—including SQF, BRCGS, FSSC 22000, and more—on culture and operational controls all reflect the same broader shift: certification is increasingly tied to how well food safety systems perform in practice.

The opportunity for quality leaders is to treat the evolution of these not as an operational burden or just another box to check, but as a reason to build a food safety program that adds strategic value to their entire organization. A strong food safety program can do more than support certification; it can reduce operational friction, reinforce consistency across facilities, and give leaders better visibility into how food safety expectations are being carried out across the business.

The Role of GFSI in Food Safety Certification

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) was launched in 2000 to harmonize food safety expectations across the supply chain, and GFSI-recognized certifications continue to function as a market-access signal over 25 years later. The benchmarking process is built through expert consensus and based on internationally recognized standards including ISO and Codex Alimentarius.

The role of GFSI benchmarking to support market access for food and beverage brands all over the world remains highly relevant in today's market. What has changed is the degree to which certification expectations now shape day-to-day operations.

The challenge that food and beverage quality leaders face isn't simply passing an audit, but doing so predictably across a growing network of sites, schemes, and stakeholders. As GFSI-recognized schemes continue to refine requirements, manufacturers are being asked to demonstrate not only that systems exist, but that they are applied clearly, supported by evidence, and reinforced across the business. The success of a food safety program is increasingly measured by how consistently expectations are translated into execution.

“GFSI recognition offers a passport to the global market”

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The Evolution of GFSI Requirements

The evolution of GFSI requirements is best understood as part of the maturation of food safety assurance. While originally focused on benchmarking food safety standards like HACCP, GFSI has expanded their scope of recommendations to include food fraud prevention and food safety culture. These evolutions reflect the changing nature of the food industry and the emerging risks that are present in the supply chain.

GFSI's 2026 position paper on food safety culture asserts that the concept has gained significant traction since 2018 and has increasingly become recognized as a critical factor influencing food safety performance, organizational behavior, and consumer protection. It also clarifies GFSI's role as defining the "what" of food safety culture, while leaving the "how" to industry specialists and individual businesses.

Evolving GFSI-aligned requirements are reinforcing the importance of implementation, evidence, accountability, and consistency. That strengthens the relevance of certification by making it a more meaningful reflection of how food safety systems function in real operations.

What is "Food Safety Culture?"

Food safety culture is the set of shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape how people in an organization think about and act on food safety every day.

In practical terms, food safety culture is about what happens beyond the written program. It shows up in whether leaders reinforce expectations, whether employees feel responsible for raising issues, whether procedures are followed when no one is watching, and whether corrective actions lead to lasting change instead of one-time fixes.

These additional requirements are designed to increase awareness, commitment, and accountability at all levels.

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Why it Matters at the Facility and Enterprise Level

As requirements mature, the operational impact becomes more visible. Stronger expectations around documentation, risk assessment, corrective action, and cultural reinforcement affect plant preparation, cross-functional coordination, and corporate oversight. The challenge is not just preparing for an audit day. It is maintaining the routines, records, behaviors, and internal alignment that make a reliable outcome possible across time and across sites.

For multi-site manufacturers, there is a compounding effect. As site networks grow, portfolios expand, and customer requirements diversify, the challenge is rarely isolated to one clause or one audit. The larger issue is whether expectations are being translated into repeatable execution across facilities. That is where the operational value of a well-run audit program becomes much more apparent.

Building a Value-Add Food Safety Program

A value-add food safety audit program does more than verify facility conformance at a point in time.

First, it reduces friction. When scheduling, communication, document flow, and follow-up are handled in a consistent and predictable way by a strong partner, quality teams can devote more time to strengthening food safety performance instead of managing avoidable administrative disruption. In complex environments, smoother audit execution is not just a convenience; it is part of maintaining focus and discipline across the program.

Second, it reinforces consistency. As GFSI-recognized schemes continue to place emphasis on implementation and culture, organizations benefit from an audit approach that helps align expectations across facilities. That is particularly important for businesses operating under multiple schemes or integrating sites with different levels of maturity. Consistency creates stronger comparability, fewer surprises, and a more stable program overall.

Third, it improves visibility. Audit findings, recurring nonconformances, and patterns across facilities can reveal where systems are translating well into practice and where more attention may be needed. Used appropriately, audit activity becomes more than a pass-fail exercise. The data becomes a clearer window into program performance.

What Quality Leaders Should Expect From an Audit Partner

Quality leaders know that certification has a real impact on their organization's success, from market access to industry credibility. Selecting the right audit partner is key to supporting your business in a complex operating environment.

Operational coordination also matters more than many organizations expect. In multi-site environments, responsiveness, scheduling predictability, reporting clarity, and communication quality all shape how burdensome or manageable the audit cycle feels to plant and enterprise teams. The more complex the program, the more valuable that coordination becomes.

Program-level visibility matters as well. As requirements evolve, enterprise leaders need more than isolated site outcomes. They need a clearer view of common themes, recurring issues, and where consistency is strong or uneven across the network. A stronger audit program supports that broader perspective.

Considerations For Choosing an Auditor



Food-focused expertise:

Look for an auditor network with real food and beverage experience, not just broad assurance coverage.

Predictable advance scheduling:

Operational reliability matters. Ask about advance scheduling practices, communication processes, and certificate delivery performance so your team is not left chasing logistics.

Centralized communication and support:

A strong audit partner should reduce friction, not add to it. Look for a model where communication between sites and auditors is actively managed, with named contacts and centralized coordination that helps prevent things from falling through the cracks.

Comprehensive scheme coverage:

Make sure the certifying body can support the exact schemes, scopes, and facility profiles in your program.

Multi-site program visibility:

If you manage several facilities, evaluate whether the partner can provide more than site-by-site execution. Program-level reporting, recurring operational reviews, and cross-site trend visibility can help quality leaders get more value from audit activity.

Impartiality and credibility:

Technical strength matters, but so does integrity. Your audit partner should be recognized, credible, and clearly committed to impartiality, with a process that supports confidence in the audit itself.

A Practical Point of View for Manufacturers

The evolution of GFSI requirements creates an opportunity to get more from the audit program when certification is approached as a disciplined, coordinated, and insight-generating function. That does not change the role of certification or blur the line between certification and consulting. It simply recognizes that, in today's environment, the quality of the audit experience has a meaningful impact on how much value organizations derive from it.

For manufacturers, especially those with multiple sites, the most effective audit programs are often the ones that combine technical credibility with operational consistency. They help teams navigate requirements with less friction, create stronger alignment across facilities, and make it easier for leaders to see how food safety expectations are being carried out in practice.

The Bottom Line

GFSI-recognized certification remains a critical foundation for harmonization, trust, and market access in the global food supply chain. Its continued evolution reflects a food industry that expects not only documented systems, but stronger implementation, accountability, and consistency across the organization.

For food and beverage manufacturers, that evolution presents a practical opportunity. A more value-add audit program can reduce friction, strengthen consistency, and improve visibility into how food safety expectations are being translated into daily operations. In that sense, evolving GFSI requirements are not just shaping certification. They are helping quality leaders build stronger, more resilient audit programs overall.



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