



General information regarding elements of the IFS Food certification process is described below. However, it is important that you visit www.ifs-certification.com to access and review all the IFS Food Scheme documents in full, including any additional update from IFS MANAGEMENT and guidance documents. Please feel free to contact us to discuss how we can better serve your organization.

SAI Global Full Service Team

Upon selection of SAI Global as your Registrar and submission of the signed Application for Certification, SAI Global will assign your dedicated service team.

Introduction

This document provides information for Applicants and Approved Suppliers. SAI Global is accredited for IFS according to ISO/IEC 17065 product and process certification.

Certification against the applicable IFS Food standard (“the Standard”) provides a mechanism for giving assurances to retailers and consumers about the production standards of suppliers and thereby assurances regarding the safety, and integrity of the product. The Scheme has been designed to provide assurances that food products are manufactured in accordance with a specified Standard, which goes beyond the relevant legislation and demands best commercial practice.

Certification will only be granted to Applicants and Approved Suppliers who comply with the Standard and follow the Rules set out in this manual.

In the event of any changes to the Standard or Rules, Applicants and Approved Suppliers must conform to the new requirements from the effective date of introduction of the changes.

The registration, audit and certification of Applicants and Approved Suppliers against the IFS Standards is administered under licence by SAI Global, an ISO /IEC 17065 accredited certification body.

Application

Companies who wish to be certified against IFS Food should read carefully the applicable Standard, Standard Doctrine, Rules and other information in this document before completing and sending in an application on the official form to SAI Global.

Application forms must be completed in full giving details of all locations and types of production, scope of the audit and the data used for duration calculation. The Supplier should determine the product or process types to be evaluated using the standard document for reference and provide this information on the application form.

Types of audit

Initial Audit - An initial audit is a company's first audit to IFS Food. It is performed at a time and date agreed between the company and SAI Global. During this audit the entire company is audited, both in relation to its documentation and the processes themselves. During the audit, all criteria of the IFS requirements shall be assessed by the auditor.

Pre-audit (optional) - A pre-audit is an on-site assessment conducted prior to the initial certification audit. In the case of a pre-audit, the auditor who performs this audit shall be different from the auditor who performs the initial audit.

Follow-up audit - A follow-up audit is required in a specific situation when the results of the audit (an initial audit or a renewal audit) have been insufficient to allow the award of the certificate. During the follow-up audit, the auditor focuses on the implementation of the actions taken to correct the Major non-conformity determined during the previous audit.



Renewal audit - Renewal audits are those which are performed after the initial audit. The period in which a renewal audit shall be performed is shown on the certificate. A renewal audit involves a full and thorough audit of a company resulting in the issue of a new certificate. During the audit, all criteria of the IFS requirements shall be assessed by the auditor. Particular attention is paid to the deviations and non-conformities identified during the previous audit, as well as to the effectiveness and implementation of corrective actions and preventive measures laid down in the company's corrective action plan. Corrective action plans from the previous audit shall always be assessed by the auditor, even if the previous audit has been performed more than one year ago. Therefore, audited companies shall always inform SAI Global if they have already been IFS certified in the past.

Extension audit - In specific situations, such as new products and / or processes to be included in the audit scope or each time the audit scope would need to be updated on the certificate, then, for an IFS Food certified company, it is not necessary to perform a complete new audit, but to organise an on-site extension audit during the validity period of the existing certificate.

Please refer to IFS Food Standard for more information about types of audit.

Certification process

All audit activities are mutually planned with your assigned Auditor prior to the audit.

The Auditor will send an audit plan. The audit plan includes appropriate details concerning audit dates, duration, the scope covered and the complexity of the audit. The audit plan shall be sufficiently flexible to respond to any unexpected events which may arise during the site inspection activity within the certification audit. It also specifies which of the company's products or product ranges are to be audited. The company can only be audited at a time when it is actually producing the products specified in the scope of the audit. The audit plan will be sent before the audit, to ensure availability of responsible persons at the day of the audit.

The purpose of the audit is to check that the company conform to all the requirements of the Standard.

The audit shall be scheduled based on the following steps:

- the opening meeting
- the evaluation of existing quality and food safety systems; achieved by checking documentation (HACCP, quality management documentation)
- the on-site inspection and interviewing of the personnel
- the final conclusions drawn from the audit
- the closing meeting.

The company will assist and co-operate with the auditor during the audit. As part of the audit, personnel from different levels of management are interviewed. It is advisable that the company's senior managers are present at the opening and closing meetings so that any deviations and non-conformities can be discussed.

If the auditor identifies any areas that do not comply with the Standard, the Applicant will be informed of these at the time. At the end of the audit, the auditor will list these areas of non-conformity/deviations on a preliminary report.

The auditor may only issue a provisional assessment of company's status during the closing meeting. The auditor shall send the company both the pre-report of the audit and the outline action plan within 2 weeks of the audit date.

The company shall forward the corrective action plan to the auditor within 2 weeks of having received the pre-report of the audit and the action plan layout. If this deadline is not respected, the company has to undergo a complete initial or renewal audit

Following an audit, the auditor will submit the report and complete action plan to the SAI Global Office. SAI Global Certification Team is responsible for making the certification decision. The issue of the certificate is dependent on the audit results and on agreement on an appropriate action plan.

Companies will normally receive a certificate within 6 weeks (target) or 8 weeks (maximum time) of the audit.

Scoring and conditions for issuing audit report and certificate

Audit result	Status	Action company	Report form	Certificate
At least 1 KO scored with D	Not approved	Actions and new initial audit to be agreed upon	Report gives status	No
> 1 Major and / or total score < 75 %	Not approved	Actions and new initial audit to be agreed upon	Report gives status	No
Max 1 Major and total score ≥ 75 %	Not approved unless further actions taken and validated after follow up audit	Send completed action plan within 2 weeks of receiving the preliminary report. Follow-up audit max. 6 months after the audit date	Report including action plan gives status	Certificate at foundation level, if the Major nonconformity is finally solved as controlled during the follow-up audit
Total score is ≥ 75 % and < 95 %	Approved at foundation IFS Food level after receipt of the action plan	Send completed action plan within 2 weeks of receiving the preliminary report.	Report including action plan gives status	Yes, certificate at foundation level, 12 months validity
Total score is ≥ 95 %	Approved at higher IFS Food level after receipt of the action plan	Send completed action plan within 2 weeks of receiving the preliminary report.	Report including action plan gives status	Yes, certificate at higher level, 12 months validity

Note: In case one or several KO is / are scored with D during the audit, the current IFS certificate shall be suspended in the IFS audit portal by the certification body as soon as possible and a maximum 2 working days after the audit date. The same applies in case one or several Major non-conformity(ies) is/are issued during the audit.

Certification cycle

For all products and for all certification levels, the audit frequency for IFS Food audits is 12 months, starting from the date of the audit and not the date of issue the certificate.

The renewal audit shall be scheduled at earliest 8 weeks before and at latest 2 weeks after the renewal audit due date (due date is the anniversary date of initial audit). If this is not the case, or



if the several steps of the certification process were not completed in time, the certificate cannot be renewed with the “due date” but with the actual new date; this will lead to a break in the certification.

Companies are responsible for maintaining their certification. All IFS certified companies will receive a reminder from the IFS on-line audit portal three months before certification expiration.

SAI Global shall contact companies in advance in order to set a date for a new audit. In general, the expected date of each audit shall be uploaded in the IFS audit portal, in the diary function and at latest 2 weeks (14 calendar days) before the audit due date.

Site Obligations

The IFS Food Scheme has numerous obligations that apply as well as SAI Global Accredited Assessment Services Terms and Conditions. You need to refer to IFS Food Scheme documents and all normative documents, below are some highlights:

- Allowing the supervised training/witnessing of new auditors by SAI Global
- Routine SAI Global shadow witness audit program
- Witness audits by Accreditation Bodies, IFS, GFSI or other stakeholders
- By joining the scheme, the company agrees to the content and implications of the IFS Integrity Program (see IFS Integrity Program Section below).
- The company shall inform its certification body about any change that may affect its ability to conform with the certification requirements (e.g. recall, alert on products, etc.). This information shall be made within 3 working days.

IFS Integrity Program

To protect the integrity of the IFS standards and to provide assurance of the quality of IFS audit results IFS operates an IFS Integrity program. This involves complaint investigation, integrity on-site checks, integrity witnessing audits, integrity audits of Certification Bodies and analysis of administrative indicators for CB's.

IFS certified companies are required to participate in:

- IFS complaint investigations
- Integrity on-site checks and / or
- Integrity witness audits

IFS Complaint Investigations

IFS usually receives complaints about IFS audits from retailers and from CBs, employees of IFS certified companies or other natural persons or legal entities.

If IFS is informed of significant discrepancies between results of an IFS audit and a subsequent retailer audit, this will also be investigated within the complaint management process.

The IFS offices will gather all necessary information in order to investigate the cause of the complaint and to establish if there are deficiencies by certified companies, accredited CBs or IFS-approved auditors in meeting IFS requirements.

Integrity on-site Checks

Usually are unannounced audits whereby IFS sends an independent auditor to check on the integrity of a certification based on:

- A complaint, or
- As part of risk-based quality check.

In some circumstances the integrity on-site check may be announced in which case the IFS will inform your company by email or fax 0-48 hours prior to the date of the on-site check.

If a KO or major non-conformity is issued at an integrity on-site audit, then:

- SAI Global is required to suspend the certificate
- A certificate will be reissued once an on-site audit by SAI Global and objective evidence has been provided to the IFS that the KO or major non-conformity is no longer valid.

IFS certified companies are obliged to provide IFS MANAGEMENT and the auditor of the Integrity Program assigned by IFS MANAGEMENT access to their premises and to support the Integrity auditor in the realisation of the Integrity on-site Check wherever they can.

Witness Audits by the IFS Integrity Team

An IFS integrity auditor attends a planned IFS certification audit to observe the auditor undertaking an audit to ensure their continued competency in the IFS program.

Integrity witness audits are usually conducted by the IFS based on:

- A complaint
- An IFS internal quality assurance investigation
- When a penalty has been imposed on an IFS auditor.

IFS Portal

SAI Global is obligated to transmit to IFS MANAGEMENT the relevant (detailed) results from IFS audits and certifications, independently of the results of the audit; this data will be deposited in an online database – the IFS portal – kept by IFS MANAGEMENT.

All relevant IFS audit documents and supporting records including the report, the action plan and well as the certificate (where one is issued) are being uploaded to the IFS portal by SAI Global. Special users of the IFS portal are notified via e-mail if a certificate has been withdrawn or suspended by SAI Global. Special users of the IFS portal include food safety authorities, as well as certified companies and retailers who have access to the IFS portal and have selected your company as “favourite” in the IFS portal function “My audits”. The notification contains an explanation about the identified non-conformity(ies) which led to the withdrawal or suspension.

Data Protection

A copy of the IFS Annex 1 of Framework Agreement (Issue date: May 2018, Version 1) – Information on Data Protection can be found at the following link:

[IFS Annex 1 of Framework Agreement](#)

More information

For more information about IFS Food program, please go visit their official website at www.ifs-certification.com. There you will be able to download specific scheme requirements, guidance documents, and clarification documents.