



**Global Food Safety Initiative
Frequently Asked Questions
October 2008**

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to assist with any questions that may be raised in order to provide consistent answers and help to eliminate any possible ambiguity.

Content

The FAQ document has been designed to answer general questions.

Subject Matter

- 1) **General**
- 2) **The GFSI Guidance Document**
- 3) **Scheme Benchmarking**
- 4) **ISO 22000**
- 5) **Auditor Competence**
- 6) **Working with Accreditation Bodies**
- 7) **The relationship with Global GAP**
- 8) **The relationship with Public Authorities and International Institutions**
- 9) **Other Questions**

1) General

i. What is the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI)?

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) is a non-profit making foundation, created under Belgian law. The daily management of GFSI is undertaken by CIES – The Food Business Forum.

ii. What is the relationship between CIES and GFSI?

The Global Food Safety Initiative (**GFSI**) is co-ordinated by CIES - The Food Business Forum, and was launched in May 2000. The GFSI has a separate governance structure managed by the GFSI Foundation Board. The GFSI Board provides the strategic direction and oversees the daily management of the Global Food Safety Initiative.

CIES - **The Food Business Forum** is the only independent global food business network. It serves the **CEO's and senior management** of nearly 400 members, in over 150 countries, with retailers being the largest single group.

The CIES mission is;

- to provide a platform for knowledge-exchange, thought-leadership and networking
- to facilitate the development of common positions and tools on key strategic and practical issues affecting the food business.

iii. What is the GFSI Mission?

The GFSI Mission is ;

‘continuous improvement in food safety management systems to ensure confidence in the delivery of safe food to consumers.’

iv. What are the GFSI Objectives ?

The GFSI objectives are to;

1. promote **convergence** between food safety standards through maintaining a **benchmarking process** for food safety management schemes.
2. **improve cost efficiency** throughout the food supply chain through the **common acceptance of GFSI recognised standards by retailers** around the world.
3. provide a unique international stakeholder platform for **networking, knowledge exchange and sharing of best food safety practices and information.**

v. Who are the members of the GFSI Board?

The GFSI Board members are drawn from major retailers , manufacturers and food service operators. Membership is by invitation. Current Members of the GFSI Board are:

- Terry BABBS, International Trading Law and Technical Director, TESCO PLC, UK
- Hugo BYRNES, Product Safety and Consumer Affairs Director, ROYAL AHOLD, Netherlands
- Marcos CAMPOS, Quality Assurance Director, Bertin SA, Brazil
- Kevin CHEN, Vice President, China Resources Vanguard Co.,Ltd., P.R. China
- D.V DARSHANE, Director Policy & Standards, Global Quality, THE COCA-COLA COMPANY, USA
- Bryan FARNSWORTH, VP Quality Management , HORMEL FOODS Corporation, USA
- Hervé GOMICHOIN, Quality Director, Carrefour Group
- Cory HEDMAN, Food Safety and Quality Assurance Director, HANNAFORD BROS. CO. (Delhaize Group), USA
- Cindy JIANG, Director, Worldwide Quality, Food Safety, and Nutrition, McDonald's Corporation, USA (Vice Chair)
- Hans-Jürgen MATERN, Division Manager Quality Assurance, METRO AG, Germany
- Payton PRUETT, Vice President, Corporate Food Technology & Regulatory Compliance, The Kroger Co., USA
- Yves REY, Corporate Quality General Manager, DANONE Group (Vice Chair)
- John P. SUAREZ, Senior Vice President and General Counsel, International Division, WAL-MART STORES, INC. (Chairman)
- Johann ZÜBLIN, Head of Standards & Social Compliance, FEDERATION OF MIGROS COOPERATIVES, Switzerland

v. Will the number of GFSI Board members increase?

Following recent discussions in the US in October 2008, the GFSI Board will continue to consider new appointments to the Board ensuring there is appropriate representation of industry sectors and regionally based organisations.

vi. What is the GFSI Technical Committee?

The GFSI Technical Committee was formed in September 2006 and is composed of retailers, manufacturers, food service standard owners, certification bodies, accreditation bodies, industry associations and other technical experts. It provides technical expertise and advice for the GFSI Board and replaces the previous GFSI retailer-only Task Force. Membership of the Technical Committee is by invitation only.

vii. What is the GFSI Stakeholder Group?

The GFSI Stakeholder Group is an international forum open to interested parties such as retailers, manufacturers, Certification Bodies, Accreditation Bodies, Standards owners, Food safety experts and consultants. This forum is held annually, usually prior to the CIES International Food Safety Conference, and provides a platform for open debate on food safety issues. One of the Group's roles is to provide the GFSI Board with recommendations for future work items.

viii. What is the relationship between the GFSI Board, the GFSI Technical Committee and the GFSI Stakeholder Forum?

Any issues raised at the GFSI Stakeholder Forum are considered by the GFSI Board. The GFSI Board in turn provides the mandate of work items to the GFSI Technical Committee, based on the issues arising from the GFSI Stakeholder Forum. The GFSI Technical Committee is charged with delivering the objectives set by the GFSI Board and providing the recommendations on technical issues. It is felt by utilising such a governance process, there is an exchange of information and identification of best practice issues at an international and multi-stakeholder level thus ensuring the GFSI mission is achieved.

ix. How are GFSI priorities set and what are they?

Priorities are set on an annual basis and are developed using feedback from the stakeholder forum and to meet market needs. The GFSI Board sets these priorities.

The priorities for 2007 were;

- Improve communication and awareness of GFSI and its aims
- Gain acceptance by retailers to recognise GFSI recognised standards
- Continue to work on auditor competence
- Review the relationship between GFSI and ISO 222000
- To work in closer co-operation with lobbying associations

x. Have priorities been achieved?

The GFSI Board is very pleased with the work undertaken in 2007 to achieve significant success against the priorities they set.

For example:

- 1) Improve communication and awareness of GFSI and its aims

Achievements

- Publication of a position paper which sets out the context in which GFSI operates
- increase the membership of the GFSI Technical Committee to include US food service trade association (NRA)
- formation of alliance with the CCFA (Chinese National Retailer Association) and joint organisation and attendance at their annual conference in April 2008
- attendance at Japanese GFSI meeting April 2008
- closer co-operation with Accreditation Body organisations

- 2) Gain acceptance by retailers to recognise GFSI recognised standards

Achievements

- the acceptance by seven major retail chains to accept any four of the GFSI recognised schemes. The retailers are Carrefour, Tesco, Metro, Migros, Ahold, Wal-Mart, and Delhaize.
- the announcement by Wal-Mart asking its suppliers to gain certification to GFSI recognised standards
- Other significant retailers and food service operators have since followed this example and have introduced GFSI recognised scheme and third party auditing programmes into their companies.

3) Continue to work on auditor competence

Achievement

- revision of the GFSI Guidance Document in line with recommendations of the Audit Competence Working Group of the GFSI Technical Committee

4) Review the relationship between GFSI and ISO 22000

Achievement

- Publication of a GFSI Technical Committee Position Paper in September 2007, 'What is ISO 22000'
- Statement of intent to be released at the conference

5) To work in closer co-operation with lobbying associations

Achievement

- agreement to work closely with the European Retail Association (Eurocommerce) on food safety issues and EU Commission matters

xii. What are the priorities for 2008?

The GFSI Board has asked the GFSI Technical Committee to focus their attention on

- Auditing in emerging markets
- Schemes for small suppliers
- Food defence
- Accreditation processes and auditor competence

xiii. Are there other areas which the GFSI are considering becoming involved with?

Since GFSI was formed in 2000, food safety has been the main priority, as this has been the major concern of CIES member's Chief Executives. Their concern stemmed from the lack of consumer confidence in food safety following issues such as BSE, dioxin and other contaminants.

Considerable effort has been expended to achieve harmonisation and agreement on food safety matters in the last eight years and GFSI are proud of its achievements.

There are other areas relating to food supply which GFSI could become involved with such as ethical sourcing and the environment. With the success of the GFSI in relation to food safety, the GFSI Board

will have to carefully consider if, and how they can expand the scope of its activity. This is a matter of further debate but the GFSI is driven by market forces and business needs of its members and stakeholders.

2) The GFSI Guidance Document

i. What is the GFSI Guidance Document?

The Guidance Document sets out the key elements for production of food as requirements for food safety management schemes and gives guidance to schemes seeking compliance with it. The Document provides a framework in which food safety management schemes can be benchmarked. It also sets out the requirements for the delivery of conforming schemes and contains guidance on the operation of certification processes.

ii. How often is the GFSI Guidance Document updated?

The first GFSI Guidance Document was issued in 2002 and is now in its 5th edition. The current edition was published in September 2007. As the document reflects best practice it has been revised very regularly over the past six years. There is a requirement on GFSI to revise the Document at least every five years, however the number of revision reflects the work GFSI have undertaken to ensure best practice is agreed and specified.

iii. Where can I find the GFSI Guidance Document?

The current edition of the GFSI Guidance Document is freely available on the CIES website.

iv. What are the differences between Edition 4 and Edition 5 of the GFSI Guidance Document?

There is a document detailing the differences between the two editions of the GFSI Guidance Document freely available on the CIES website.

3) Scheme Benchmarking

i. What is the benchmarking process?

The benchmarking process is defined as;

'Procedure by which a food safety-related scheme is compared to the GFSI Guidance Document'

The GFSI operates within defined procedures to ascertain whether a standard and its certification system can demonstrate conformity against the Guidance Document. The GFSI ensures that the defined procedure used to benchmark schemes is implemented in an independent, impartial, technically competent and transparent manner.

The procedure is clearly specified in the GFSI Guidance Document itself and is freely available from the CIES website.

ii. Have there been changes to the benchmarking process?

The process has changed with the introduction of Edition 5 of the GFSI Guidance Document. Previously a Benchmarking Committee was convened and standard owners submitted detailed assessment of their scheme against the Guidance Document for consideration by the Committee. Each standard had its own Committee and standard owner representatives were interviewed by the individual Committees to clarify and issues raised.

The revised procedure is clearly defined in Edition 5 of the GFSI Guidance Document and is equally robust as that previously undertaken. The main difference is that much of the assessment is carried out by the GFSI themselves, rather than the scheme owners. The first review process is carried out by an appointed independent representative of GFSI and a group of assessors who are members of the GFSI Technical Committee; the results of the first review is referred to the standards owner for comment. A second review is carried out in light of comment from the GFSI members and submissions from the scheme owner. If needed, an explanatory meeting with the applicant can also be organised, but in most cases this can be carried out on the telephone or my e mail correspondence. The Benchmarking Committee will summarise all the consultation responses and the application itself and produce a detailed report with one of the following recommendations:

- (i) compliance is accepted
- (ii) compliance is not accepted until modifications recommended by the Benchmarking Committee have been made by the scheme owner
- (iii) rejection of the application.

In the case of acceptance after modification, the scheme owner should provide the Benchmarking Committee with a written proposal on implementation of the modifications in the existing scheme within a mutually accepted time frame.

The GFSI Board will review the recommendations and will decide to accept, accept after modifications or to reject the applications; the decision in relation to the recognition of a scheme rests with the GFSI Board.

iii. Which standards have been benchmarked against the GFSI Guidance Document 5th edition?

The following standards have been formally benchmarked and recognised by GFSI Board;

- IFS version 5
- BRC version 5
- Dutch HACCP Option B
- SQF 2000

iv. Have any other standards been benchmarked?

There are two other schemes which have been benchmarked against the GFSI Guidance Document Version 4; these are SQF 1000 and New Zealand GAP. The GFSI Board will ensure benchmarking of these pre-farm gate schemes in due course.

v. Are other schemes eligible to be benchmarked?

Currently there are no applicants awaiting benchmarking by the GFSI, but any applications will be considered if the scheme owner believes they meet the requirements of the GFSI Guidance Document. The GFSI does not wish to, nor has any desire to restrict the opportunity for any scheme to be formally recognised by the GFSI.

We would point out that if applicants put forward schemes for benchmarking, all information is confidential and GFSI will not openly discuss the application with any third party.

vi. Are the results of the benchmarking process publically available?

The results of the benchmarking process are openly available, if there is agreement from the applicant to do so. The results of the benchmarking are available on the CIES website.

There is no intention to make any supporting documentation publically available as this can be extensive and much of the decision making will be based on the dialogue which takes place between the GFSI and the applicant.

4) ISO 22000

i. Does the GFSI recognise ISO 22000?

At the present time GFSI does not formally recognise the ISO 22000 standard, however work has been undertaken by the GFSI Technical Committee in the last twelve months to identify where the differences between the GFSI Guidance Document and ISO 22000 exist. The GFSI has no intention to be restrictive in its activities, but by the very nature of the benchmarking process, any submitted standard must meet the requirements defined in the GFSI Guidance Document.

In September 2007 the GFSI Technical Committee published a paper 'What is ISO 22000?', which has led the way for further work by a number of organisations interested in gaining recognition by the GFSI. The document is freely available on the CIES website.

ii. What have been the problems with ISO 22000 recognition?

There are three main areas where differences exist;

- The lack of defined pre requisite programmes in ISO 22000

- The accreditation requirement for ISO22000 differs from that specified in the GFSI Guidance Document
- Ownership and accountability issues

iii. Will GFSI ever recognise ISO 22000?

The GFSI Board has recognised that ISO 22000 has an important role in global food safety and will consider its recognition but within the GFSI benchmarking framework.

The CIAA (the European Food Manufacturers Trade Body) have developed a pre requisite programme (PAS 220) which has just been published and which is available from BSI in the UK. They are also undertaking work to address ownership issues; this has been subject to discussion with the GFSI. It is hoped that these developments will lead to the opportunity to submit the ISO 2000 standard in combination with the PAS 220 for recognition by the GFSI in 2008, but utilising the benchmark framework for the assessment. The outcome of the benchmarking process will be dependant upon close co-operation and further discussion with GFSI and other interested parties in the coming months.

5) Auditor Competence

i. Why is auditor competence an issue?

Auditor competence is a key factor relating to the integrity of any scheme and has long been recognised by scheme owners as a matter which must be managed and controlled to ensure consistency and fairness. At each of the stakeholder meetings held by the GFSI at previous conferences, this has been the subject of much debate.

ii. What has GFSI done about auditor competence?

There are a number of things that GFSI have done in the past year in this area and will continue to work with other stakeholders to continue to address the concerns of the Industry.

2007 - The GFSI Technical Committee formed a multi stakeholder Working Group looking at the issue of auditor competence and the recommendations from this Group formed the basis for the complete revision of the section of the GFSI Guidance Document relating to auditor qualification, training and experience.

Future work – There are a number of areas where the GFSI will work in relation to auditor competence

- As members of the IAF (International Accreditation Forum), there will be active engagement to ensure the food industries requirements are made known to the Accreditation Bodies and close co-operation work to develop a harmonised approach to accreditation processes.
- Form an Accreditation Task Force to co-ordinate the work with the IAF
- Work closely in Europe with the EA (European Accreditation Body) under a memorandum of understanding
- Provide technical support from GFSI Technical Committee members to ISO committees developing standards relating to accreditation and certification.
- Continue to look at auditor competence within the GFSI Technical Committee framework on issues such as emerging markets.

6) Working with Accreditation Bodies

i. Why is GFSI working with Accreditation Bodies?

The GFSI recognise the importance of the accreditation process in relation to scheme ownership and feels that is important to gain co-operation with organisations which can influence accreditation processes on a global or regional basis.

ii. Which organisations are working with GFSI?

The GFSI is working with two organisations;

IAF – International Accreditation Forum

EA – The European Co-operation for Accreditation

Both of these organisations are highly influential in the management and control of National Accreditation Bodies and the GFSI welcomes the opportunity to work closely with these important organisations.

The GFSI believes that by working closely with such organisations, this will provide some guarantee of consistent implementation of food safety certification schemes by providing the industry expertise and perspective which may be absent in these organisations.

Some progress has already been made by representatives of the GFSI Technical Committee and we look forward to even closer co-operation in the coming months.

It is proposed to form an Accreditation Task Force which will comprise of standards owners, accreditation experts and members of the GFSI Technical Committee to assist with a review to create a more harmonised approach to accreditation.

7) The relationship with Global GAP

i. Why is the Global GAP not recognised by GFSI?

There has been a great deal of dialogue between the GFSI and Global GAP since the GFSI was formed in 2000. Despite this dialogue there has been little progress on the formal recognition of the Global GAP scheme by the GFSI for a number of reasons.

However recent developments whereby Global GAP and SQF 1000 have reached agreement to work closely together, has meant that the GFSI has been involved with both scheme owners to ensure that the joint project remains aligned with the GFSI Guidance Document. There is an agreement between the three parties to communicate with all stakeholders ensuring there is clarity on visions, missions and working relationship of each organisation. The GFSI strongly believes that such an agreement is aligned with their objective to facilitate convergence of best practice with the food supply chain.

8) The relationship with Public Authorities and International Institutions

i. Has GFSI developed relationships with Public Authorities and International Institutions?

One of the main priorities recognised by the GFSI in 2007 was to improve communication and awareness of GFSI and its aims; this has meant that efforts have been made to develop relationships with governmental organisations and international institutions. GFSI and members of the GFSI have held a number of meetings with organisations such as the European Commission and the World Trade Organisation. There is a lot more to do in this area and we will continue to build and enhance these relationships. GFSI is in an ideal position to act on the behalf its members and stakeholders to facilitate discussions and dialogue on a number of important issues with these influential organisations.

9. Other Questions

i. Has the GFSI considered the development of one global scheme?

This was the subject of great debate in the early years of the GFSI and it was decided that the preferred option was benchmarking of existing or new schemes. It was felt that, if there had been a move to develop one global standard, there were a number of complex issues, such as legislative, political and cultural differences, that would have been extremely difficult to overcome and the time frame to actually develop such a scheme would have been seen, by the then users of standards, as being excessive.

The framework for benchmarking was also a complex and difficult issue, however was successfully achieved by the commitment of the GFSI members. We believe, given the developments seen in 2007, the GFSI vision has been achieved albeit after several years' hard work.

ii. Why are there no members of Consumer Associations involved with the GFSI?

The GFSI was initially formed to meet retailer requirements; it was felt that there was detailed knowledge and awareness of consumer needs within the GFSI and as much of the activities related to matters of a highly technical nature, there would be little benefit from direct involvement with Consumer Associations at that time.

However as the GFSI moves forward and it is felt that involvement with Consumer Associations would be appropriate and add value to the either the Board or specific Committees, then obviously this will be considered.

iii. Why do not all retailers accept GFSI benchmarked schemes?

The use of any scheme is voluntary and therefore the use is purely at the discretion of the individual retailer or supplier. Individual companies are also responsible for their own food safety systems and

the use of schemes does differ widely depending upon company policy, general regulatory requirements and liability.

The GFSI can only encourage the use of recognised schemes and cannot dictate to individual companies how, or if, they use them. GFSI however has been successful in promoting harmonisation and facilitating co-operation between global retailers and suppliers to will continue to do as this is one of the GFSI founding principles.

iv. Does GFSI support the practice of only specifying certain Certification Bodies?

In relation to the use of specific Certification Bodies by individual scheme users, there is little GFSI can do on this issue, as it is the responsibility of the scheme user to utilise a scheme how they see fit. GFSI can only provide a harmonised framework to work within but cannot dictate to individual organisations how they control and manage their food safety programmes.

v. Does GFSI support the practice of Scheme Owners only specifying certain Accreditation Bodies?

The GFSI Guidance Document defines the requirements for Accreditation Bodies and their relationship with Certification Bodies, i.e. the requirement for the Accreditation Body to be a member of the ISO Guide 65 mutual lateral agreement for product certification. However there is the still some inconsistency in approach by national Accreditation Bodies and GFSI has actively engaged with IAF (the International Accreditation Forum) to promote best practice in the accreditation process.

vi. Why do some retailers keep performing their own audits?

There are two reasons;

1. They do not recognise any scheme

or

2. They carry out supplementary audits to a scheme they recognise

If they do recognise an scheme, but still carry out audits, this may be a policy decision as they feel that they require more information or have a different requirement to those within a scheme standard itself; for example they may wish to assess their own label product being manufactured rather than reliance on an audit where their product may have not been made on the date of the audit.

Users of schemes are responsible for the way in which they use the audit information and GFSI cannot dictate to individual companies how they manage and control their food safety systems.

However with recent announcements by several major retailers and GFSI members the number of such audits is likely to reduce.

For any further information, please contact j.wigram@ciesnet.com