

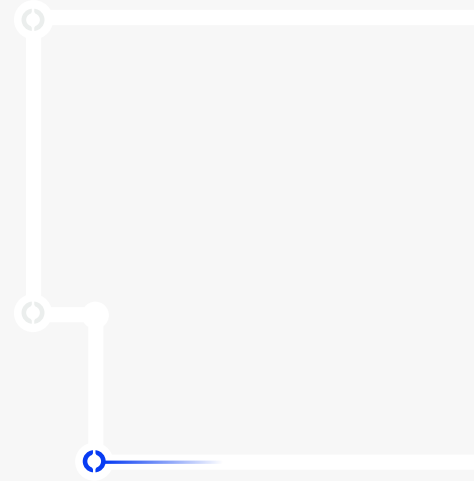
eBook

GFSI Unraveled: Your Complete Guide to the Global Food Safety Initiative

Understanding what GFSI is
and how you become certified



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Achieving GFSI-recognized certification can benefit your business in many ways: enhanced food safety, greater consumer trust, improved supply-chain efficiency, and access to new markets.

As [Bamikole Sunday of Plantation Industries Limited](#) explains, “Achieving GFSI-recognised certification has given Plantation Industries Limited a boost in cocoa processing and has allowed us to be more competitive in the market. Overall, 90% of customers supporting our cocoa products have specifically done so due to our FSSC 22000 certification [GFSI-recognized certification]. FSSC 22000 is a mandatory requirement without which supplying to the big players in the food industry would not have been possible.”

But what precisely is the GFSI? And how do you become certified?

This guide answers these questions and more. You’ll walk away fully confident you can implement the GFSI food safety standards in your business.





① What is the GFSI?

GFSI, or the Global Food Safety Initiative, is an internationally recognized benchmarking organization that brings together retailers, manufacturers, and food service companies to ensure global food safety along the entire supply chain.



② What does the GFSI do?

The GFSI does not provide GFSI certification. Rather, it's an advisor acting as a benchmarking organization that identifies requirements for global food safety standards in its guidance document. All food safety standards created by other organizations are assessed against GFSI-recognized certification programs that meet these GFSI benchmarking standards.

This benchmarking process is so well recognized across the food industry globally that any company meeting these requirements is regarded as having the highest standards in food safety.

But the GFSI does so much more than just benchmarking. Other key activities include:

Harmonizing food standards globally. The GFSI outlines common global standards, practices, and approaches to food safety to help maintain the highest food standards, regardless of location. It also works with regulatory authorities and associations to align global food standards and avoid duplicate work.

Fostering global collaboration. The GFSI cultivates collaboration among all stakeholders in the food industry, like retailers, manufacturers, and other food service providers. It does this by organizing conferences, workshops, and events. This collaboration promotes the exchange of information and expertise that helps to constantly improve food practices.

Offering capacity-building and training initiatives. It provides resources, tools, and training to all companies wanting to improve their food safety management systems.

For instance, the GFSI established the [Global Markets Programme](#) in 2008 to help companies with less sophisticated food systems strengthen their food safety and enhance market access. Plantation Industries Limited is but one example of a business that has benefited from the Global Markets Programme.

Assembling experts to improve food safety. The GFSI brings together groups of experts from various sectors (e.g., supply chain experts and food safety auditors) to address issues and challenges, like fraud prevention, supply

chain transparency, and food risks. They then provide practical solutions to solve these problems, like innovative technologies to identify mislabeling.

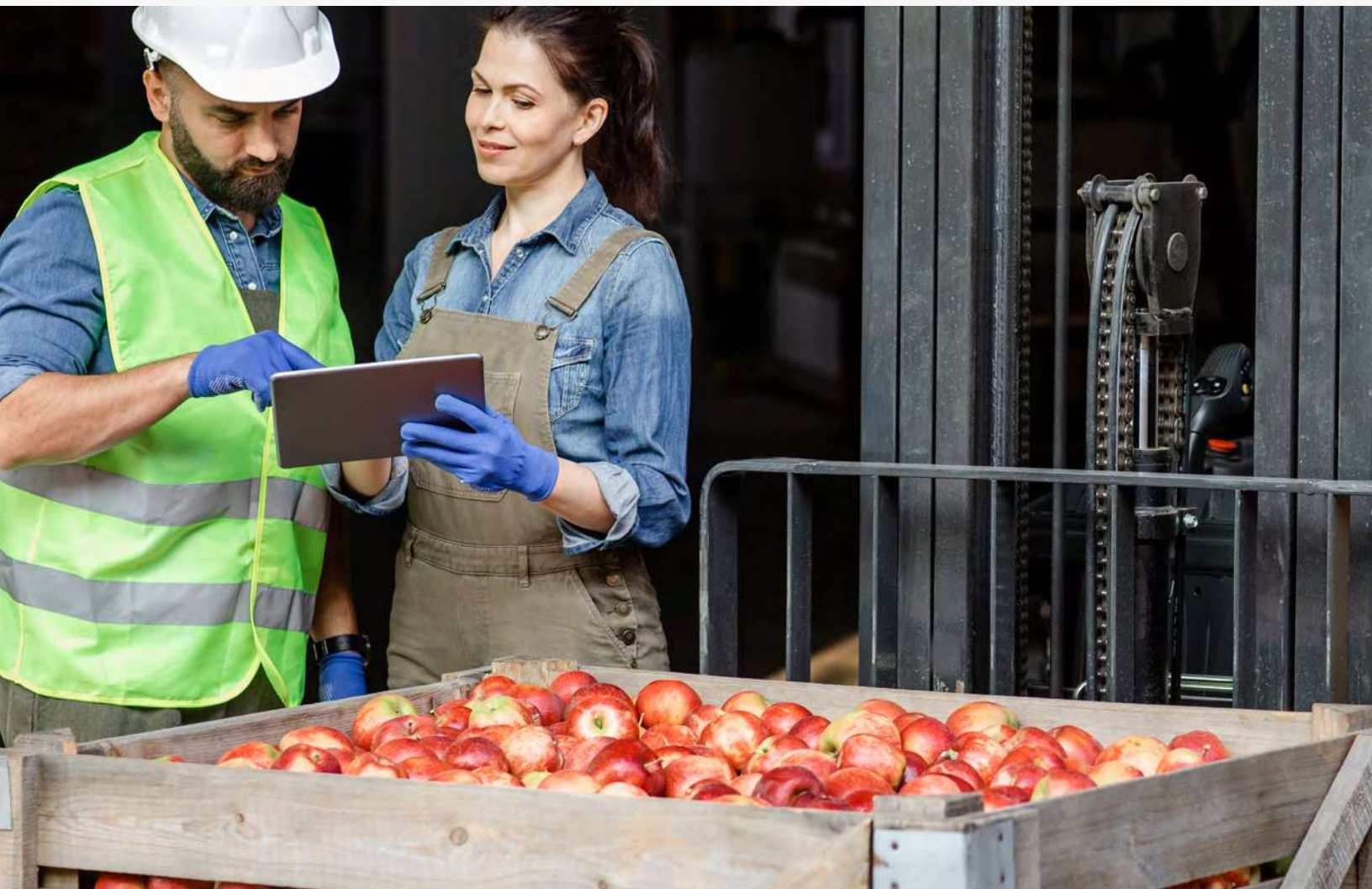
Recognizing the food safety programs that meet the GFSI food safety requirements.

These certification programs help companies enhance food safety, build customer trust and meet regulatory requirements—see the “How do you achieve GFSI-recognized certification?” section later for a complete list of GFSI-accredited programs.

Raising awareness about the importance of food safety. The GFSI communicates the

positive impact of sticking to global food safety standards by engaging with the media, publishing articles like this [World Food Safety Day](#) press release, and organizing awareness campaigns.

Promoting innovation and continuous improvement. The GFSI uses conferences and guidance documents to encourage companies to adopt new technologies, tools, and systems to enhance food safety practices. For instance, it may highlight the benefits of specific technologies, like blockchain for traceability, and provide the tools to implement them.



3 Is GFSI required for your business?

No. GFSI-recognized certification is not a mandatory requirement for businesses in the food industry. Those who choose to pursue certification do so voluntarily.

However, achieving GFSI-recognized certification would be a smart decision, as it can offer many advantages for your company:

Greater food safety. You're able to establish more robust food safety management systems that help prevent foodborne illnesses and [food recalls](#).

Improved reputation and credibility. Because GFSI is globally recognized, achieving certification demonstrates your commitment to food safety and quality. This can boost your reputation and credibility among consumers and in your industry.

Greater consumer trust and loyalty. Showing commitment to upholding food standards by meeting the GFSI requirements also enhances consumer confidence and can make consumers more loyal to your company.

Market access. As we saw in the introduction, GFSI-recognized certification is a requirement to do business with many retailers and manufacturers globally. As such, it opens up new markets and a larger customer base for your business, so you can boost revenue and profits.

Risk mitigation. You're able to more easily identify potential risks and hazards in your

production processes. You can then implement controls to protect against these risks from happening.

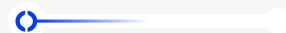
Supplier chain efficiency. GFSI standards promote collaboration across the value chain, which can lead to better traceability and more efficient processes and systems.

Cost savings over the long run. There are initial costs involved in meeting the GFSI requirements, such as the audit cost and the cost of implementing new systems, but you can recoup these costs over the long run through less waste and fewer recall-related events.

Improved regulatory compliance. GFSI standards usually meet, or surpass, the criteria of most food regulations. So, meeting them helps you remain compliant with changing food laws.

Continuous Improvement. The GFSI standards are constantly being updated to keep up with changes in the food industry and best practices. In line with this, the GFSI encourages you to continually evolve your food practices and improve food management systems to maintain food safety.

Competitive advantage. Certification is a unique selling point, allowing you to stand out from competitors who are not certified.



④ How do you achieve GFSI-recognized certification?

Since the GFSI does not provide certification, you can pursue certification through a third-party that will conduct an audit against a GFSI-recognized program. Each program will have its own certifying body to assist with the audit.

On the next page you'll find a step-by-step process for helping you pass that audit and get certified.



Step 1

Choose a GFSI-recognized certification program that aligns with your business

Do your research on the various GFSI-certified programs available to determine which one aligns with your industry and the primary activities you conduct. You can find a complete [list of certified programme owners](#) (CPOs) on the GFSI website. These include:

1. [British Retail Consortium Global Standards \(BRCGS\)](#):

Promotes global food standards across the food supply chain—from production and manufacturing to packaging, storage, and food service.

2. [Canada GAP](#):

Encourages Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for fruit and vegetable suppliers in Canada.

3. [Equitable Food Initiative \(EFI\)](#):

Focuses on creating a more equitable and sustainable food supply chain through improving working conditions and food safety for farm workers.

4. [Freshcare](#):

Sets food, quality, and sustainability standards for the fresh produce and grape industries, so consumers receive safe, high-quality products. It's an Australian certification program.

5. [FSSC 22000](#):

A Food Safety Management System Certification Scheme that combines ISO 22000 and PAS 220 standards. This program applies to

companies that process or manufacture perishable animal products, perishable vegetable products, and other food ingredients, like bio-cultures.

6. [Global Red Meat Standard \(GRMS\)](#):

Ensures the safety and quality of meat in the meat industry.

7. [Global Seafood Alliance \(GSA\)](#):

Focuses on advancing responsible seafood practices worldwide, by concentrating on responsible seafood farming and processing practices.

8. [GlobalG.A.P.](#):

A globally recognized organization that concentrates on reducing the environmental impact of agriculture, while ensuring the health and safety of animals and humans.

9. [International Featured Standards \(IFS\)](#):

Sets food safety and quality standards for companies at different stages of the global value chain, from manufacturers and brokers to wholesales and logistics providers.

10. [Japan Food Safety Management Association \(JFSM\)](#):

A certification for food safety standards in Japan.

11. [Japan GAP Foundation](#):

Promotes Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in Japan, by encouraging safe and sustainable farming.

12. [PrimusGFS Standard](#):

Assesses the food safety and quality management systems of companies in primary production and manufacturing sectors.

13. [Safe Quality Food \(SQF\)](#):

A program with comprehensive food safety and quality standards for the entire value chain from manufacturing, processing, and storage to transportation and distribution.

Be sure to visit the CPO page on their site to learn more about getting certified, or contact each CPO directly via email or phone.

This step will help you gather information on how to pass the audit and get certified. For example, when visiting the [EFI certification page](#), we learn that the first step in certification involves the EFI learning more about your business and needs through a process known as Grower Mapping.

Step 2

Contact certification bodies and choose the right one

Each program will have different certification bodies that are approved and accredited to conduct the audits. For example, the [certifying bodies for EFI](#) are ELEVATE, NSF International, and SCS Global.

Find out who they are for your program. Then, gather information about them—their services, auditing process, and the cost

involved—to help you choose the most suitable certification body.

Step 3

Develop a plan for audit success

Work with the certification body to help you prepare. First, you'll want to align your processes and standards with the certification program's requirements: identify any gaps in current food safety management systems and implement the necessary improvements to meet the standards.

You're likely wondering: But what are the specific requirements for GFSI-recognized certification?

Well, requirements will usually vary between certification programs. For instance, in the case of the EFI, you need to create a [leadership team](#) to ensure your farming operations comply with EFI standards. This team consists of 8-20 people, depending on the size of the operation, and represents management and the workforce.

However, all programs generally focus on good food safety management and manufacturing practices, traceability, allergen management, having specific documentation, and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP).

At the very least, you'll need to implement this HACCP system: a food safety system that identifies and controls hazards in the food production process. It's based on seven principles to ensure food safety, namely:

1. Complete a hazard analysis
2. Identify critical control points (CCPs)
3. Establish critical limits
4. Monitor these limits
5. Develop corrective actions
6. Verify the system's effectiveness
7. Maintain thorough documentation for proper recording keeping

Throughout this process, be sure to use the tools and resources the certification program provides. For instance, the EFI offers 40 hours of training to the leadership team and various materials and support.

Step 4

Request and schedule the certification audit

Certification bodies either have in-house auditors or will partner with an auditing company. Regardless, they will send qualified auditors to complete the audit to see if you meet the standards of the GFSI-certified program.

Depending on the audit findings, you can expect to receive your [GFSI certificate within 15-45 days](#). If any non-conformities are found, you'll need to fix them before obtaining certification.

The length of validity for a GFSI-recognized certificate will depend entirely on the GFSI-certified program. For instance, [EFI certification is valid for three years](#), subject to annual audits to ensure you remain compliant.

Step 5

Monitor systems and processes to maintain compliance

Even after successfully achieving GFSI-recognized certification, you'll need to monitor your food safety management systems to remain compliant with the GFSI's food safety standards—and this means regular audits.

The GFSI standards, as you saw, do evolve and your food safety practices will have to, too.

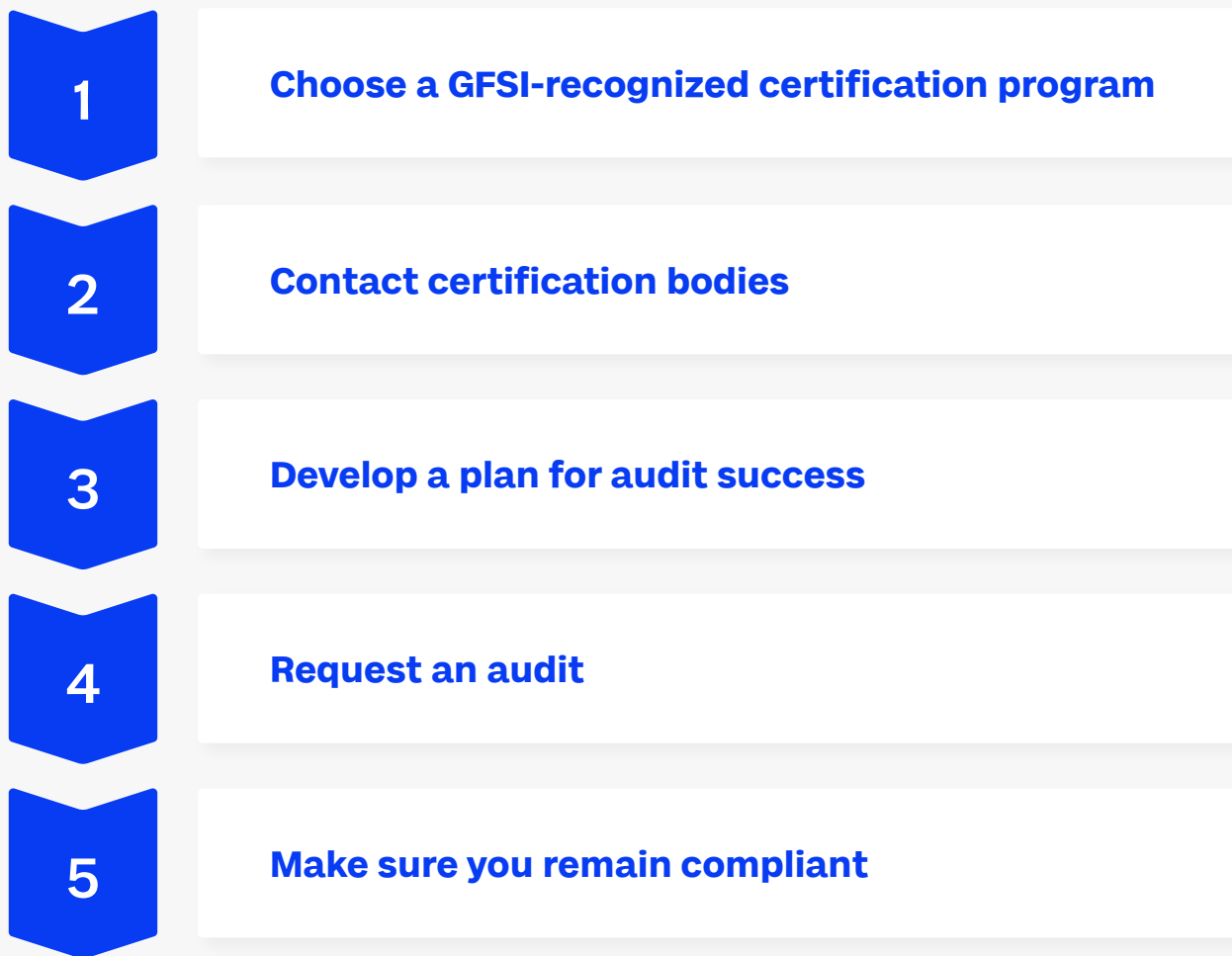


⑤ The bottom line on GFSI certification

The GFSI was established to ensure there are global food standards for everyone in the supply chain to follow and, ultimately, that the food we consume is safe.

While GFSI-recognized certification is not mandatory, achieving it can be hugely beneficial for your business—from enhancing food safety and building customer trust to opening up new markets and giving you a competitive advantage.

The key, of course, to achieving this certification is to follow the right steps:



Do that, and you too may be riding the wave of success like Plantation Industries Limited and countless others who have benefited from GFSI certification.