Introduction

This document provides a guide for clients about how the AIBI Certification Services, Inc. (AIBI-CS) evaluates and certifies food companies against the IFS Food, Logistics and PACsecure Standards. It is important that the client has a copy of the most current version of the applicable IFS Standard as this is the scope and protocol upon which the AIBI-CS Certification scheme is built.

Version #6 of the IFS Food Standard was published in April 2014 and this document follows the protocol laid out in that version. Version #6.1 was published in November 2017 and this document has been respectively updated.

Version #4 of the IFS Logistics Standard was published in December 2017 and this document follows the protocol laid out in version 2.2.

Version #1 of the IFS PACsecure Standard was published in April 2014 and this document follows the protocol laid out in version 2.2. Version 1.1 was published December 2017 and audits conducted from 1 September 2018 will be conducted against this.

The AIBI-CS Quality System is designed to meet the requirements of ISO/IEC 17065. Many of the documents that are part of this system are provided at various stages of the certification process. Accreditation to the ISO/IEC 17065 Standard is carried out by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

When conducting an evaluation AIBI-CS may subcontract to AIBI, use independent contractors or full time AIBI-CS employees.

AIB International Certification Services, Inc.

AIB International Certification Services, Inc. (AIBI-CS), a wholly owned and legally separate subsidiary of AIB International provides certification services to organizations around the world within the food industry and associated services. The Certification Office of AIB International is located in Manhattan, Kansas. The General Manager, Certification Services provides oversight for the AIBI-CS.

AIBI-CS has an Impartiality Governing Board composed of impartial members (who do not work for AIBI-CS) who are stakeholders in the IFS Food Standard. This board meets according to the ISO/IEC 17021 and ISO/IEC 17065 requirements and overviews the whole certification scheme.

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The IFS Food, PACSecure Standard
International Featured Standards has developed these standards to provide assurance to retailers and consumers of the safety and quality of the food they purchase. The Global Food Safety Initiative has benchmarked these standards. They are available from the IFS Website www.ifs-certification.com.

In-between Standard revisions IFS may publish a Doctrine document providing clarification on aspects of the Standard and / or Protocol. Doctrines are available for download from the IFS website.

The IFS also controls the usage of the IFS Logo. Certified clients wishing to use the IFS Logo can download it via the secured section of the IFS audit portal. Rules on the IFS Logo usage can be found in the applicable IFS Standard Part 1 Section 10 and also on the website: www.ifs-certification.com . All usage of the IFS logo has to be declared to AIBI-CS.

To progress with the certification program after the initial inquiry stage, the following stages of the certification process will be followed.

**First Application Stage**

AIBI-CS will forward a copy of the certification application along with other documents that will include:

- An Overview of the AIBI-CS Certification Scheme (this document)
- The Rules for Certification that must be followed by both parties
- Additional information if required

In order to progress further, the preliminary questionnaire should be filled out and returned to the AIBI-CS office.

AIBI-CS will forward a final application letter and other documents that are needed for contract purposes and to allow the evaluation and certification stages to take place. This work will only be carried out when the relevant documents have been filled out and returned as detailed in the quality system. The details provided in the application form will be used to calculate the audit duration in line with the requirements specified in section 5 of the IFS audit protocol.

It is the responsibility of the applicant site to inform AIBI-CS on any outsourced process and keep AIBI-CS updated on the GFSI certification status of the site carrying out the outsourced process, since there might be the case to include the outsourced processes or products as part of the scheduled IFS audit.

If defined processes are centrally organized in a company with several production sites (e.g. purchasing, personnel management, complaint management), the central managing site – headquarter – shall also be audited and relevant audited requirements outcome shall be considered in the audit reports of each production site. The audit of the managing site shall always take place before the audit of each production site to have a preliminary overview. If it is not possible to perform an audit at the managing site, then it shall be ensured that, during the audit of the production site, all necessary information from the managing site is available (e.g. a representative of the managing site should attend at the audit(s) of the production site(s)).

Every effort will be made by AIBI-CS to carry out the evaluation on the date(s) requested by the client. In the case of a re-certification audit, similar documentation will be sent to make sure that the exact scope or any other changes are known in advance.
An evaluation plan for all types of audits will be forwarded to client in advance of the agreed evaluation/audit date.

Prior to the audit, you will need a copy of the standard and ensure you have implemented its requirements.

**Contract Aspects of the Certification Scheme**

The signed documents at both the first and final stage of the application procedure form the basis of the contract. The final contract is when the pre-assessment or audit dates are agreed and the audit is carried out. Terms and conditions regarding payment are detailed later in this document.

The term “client” is used for both the applicant (pre-audit) and the facility being certified.

**Pre-assessment Evaluation**

An optional pre-assessment evaluation can be carried out if the client is not sure about meeting all the aspects of the certification standard. This involves an audit against the agreed scope and a list detailing possible deviations/ non-conformances that are found. At this stage, the process stops, allowing the client to apply for final certification when the corrections to all non-conformances have been completed. The client must understand that a pre-assessment audit will identify where the site does not meet the requirements of the standard, but advice on how to correct the issues cannot be given by the auditor. The pre-assessment does not involve training or consultancy and has to be conducted by a separate auditor than the one who conducts the certification audit.

The certification audit should be scheduled no earlier than three months after the pre-assessment.

**Audit and Certification Stage**

Once all the final application stage documentation (including renewal or extension) has been received by AIBI-CS, an auditor will carry out the evaluation in the agreed time scale and on the agreed date(s). Guidance on the time scale will be provided for each site. There are seven key aspects at this stage of the process:

1. Opening meeting
2. Floor Audit/Factory Inspection
3. Traceability challenge/Vertical Audit
4. Document review of the QMS and FSMS, procedures and HACCP
5. Check back of audit trails, verification and further document checks
6. Final evaluation of findings by the auditor in preparation for the closing meeting
7. Closing meeting

It is important that the client understands that the auditor will present the findings at the closing meeting by discussing any deviations and non-conformities that have been found but will not comment on the likely outcome of the evaluation. The Client will be asked to agree and sign the deviations and non-conformities raised and a copy of these will be left with them.

The audits are carried out by using the Electronic Audit File that is generated by AuditXpress software system or other format supplied by IFS.

On receipt of the preliminary audit report from the auditor, a Technical Review of the documents will be carried out by an approved Technical Reviewer. This reviewed preliminary report will be provided back to the client within 2 weeks of the last day of the audit.

The client should send in details of all the corrective actions or corrective action plans to the AIBI-CS Office within two (2) weeks of receiving the preliminary audit report and outline action plan. It should be noted that adequate time for the auditor to assess the corrective action plans and request clarification is included within the two (2) week deadline.

The evidence/corrective actions received at the AIBI-CS office will be sent to the auditor who will verify that they are satisfactory. If the auditor requires further evidence, he/she will contact the client. If the corrective action plans are assessed as inadequate at the time of the deadline, no certificate will be issued and a full re-audit will be necessary. For this reason, it is recommended that corrective action plans are submitted as early as possible to accommodate any request for further information. Typically, initial submission of CA plan should be within the first two days after receiving the preliminary audit report and outline action plan.

A reminder will be sent to the client before the due date if no evidence of corrective action plans to the deviations and non-conformities raised has been received.

The appointed Decision Maker will make sure that the whole process and all the documents involved in the evaluation are correct before deciding if a certificate can be granted or, in the case of a recertification audit, re-issued. If after Technical Review, the outcome of the audit score is >75% with no Major NC and a corrective plan has been submitted and approved by the auditor, the audit result is deemed positive and certification will be granted within 8 weeks from the day of the audit.

If an audit has been identified as having a maximum of one (1) major NC and greater than or equal to 75% score, certification is not granted (or is suspended for renewal audits); arrangements will be made for a CB representative to visit the plant and confirm that the corrective action(s) are correct and effective. The representative may or may not be the original auditor although the original auditor is preferred. During the follow up audit, the auditor focuses on the implementation of actions taken to correct the Major non-conformity determined at the previous audit. The follow up audit shall be performed within a 6 months period from the date of the previous audit. If the Major is related to production failures, the follow up audit shall be performed at least 6 weeks after the previous audit and no later than 6 months. Certification is granted upon the auditor’s approval of the implemented corrective action.

Where a KO scored with a D, more than one major NC and/or less than 75% score, the client will not gain certification.
It is extremely important that the client reads Part 1 Section 5.5 Evaluation of requirements part of the Standard as it is this protocol that AIBI-CS will follow for all types of deviations and non-conformances.

In the event of a follow up audit to verify a major non-conformance, the client will be charged according to the price list at the end of this document and also for additional expenses for travel. The AIBI-CS office will clearly document this.

A certificate can only be issued after all corrective action plans have been completed and verified according to the quality system.

The AIBI-CS office will notify the client of the outcome of the decision, typically by e-mail, and will issue a copy of the final report and certificate to them as well as upload the report to the IFS Audit Portal.

**Certification Status**

Granting certification will be based on requirements noted in Part 1 Section 5.8 of the applicable IFS Standard. An audit that required a follow up audit will be granted certification at the Foundation level if the corrective action plans were acceptable at the follow up audit. An audit with no major or KO Ds and score between 75% and less than 95% will be granted certification at the Foundation level after review of the corrective action plan. An audit with no major NCs or KO Ds and a score equal to or higher than 95% will be granted certification at the “Higher” level after review of the corrective action plans. The frequencies of subsequent recertification audits are 12 months, starting from the initial audit date.

**IFS Unannounced audits**

IFS Food unannounced audit (option “Unannounced”) involves a full unannounced audit against the audit checklist of the IFS Food requirements, which replaces the yearly scheduled audit. The audit date shall not be notified to the company in advance of the audit.

To get registered for an unannounced audit, the company shall notify AIBI-CS at latest before the start of audit time window ( [−16 weeks; + 2 weeks] of their audit due date). The audit shall be performed during consecutive days. If the company does not inform the certification body before the start of audit time window, the option “Unannounced” cannot be chosen.

If the audit is scheduled outside the defined time window, the audit will not be a valid IFS Food unannounced audit and will be processed as an announced audit.

If company denies access to the auditor (apart from “force majeure”), the currently valid IFS certificate shall be suspended within a maximum of 2 working days after the audit date (notification will be received by customers having placed the company in their favorites’ list in the audit portal) and this information will be visible in the company history in the audit portal.

Following the unannounced audit, the site can choose to remain in the unannounced scheme or revert to announced audits.

**IFS Integrity Program**

The IFS Integrity Program has been put in place to assure the quality of the IFS certification scheme, with a focus on the review of audits conducted by the IFS certification bodies and their auditors. These reviews are conducted on an ongoing basis for random selected audits and as a result of complaints. Most reviews are conducted at the Certification Body’s office; however IFS reserves the right to conduct follow up audits or witness audits with IFS employed auditors at the client’s certified site without any prior notification or in some cases with a 48 hour notification.
Details of this program are documented in Part 1, Section 12 of the applicable IFS Standard and participation is mandatory for all certified facilities.

**Suspension and Withdrawal of Certification**

If a Knock Out clause is scored with a D, one or more major NCs are found or your score is less than 75% at your re-certification audit, your certification shall be suspended and the IFS Audit portal database shall be updated as a maximum of 2 working days to indicate this along with the audit report. We shall inform you of the suspension, the date of effect and the reasons for it.

In the case of the Knock Out clause scored as a D, more than one major NC or the score is less than 75%; a complete new audit is required. Re-instatement and re-certification would then be based on the new audit when it is completed.

In the case of suspension based upon a single major NC and score at or above 75%, a follow-up audit will be scheduled between six (6) weeks and six (6) months of the re-certification audit. Upon successful completion of the follow up audit, the certificate will be re-instated and the IFS Audit Portal shall be updated.

Your certification can be withdrawn for any of the following reasons:

- Information indicating that the product(s) may no longer comply with the requirements of the certification system (ISO/IEC 17065).
- Non-payment of the current audit by the certified company.

We shall inform you when your certification has been withdrawn and the reasons for such action and the date of effect. We shall ask you to return your certificate and discontinue use of any materials that have the IFS Logo.

**Documentation and Supplementary Action**

The evaluation report and associated documents shall be stored safely and securely for a period of five years by the client and AIBI-CS.

Extraordinary information that may impact the site’s certification, including recalls and regulatory alerts, shall be provided to the Certification Body within 3 working days. Recall notification must be sent to gfsi@aibonline.org. Formal written confirmation shall be kept at affected sites.

Significant changes (not limited to but including changes to the site’s ownership, structure, audit scope, product lines, or management personnel) shall be reported to the Certification Body in a timely manner. This information will be forwarded to the IFS-CM and will be evaluated to determine if an Extension or Follow-Up Audit is warranted.

**IFS Audit Portal**

The IFS maintains a database that is accessible on varying levels to the certification bodies, sites certified to the IFS standards (Food and other standards) and retailers/other users. This can be accessed by logging into the IFS website www.ifs-certification.com. Retailers can search for certified companies, assign favourite status to certified companies and can get updates on suspensions of the favourite companies.
The report will be uploaded to a secure section of the IFS portal available only to you and those to whom you grant access.

**Appeals and Complaints**

AIBI-CS will formally reply within 10 working days from the day of receipt according to the procedure and Part 1 Section 9 of the IFS Food Standard and our own appeals, complaints and disputes procedure. A letter (email) receipt of the complaint will be issued within five (5) working days of receiving the complaint or appeal.

A person independent from the IFS certification process will handle appeals and the result of the investigation/outcome will be finalised within 20 working days.

In the event of an unsuccessful appeal, the client will be charged for conducting the appeal investigation.

**Certification Fees**

These will be reviewed annually.

**Terms of Business**

The certification fees detailed and any revisions are effective from 1 January each year.

Subsistence fees (hotel, meals, transportation, etc.) and travel fees, where applicable, are additional to the cost shown above. AIBI-CS will try to minimize these costs by grouping work whenever possible.

Invoices will be raised in pounds Sterling (£) and should be paid in pounds Sterling (£) for audits conducted in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.
Invoices will be raised in US$ and should be paid in US$ for audits conducted in the US.
Invoices will be raised in CA$ and should be paid in CA$ for audits in Canada.
Invoices will be raised in MXN pesos and should be paid in MXN pesos for audits conducted in Mexico.

Payment should be made within 30 days from the date of invoice. Failure to settle invoices in the specified time will be taken into account for on-going certification, and could result in withdrawal of certification.

**Queries**

If you require any more information or clarification on any aspect of the certification process please contact:

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Raised by: Loree Allen – Administration Manager, Certification Services
Approval: Alfonso Capuchino - General Manager, Certification Services
Date: 15 Feb 19
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Page: 7 of 8

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Fax: 1-785-537-0106

Email: gfsi@aibonline.org

The office is open from 0800 to 1700 CST Monday to Friday. It will be closed on national / public holidays.

Confidentiality

AIBI Certification Services (AIBI-CS) shall take all reasonable measures to ensure that AIBI-CS employees and agents keep confidential all information that comes to their knowledge as a result of the certification program. AIBI-CS shall ensure that only a subcontractor / external expert and/or evaluator who have signed a confidentiality agreement and that you, the client have agreed to will be used. Be advised that AIBI-CS will have to show any documentation of the client’s to the ISO/IEC 17065 accreditation body (ANSI) and IFS, if they make a formal request. The client is the owner of information garnered through the audit process; only that information required by the scheme owner or by regulation will be made available.