

# AIBI-CS Overview of the SQF PR3B: Certification Scheme



Any Update to this Document is Posted on the [AIB International website](#).

## Introduction

This document provides a guide for applicants and suppliers about how AIBI Certification Services, Inc. (AIBI-CS) evaluates and certifies food companies against the Safe Quality Food Code.

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. AIBI-CS is currently accredited by ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) for the SQF Code.

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 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 SQF scheme. The Board meets according to the ISO/IEC 17021-1 and ISO/IEC 17065 requirements and overviews the whole certification scheme. AIBI-CS acquired the License to carry out SQF audits in September 2008.

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## Safe Quality Food Standards (SQF)

The Food Marketing Institute has developed these codes 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 SQF Website [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com) and are as follows:

### Safe Quality Food Code/HACCP Based Supplier Assurance Code for the Food Industry

The **SQF** (Safe Quality Food) **Codes** provide the food sector (Food Primary producers, manufacturers, and retailers) a food safety and quality management certification programs that enables Sites to meet regulatory, food safety and commercial quality criteria in a cost-effective manner. In 1994, the Code was developed, and pilot programs implemented to ensure its applicability to the food sector. It was circulated in draft form for comment to experts in quality management, food safety, and food regulation, food processing, agriculture production systems, food retailing, food distribution and HACCP.

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The Food Marketing Institute (FMI) acquired the rights to the SQF Program in August 2003 and has established the SQF Institute (SQFI) Division to manage the Program. The SQF Code is recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) as a standard that meets its benchmark requirements.

## Application Stage

AIBI-CS will forward a copy of the application form (REC10) with other documents that will include:

- An Overview of the AIBI Certification Scheme, which is this document
- The Rules for Certification that must be followed by both parties (PR4)
- Additional information, if required

In order to progress further, the application form should be completed and returned to the AIBI-CS office in Manhattan, Kansas. At this stage, if you have any questions, please contact the office. If we cannot deal with the question, we will be more than happy to arrange a meeting to discuss your requirements.

If you are a food manufacturer applying for certification to SQF but have a network of sub-sites eligible for certification to SQF (e.g., a fruit packing house receiving fruit from contracted growers or a network of warehouses), you may be able to have multisite certification (see section below).

You will need to determine at this stage which certification you want to achieve, and this may be specified by your customers. The Certification Codes are as follows:

- SQF Food Safety Fundamentals Basic and Intermediate (No GFSI Recognition)
- SQF Food Safety Code for Primary Plant Production
- SQF Food Safety Code for Primary Animal Production
- SQF Food Safety Code for Aquaculture
- SQF Food Safety Code for Food Manufacturing
- SQF Food Safety Code for Pet Food Manufacturing
- The SQF Food Safety Code for Animal Feed Manufacturing
- SQF Food Safety Code for Animal Product Manufacturing
- SQF Food Safety Code for Dietary Supplement Manufacturing
- SQF Food Safety Code for Manufacture of Food Packaging
- SQF Food Safety Code for Storage and Distribution
- SQF Quality Code
- SQF Quality Code – applies to all GFSI-recognized and equivalent standards and other Food Safety Management Standards including HACCP certification and ISO22000.

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- Note: Only sites certified to the SQF Quality Code are eligible to use the SQF Quality Shield

AIBI-CS will review your application to determine that they can provide certification. Every effort will be made by AIBI-CS to carry out the audit on the date(s) requested by the client. AIBI-CS will forward documents that are needed for contract purposes and to allow the evaluation and certification stages to take place. In the case of a surveillance audit, similar documentation will be sent to make sure that the exact scope or any other changes are known in advance.

You must register in the SQF Supplier Database: ReposiTrak. You must maintain this registration each year and request your audit through the database. Failure to register or maintain current registration results in the inability to generate the audit form for the auditor and delays the certification process.

The certification body is required to conduct an unannounced audit of your site once every three years. Your first three-year cycle commences with your initial certification audit date. Within the first three years of certification, you are required to have one unannounced audit. Thereafter, you will have an unannounced audit every three years. The unannounced audit will occur within the sixty-day re-certification window (the anniversary date of the initial certification audit +/- thirty days.) The unannounced audit year will be determined between you and AIBI-CS. Unannounced audits will not be conducted on initial certification audits or on surveillance audits. There is an option within the SQF codes to voluntarily have an Unannounced audit every year. Sites that choose and pass an annual unannounced audit will be recognized on the SQF certificate as an "SQFI select site."

A plan for the audit will be forwarded to the client in advance of the agreed audit date (except in the Unannounced Audit Year). To prepare for your audit, you will need to review each clause of the relevant SQF Code and ensure that you have the necessary systems, documents and records in place to demonstrate compliance. You will also need to allocate a member of your staff the duty of being an SQF Practitioner and designate and train and back-up.

## **SQF Practitioner**

An SQF Practitioner is a person in your company's employment who is responsible for developing, validating, verifying, implementing and maintaining SQF Systems. To prepare the Practitioner for this role, it is a good idea to attend an SQF Systems training course and take the online exam. For more information about these courses and online exam, see the SQF Website [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com). Your SQF Practitioner and back-up must have completed recognized HACCP training and be experienced and competent to implement and maintain HACCP-based food safety plans. The Practitioner should also have demonstrated knowledge and experience of the product/category and process under consideration.

## **SQF Consultant**

An SQF Consultant can be used in order to help you set up and develop the systems required to comply with the requirements of the SQF Code. A list of approved consultants is available on the SQF Website [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com).

## **Multisite Certification**

Multisite certification is another option that can be selected for certain companies for SQF certification. This scheme is detailed in Appendix 4 of the Applicable Codes (Primary Plant,

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Aquaculture, Primary Animal, Storage and Distribution, Animal Products, and Food Manufacturing (with primary sub sites).

## **Options for Manufacturers Controlling Primary Producers**

If you are a food manufacturer controlling a group of primary producer sub-sites, multisite certification may be relevant to you. In this case, your certification will be centered at the central-site and the primary producer sub-sites under your control will be sampled to SQF Code. To be eligible for multisite certification, you must meet the following criteria:

- The products supplied by each sub-site are of substantially the same kind produced according to the same fundamental methods and procedures.
- The central-site shall establish a management system in accordance with the SQF Code and shall maintain SQF Code for the duration of the multi-site agreement.
- The central-site's SQF management system shall be administered under a centrally controlled plan and be subject to central management review. All the relevant sub-sites shall be subject to the central site's internal audit program and shall be audited in accordance with this prior to the certification body starting its assessment.
- The central site shall demonstrate an ability to collect and analyze data from all sites and has authority and ability to initiate organizational change, if required. This data shall include: system documentation and changes, management, complaints, evaluation of corrective actions, internal audit planning and evaluation of results.
- The central-site shall document its internal audit procedure. The procedure shall include an internal audit schedule and outline the method and frequency of conducting audits of all sub-sites and the central-site.
- The central-site shall ensure that personnel conducting internal audits of multi-site organizations shall:
  - Successfully complete the Implementing SQF Course
  - Attend Internal Auditing training
  - Have competence in the same food sector category as the internal audit
- Personnel reviewing and evaluating the results of those internal audits shall be separate from personnel conducting internal audits and are trained in internal audit procedures and that they are registered as an SQF consultant or SQF auditor.

If you are considered for multisite certification by AIBI-CS, your main SQF site shall be visited to review whether the above criteria are met. If this is the case, a lead auditor for all the audits will then be assigned to you. AIBI-CS shall visit a sample of sub-sites to assess them against the criteria of SQF Code and if all are compliant with the requirements of the standard, a multisite certificate can be issued. AIBI-CS shall determine how to sample the sub-site sites during the certification period. This certification is then dependent on all sites continuing to meet the criteria for certification.

## **Options for Manufacturers Controlling Manufacturing Sites**

The eligibility/criteria for this option include that there is a central-site certified to the SQF Code that supplies out to the sub-sites that are also certified to the SQF Code. Examples of this are products supplied centrally that are assembled and/or processed at the sub-site (restaurants or fast food outlets are an example of this).

The systems and processes are similar to the option explained previously and are explained in Appendix 4 of the Applicable Codes.

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## **Seasonal Supplier Option**

Initial certification audits for suppliers involved in seasonal production (i.e. a period in which the major production activity is conducted over not more than five consecutive months) shall be conducted during the peak operational part of the season.

Where suppliers seek to include products from more than one season within their scope of certification, the supplier and certification body shall agree to conduct the initial certification audit during the highest risk and/or highest volume production operation. Documentation and records for other seasonal production shall be reviewed as part of the certification audit.

## **Corporate Audits**

If your site is part of a larger corporation and some food safety functions are conducted at a corporate head office (i.e., an office that does not process or handle products), an optional corporate audit of the Code elements managed by that office can be conducted by the certification body. This part of the assessment may also be conducted remotely using ICT. The decision on whether a separate corporate audit should be conducted is made by agreement between the certification body and the corporation and communicated by the corporate office to SQF certified sites managed by the corporate office.

When a corporate audit is conducted, the audit evidence shall be reviewed, and all identified corporate non-conformances must be closed out before the site audits are conducted. Any open non-conformances, which are not closed out, are attributed to the site or sites.

The SQF food safety auditor audits the application of the corporate functions relative to the site's scope of certification during the audit of each site managed by the corporate office. All mandatory and applicable elements of the SQF Food Safety Code: Food Manufacturing are audited at each site regardless of the findings of the corporate audit.

## **Contract Aspects of the Certification Scheme**

The signed documents of both application and the Proposal Letter form the basis of the contract. Terms and conditions regarding payment are detailed later in this document. AIBI-CS has provisions to ensure that all records, data and information received during the execution of an SQF Audit remain confidential and the property of the Supplier, except as required by the SQFI accreditation requirements or by Law, records appertaining to certification shall not be disclosed to a third party without the written consent of the Supplier. This is part of the AIBI-CS application and ongoing surveillance and re-registration/certification procedures.

## **Pre-Assessment Audit**

A Pre-Assessment audit can be carried out if the applicant is not sure that the site will meet all the aspects of the certification Code. This involves an audit against the agreed scope (document review and audit of the plant) and a report detailing possible non-conformances that are found. At this stage, the process stops, allowing the applicant to apply for final certification when any corrections to the non-conformances raised have been made. The applicant must understand that a Pre-Assessment audit will identify where the site does not meet the requirements of the Code. A pre-assessment report is not generated only a list of non-conformances is generated and left with the site. The pre-assessment is not recorded in the SQFI database.

## **Hybrid Audit Approach**

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The hybrid audit approach is a technique that splits the audit into 2 components (virtual and on-site). You must request and fill out REC86, Hybrid Audit Risk Assessment Application to determine if you are low risk for the Hybrid Audit. You must be able to maintain a stable internet connection, capable of attending an online meeting and presenting documents, have personnel available, and have records and procedures available electronically that you are willing to present to the auditor virtually. Each activity of the audit (virtual and on-site) is one half the total duration, which is usually 1 day each.

The virtual portion consist of record reviews, procedure reviews, and any interviews necessary to cover the entire SQF Program. You must be able to present in electronic format the records that the auditor request during a live virtual meeting session. The record dates will not be chosen prior to the audit. Appropriate personnel must be available for both portions. This means the practitioner and others as request must be able to maintain an internet connection and attend an online meeting for 8 hours or the duration described in the audit plan.

The virtual portion and the on-site portion must be completed within 30 days of each other or before your audit window closes whichever comes first. Your certificate is not issued until all of the audit is complete and the corrections/ corrective actions are submitted and accepted. There is only one report and one score. Non-conformances from each component at combined for the final score of the audit.

The hybrid audit approach can be used for all SQF Codes for Certification, Recertification, and Surveillance Audits as determined by the review of the REC86 Hybrid Audit Risk Assessment Application Form.

## **Audit and Certification Stage**

Once all the application stage documentation has been received by AIBI-CS, an auditor will be assigned to your site. We will confirm with you who the auditor is and you have a right to object. Where we need to use anyone subcontracted in from outside AIBI-CS, such as translators, we shall ask your agreement to this. The certification audit will normally take between 2 and 3.5 days on site and 1.0 day for offsite report writing.

Prior to site audit, the entire SQF System must be implemented and a minimum of two months critical records must be available during the audit. During the site audit, all of the product groups being certified must be in production at some point during the audit.

The purpose of the Certification audit is to establish and ensure that within your scope:

1. The SQF System is effectively implemented as documented.
2. Effectiveness of SQF System in its entirety
3. Food Safety hazards and food quality hazards (SQF Quality Code only) are effectively identified and controlled.
4. Effective interaction among all elements of the SQF system is maintained.
5. That your company site has demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the effectiveness of the SQF System and to meeting the regulatory and customer requirements.

The auditor shall determine your site's compliance to each clause of the standard and where compliance is not shown, raise a non-conformance. Non-conformances are classified as follows:

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## **Critical (includes but is not limited to):**

This is a breakdown of control(s) at a critical control point, a Prerequisite Program, or other process step that might cause a public health risk whereby product safety is compromised that warrants a Class 1 or Class 2 recall and effective Correction Action is not taken. This also includes falsification of records relating to food safety controls and the SQF system. *Rating = -50*

## **Major:**

A lack or deficiency in the SQF System producing unsatisfactory conditions that carry a food safety or quality risk and are likely to result in a systems element breakdown. These need to be corrected within 30 days from the completion of the site audit to maintain certification. *Rating = -5*

## **Minor:**

A lack or deficiency in the SQF System that produces unsatisfactory conditions that, if not addressed, may lead to a risk to food safety and quality, but not likely to cause a systems element breakdown. These need to be corrected within 30 days from the completion of the site audit to maintain certification. *Rating = -1*

If the clause or criteria are fully met, the *Rating = 0*.

***The Certification, Recertification, and Surveillance audits are carried out using the Excel based Audit file that is generated by the SQFI ReposiTrak software system.***

You will need to provide evidence for the root cause analysis, correction / corrective actions for any Major non-conformance and correction / corrective actions for any minor non-conformance within an agreed timescale before certification can be considered. The REC228 SQF Non-Conformance Report will be provided by the auditor at the closing meeting. After the report has been reviewed, you will receive the Excel non-conformance report to record and submit the evidence/ results of the root cause analysis, corrections and corrective action on this Spreadsheet and return to the auditor and office. Dependent on the number, type and severity of the non-conformances, a follow-up visit, or surveillance audit may be required.

Following each audit, the audit report will be issued within 10 calendar days. Once the non-conformances are closed out, the final report will be made available. This will be no later than 45 days from the last day on site of the site audit.

## **Certification Status**

A decision will be made on your certification status and AIBI-CS shall apply to SQFI for a unique Certification number for your Certification. Within 14 days of receiving the Certification number, AIBI-CS will supply you with:

- An SQF certificate of registration
- An electronic copy of the relevant Quality Shield (for SQF Quality Code certifications only) together with its rules for use)
- Rules for using the SQF logo.
- Details of your certificate validity and required audit frequency and as outlined in this document and PR4 how it can be withdrawn or suspended

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Based on the evidence collected by the SQF auditor, each applicable aspect of the SQF site audit is automatically scored when the audit report is uploaded to the SQF assessment database. The calculation uses the following factors:

- 0 aspect meets the criteria**
- 1 aspect does not meet the criteria due to minor variations (minor non-conformity)**
- 5 aspect does not meet the criteria (major non-conformity)**
- 50 aspect does not meet the criteria (critical non-conformity)**

A single rating is calculated for the site audit as  $(100 - N)$  where N is the sum of the individual rating criteria allocated. The rating provides an indication of the overall condition of the supplier's site against the SQF Code, and also provides a guideline on the required level of surveillance by the certification body. The audit frequency at each rating level is indicated as follows:

Score	Rating	Certification*	Audit Frequency
96 – 100	E – Excellent	Certificate issued	12 monthly re-certification audit
86 – 95	G – Good	Certificate issued	12 monthly re-certification audit
70 – 85	C – Complies	Certificate issued	6 monthly surveillance audit
0 – 69	F – Fails to comply	No certificate issued	Considered to have failed the SQF Audit

\*Certification also requires that all major non-conformities and minor non-conformities are closed out within thirty (30) calendar days from the last day of the site audit.

The following will be generated for public display on the SQFI website via the SQF Database:

Site name, country, certificate type and number, accreditation body logo and accreditation number, audit date, date of next audit, date of issue, certification expiry date, food sector category(s), product(s) covered by the certificate.

Additionally, the site must consent to have the certificate details accessible by their customers.

The certificate of registration is valid for twelve (12) months from the date the certification decision was taken and shall be in a form approved by the SQFI. Re-certification shall be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days either side of the anniversary of the last day of the initial certification audit. The re-certification audit score is calculated in the same way as the initial certification audit, and the same rating applied (refer to section 3.3). The grade of C will always require a surveillance audit (seasonal products might be the exception to this). The surveillance audit is conducted when the supplier attains a "C" rating at a certification audit or re-certification audit. The surveillance audit shall be conducted within thirty (30) calendar days either side of the six-month anniversary of the last day of the previous certification or re-certification Audit. After the surveillance audit a new score is posted on the SQF Database but the Certificate and the recertification date are not changed.

Minimum Comply (C) rating is required at the surveillance audit to maintain certification. If the rating is Excellent or Good at the surveillance audit, new certificate is NOT issued. The re-certification audit is to verify continued effectiveness of the SQF system in its entirety and review past performance of the SQF System over the period of Certification. It shall include:

1. The SQF System is effectively implemented as documented.
2. Effectiveness of SQF System in its entirety

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3. Food Safety hazards (Food Safety Codes) and food quality hazards (SQF Quality Code) are effectively identified and controlled.
4. Effective interaction among all elements of the SQF system is maintained.
5. That your company site has demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the effectiveness of the SQF System and to meeting the regulatory and customer requirements.

Re-certification audits will normally require 2 to 3.5 days on site as determined by the information confirmed on the REC81 which is sent to the site each year.

## **Changing certification (from SQF Food Safety Fundamentals to SQF Food Safety Code or addition of the SQF Quality Code to the SQF Food Safety Code)**

A certified supplier has the right to change the certification code, according to the scheme. This must be done by contacting AIBI-CS in writing, which will document and manage this process. The supplier must wait till the next recertification audit for level change..

## **Notification of Recalls or Regulatory Warning**

During certification, the supplier must notify the Certification Body and SQFI in writing of a food safety incident (Class I or Class II recall or Regulatory Warning) within 24 hours. Recall notification must be sent to [gfsi@aibonline.org](mailto:gfsi@aibonline.org) and [foodsafetycrisis@sqfi.com](mailto:foodsafetycrisis@sqfi.com). Formal written confirmation shall be kept at affected sites.

AIBI-CS and SQFI are required to be listed in your essential contacts lists as defined in appropriate system element 2.6.3 of the applied SQF Food Safety Code.

AIBI-CS will notify SQFI within forty-eight hours of intended action to ensure integrity of the certification.

## **Temporary or Permanent Change of Audit Dates**

If for legitimate business reasons, there needs to be a change of the audit recertification date (as listed on the SQF Certificate), the site must request the change in writing to AIBI-CS ([GFSI@aibinternational.com](mailto:GFSI@aibinternational.com)).

Written approval by the SQF Compliance Manager is required to issue an extension to your site's certificate or a temporary or permanent change to your site's re-certification audit timeframe, including changes due to extraordinary events such as acts of nature or extreme weather.

All change requests are required to be sent by AIBI-CS that issued your site's most recent SQF certificate.

All requests regarding temporary or permanent certification changes for legitimate business reasons are to be submitted to SQFI by AIBI-CS using the Change Request and Notification Form (available at [sqfi.com](http://sqfi.com)). Using this online form enables SQFI to track and manage all incoming requests and respond in a timely manner.

## **Change of Ownership**

If the business of a client certified to one of the SQF Codes Standards is sold and the legal entity's business name is retained, the new owner shall, within thirty days of the change of ownership apply to the CB to retain the SQF certification and existing Certification number. If the staffs with major responsibility at the client have changed, AIBI-CS shall arrange a full Certification Audit and if the requirements are shown to be met issue a new Certificate of Registration and new Certificate number. If the staff with major responsibility has been maintained, AIBI-CS shall verify this with a site visit within 60 days of the change and maintain the existing audit frequency.

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## **Change in Scope of Certification**

If you wish to add food sector categories or new products to your scope of certification, you may request the increased scope of certification in writing to AIBI-CS. The SQF Certification Manager will assess the request and determine if a scope/ expansion audit is required. An audit for an expansion in scope does not change the re-certification date or certificate expiry date. When a new certificate is issued, the re-certification audit date and certificate expiry date remain the same as on the original certificate.

## **Relocation of Premises**

**If the site relocates the business, the site's certification does not transfer. A successful certification of the new premises must be conducted before a new certificate is issued.**

## **SQFI Website Registration**

SQFI maintains details of all companies that have been certified to their standards on their Website [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com). Following your audit, we shall supply SQFI with the following details for this:

Supplier name, country, Certificate type and number, Certification expiry date, Food Sector Category(s), Product(s) covered by the Certificate of Registration and Modules implemented.

The following details will be provided on the SQFI Website automatically from the SQF Database:

Site name, country, certificate type and number, accreditation body logo and accreditation number, audit date, date of next audit, date of issue. certification expiry date, food sector category(s), product(s) covered by the certificate.

## **SQFI Quality Shield and SQFI Logo**

Sites who achieve and maintain certification to the SQF Food Safety Fundamentals, the SQF Food Safety Code and/or the SQF Quality Code are granted permission by AIB-CS to use the SQF logo. Electronic SQF logo files are to be obtained from the AIB-CS Reports Associate.

When you achieve certification to SQF Quality Code, you can use an SQF Quality Shield on stationery, publicity materials and products.

The Quality Certification Shield and Logo rules and its use are available on the Website [www.sqfi.com](http://www.sqfi.com).

## **SQFI Compliance and Integrity Program**

To meet the requirements of SQFI's Compliance and Integrity Program, SQFI may randomly monitor the activities of AIBI-CS and it's auditors through techniques that include but are not limited to validation and/or witness audits.

While conducting these additional monitoring activities, your site is required to allow SQFI authorized representatives into the site during or after the audit has taken place.

The attendance of an SQFI representative does not interfere with the site's operations or result in additional audit time or non-conformances, and it will not increase the cost charged by the AIBI-CS for the audit.

## **Suspension of Certification**

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If your site's certificate is suspended, the certification body immediately amends the site details on the SQFI assessment database to "suspended" status, indicating the reason for the suspension and the effective date. The certification body also:

- informs your site in writing of the reasons for the action taken and the effective date. Acknowledgment of receipt of the suspension notification is required; and
- notifies SQFI about the suspension using the online change and notification form 13.2 Corrective Action Following Suspension.

The following action is required, dependent on the reason for suspension:

IF	Then
i. Your site does not permit the re certification or surveillance audit to occur within the audit window (applies to the Food Safety Codes and the Quality Code):	The AIBI-CS requests that within forty-eight (48) hours of receiving notice of the suspension you provide a plan detailing the justification for the delay and the timetable for the rescheduled audit (must be no more than thirty (30) days from the audit window). The AIBI-CS conducts an announced on-site re-certification or surveillance audit (as applicable) within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving your corrective action plan. If your site successfully completes the SQF audit with an E, G, or C rating, the AIBI-CS reinstates your site status on the SQFI assessment database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended. Regardless of the rating and because the site failed to permit the re-certification audit in the designated timeframe, the AIBI-CS conducts an additional unannounced surveillance audit no more than six (6) months after the suspension to verify continued compliance with the SQF Code.
ii. Your site does not take corrective action within the timeframe specified (applies to the Food Safety Codes and the Quality Code):	The AIBI-CS requests that within forty-eight (48) hours of receiving notice of the suspension you provide a detailed plan outlining the corrective actions to be taken to resolve the outstanding non-conformances. The AIBI-CS verifies that the corrective action plan has been implemented through an on-site visit within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving your corrective action plan. When the corrective action plan has been successfully implemented, the AIBI-CS reinstates your site status on the SQFI assessment database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended.
iii. Your site does not permit an unannounced audit or refuses entry to an SQF food safety auditor for an unannounced audit (applies to the Food Safety Codes):	The AIBI-CS requests that within forty-eight (48) hours of receiving notice of the suspension you provide a plan detailing the justification for the refusal to permit an unannounced audit and an agreement to proceed with an unannounced audit within the next thirty (30) days. The AIBI-CS conducts an on-site re-certification audit within

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	<p>thirty (30) calendar days of receipt of the site confirmation. If your site successfully completes the unannounced audit with an E, G, or C rating, the AIBI-CS reinstates your site status on the SQFI assessment database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended. Additionally, an unannounced surveillance audit is conducted no more than six (6) months after the above unannounced re-certification audit to verify continued compliance with the SQF System.</p>
<p>iv. Your site receives an “F – fails to comply” rating at a surveillance or re-certification audit (applies to the Food Safety Codes):</p>	<p>The AIBI-CS requests that within forty-eight (48) hours of receiving notice of the suspension you provide a detailed plan outlining the corrective actions to be taken to resolve the outstanding non-conformances. The AIBI-CS verifies that the corrective actions have been implemented by means of an on-site visit within sixty (60) calendar days of receiving your corrective action plan. When the corrective action plan has been successfully implemented, the AIBI-CS reinstates your site status on the SQFI assessment database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended. If the suspension is the result of a re-certification audit, the AIBI-CS conducts an unannounced surveillance audit no more than six (6) months after the suspension to verify the effective implementation of the corrective action plan.</p>
<p>v. Your site does not maintain the requirements of the SQF Food Safety Code: Food Manufacturing and or SQF Quality Code:</p>	<p>The AIBI-CS requests that within forty-eight (48) hours of receiving notice of the suspension you provide a detailed plan outlining the corrective actions to be taken regarding the failure to maintain the SQF Food Safety Code. The AIBI-CS verifies the corrective actions have been implemented by means of an on-site visit within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving your corrective action plan. When the corrective action plan has been successfully implemented, the AIBI-CS re-instates your site status on the SQFI assessment database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended. If your site’s SQF certificate is suspended, your site cannot represent itself as holding an SQF certificate for the duration of the suspension. Appeals regarding decisions on the suspension and/or withdrawal of your SQF certification by a AIBI-CS shall not delay the decision to suspend or withdraw the certification.</p>
<p>vi. Your site fails to pay for the AIBI-CS services as agreed</p>	<p>The site completes payment for the services rendered. AIBI-CS reinstates your site status on the SQFI assessment</p>

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(applies to the Food Safety Codes and the Quality Code):	database and provides you with written notice that your certificate is no longer suspended.
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## Withdrawing Certification

AIBI-CS withdraws the certificate if your site:

- Has been placed under suspension and fails to follow the suspension protocol, as defined by the certification body in your notice of suspension;
- Fails to take approved corrective action within the timeframes specified, as determined by AIBI-CS;
- Has intentionally and systemically falsified its records;
- Fails to maintain the integrity of the SQF certificate; or
- Has an administrator, receiver, receiver and manager, official manager, or provisional liquidator appointed over its assets or where an order is made, or a resolution passed for the closure of your site (except for the purposes of amalgamation or reconstruction) or the site ceases to carry on business or becomes bankrupt or applies to take the benefit of any law for the relief of bankrupt or insolvent debtors or makes any arrangement or composition with its creditors.

If your site's certificate is withdrawn, the AIBI-CS immediately amends your site's details on the SQFI assessment database to a "withdrawn" status, indicating the reason for the withdrawal, and the effective date. The AIBI-CS also:

- Informs you in writing that the SQF certificate has been withdrawn, the reason for such action, and the effective date. Acknowledgment of receipt of the withdrawal notification is required.
- Notifies SQFI about the withdrawal using the online change and notification form; and
- Instructs you to return the certificate within thirty (30) days of notification.

If your certificate is withdrawn, you are not permitted to re-apply for certification for twelve (12) months from the date the certificate was withdrawn by the AIBI-CS. The withdrawn site is posted on sqfi.com for twelve (12) months.

Withdrawn sites cannot use the SQF Quality Shield on packaging or other printed materials  
**Documentation and Supplementary Action**

The evaluation report and associated documents shall be stored safely and securely for a period of five years by you (the applicant/supplier) and AIBI-CS. The certificate issued is the property of AIBI-CS as outlined in the "Rules for Certification."

## Explanation

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The Certification Manager is responsible for providing explanation to the documents related to certification process. This includes SQF Code, SQF Guidance documents and AIBI-CS internal documents. The external sources such as SQFI and ANAB or internal experts including the CB management team and the administrative staff will be used as needed.

## Appeals and Complaints

AIBI-CS will formally reply within 10 working days from the day of receipt. A person independent from the certification process will handle and the result of the investigation/ outcome will be finalized within 30 working days. Appeals must be received within 25 days of the last day of the audit. In the event of an unsuccessful appeal, the supplier will be charged for conducting the appeal investigation.

## Certification Fees

These will be reviewed annually. You are required to pay SQFI their ReposiTrak registration fee annually, which is calculated based on the revenue of the site. ReposiTrak registration Information can be found at <https://www.sqfi.com/assessment-database/>.

Travel and subsistence of auditors are charged in addition to the AIBI-CS certification fee and translator fees will be charged, where required.

## Terms of Business

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

Subsistence fees (hotel, meals, transportation, etc.), 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 US\$ and should be paid in US\$ for audits conducted in the U.S.
- 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.
- Invoices will be raised in pounds Sterling (£) and should be paid in pounds Sterling (£) for audits conducted in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Payment should be made within 30 days from the date of invoice. Failure to settle invoices in the specified time can be taken into account for ongoing certification and could result in suspension of certification.

## Confidentiality

AIB International Certification Services, Inc. (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 applicant/supplier have agreed to will be used. Be advised that AIBI-CS will have to show any documentation of the suppliers to the ISO/IEC 17065 accreditation body (ANAB) and SQF, if they make a formal request.

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Details of your certification shall be displayed on the scheme owner's website as outlined to you in the summary above.

**For more information or clarification on any aspect of the certification process contact:**

AIB International  
P.O. Box 3999  
Manhattan, KS 66505-3999  
Tel: +1 785 537 4750  
Fax: +1 785 537 0106  
[gfsi@aibinternational.com](mailto:gfsi@aibinternational.com)

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

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