



Win More Business
With SQF Certification
How SPC Solutions Support SQF
Certification

Well-known food and beverage companies often rely on contract facilities to produce their products. Many of these companies have well-established brands, so they must be very careful about the contract facilities they choose to work with. These brands rely on third-party organizations that establish food safety guidelines and quality standards, conduct audits, and award certifications.

The Safe Quality Food Institute (SQFI), a division of the Food Marketing Institute (FMI), is one of the most recognized third-party organizations that sets the standards for food safety and quality. To significantly pare the list of qualified contract partners—and ensure they're getting a company that meets their needs—these major food and beverage companies set an SQF certification requirement level for the work. And a big part of their requirement is that companies use a statistical process control (SPC) methodology and tools in their manufacturing processes.

To become more competitive and win more of this business, your organization needs to become SQF certified.

In this white paper, we'll discuss in detail what an SQF certification is and why you need it, the levels of certification, how you should pursue certification, the many benefits your organization can glean from obtaining certification, and the nuts and bolts of SPC. Position your company to win more contracts and boost revenue by obtaining your SQF certification.

To become more competitive and win more business, your organization needs to become SQF certified.



What Is an SQF Certification?

Developed and managed by the SQFI, SQF is a food safety management program that helps companies control food safety risks. SQF certifications are recognized by retailers, brand owners, and food service providers around the world. The program was designed to bring rigor and credibility to the food industry, protecting consumers and food brands in the process. A guaranteed food safety monitoring system, SQF certifications are required by many of the largest food and beverage suppliers to ensure that all links in the supply chain adhere to the same stringent standards of safety and quality.

SQF is one of 11 certifying bodies recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) ([source](#)). The GFSI has determined a set of benchmarked standards that retailers, brand owners, and food service providers use to guarantee the safety and quality of their food supply chain. SQF certifications enable businesses at every level of the food supply chain to meet all industry, customer, and regulatory requirements necessitated by the GFSI. Without certification from SQF or one of the other 10 certifying organizations recognized by the GFSI, producers, manufacturers, food packaging facilities, and distributors cannot sell their products to some of the world's largest purveyors of food and beverage.



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Who Should Pursue SQF Certification?

There are three primary levels of SQF certification that companies may pursue, and they are available to suppliers at all levels of the food industry. This three-tiered system accommodates anything from small-scale family-owned businesses to global brands. SQF certifications include the SQF Fundamentals Program, the SQF Food Safety Program, and the SQF Food Safety and Quality Program. Each program is progressively more robust, and each level is covered by the SQF Compliance and Integrity Program.

Why Is SQF Certification Important?

SQF programs are designed to mitigate risks associated with consumer health and industry profitability. Approximately one in four food and beverage purveyors require their suppliers to obtain SQF certification ([source](#)). By establishing an SQF program, sites demonstrate to major food and beverage brands that their food safety and quality systems can be verified and validated at each level of the supply chain. This benefits all parties involved. Consumers can rest assured they're purchasing safe and quality products, suppliers can protect their profits from costly recalls that damage brand image, and sites at every level of the food supply chain can continue their trusted and profitable relationships with major purveyors of food and beverage.

Supplier Benefits

There are many competitive, financial, and quality advantages to implementing an SQF program. Producers, manufacturers, food packaging facilities, and distributors with SQF certifications are recognized as purveyors of verifiably safe and quality products by retailers, food service providers, and regulatory agencies worldwide.

Sites that are in compliance with GFSI benchmarked standards increase their brand protection by assuring confidence in the safety, quality, and legality of their food products. This globally recognized standard enhances the brand's image, making SQF-certified products more marketable to major suppliers. As a result, demand grows and suppliers are able to increase their yields to become more profitable.



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Further, an SQF program empowers sites to strive for continual process improvements related to quality and safety. In the long run, this enables sites to cut back on time and resources wasted on conflicting audit standards. By improving processes, identifying risks, and reducing waste, sites are able to streamline productivity and effectively manage risk.

Finally, SQF certifications raise the bar for responsible farming and manufacturing processes. SQF programs are proof of due diligence, ensuring regulatory compliance and safe, quality food for consumers. This contributes to an industry-wide standard of consistency that consumers can trust.

Purveyor Benefits

SQF programs are recognized by the GFSI, meaning they're trusted by retailers around the world. By requiring SQF certification from producers, manufacturers, food packaging facilities, and distributors, food and beverage purveyors protect their brand image and profitability. This focus on hazard analysis, risk management, and preventive strategies increases consumer confidence and loyalty. Further, the SQFI's online database of SQF-certified suppliers makes it easy for purveyors to identify which suppliers have a program in place, and also to check the status of supplier certifications and audit results.

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What Are the Levels of SQF Certification?

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Level 1: SQF Fundamentals Program

This first level of SQF certification was created for small- and medium-sized food suppliers. This level is ideal for sites that are looking to establish a food safety management program for the first time or to build upon the program they already have in place. The SQF Fundamentals Program doesn't satisfy GFSI certification, but it creates a solid foundation for doing so. Sites with this level of certification typically sell their products to small, locally owned purveyors that don't require suppliers to meet GFSI benchmarked standards.



Level 2: SQF Food Safety Program

The second level of SQF certification meets GFSI benchmarked standards for food safety and is globally recognized. The SQF Food Safety Program helps sites implement an approach based on a preventive food safety system known as Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP). HACCP ensures that thorough scientific analysis of microbiological, physical, and chemical hazards are applied to each step of the food supply chain. This certification level is ideal for businesses that would like to sell their products to purveyors that require GFSI benchmarked standards be met.



Level 3: SQF Food Safety and Quality Program

The third level of SQF certification is for sites that would like to go above and beyond the standards set by Level 2. The SQF Food Safety and Quality Program was created to monitor and control threats related to food quality. This level is ideal for businesses that have implemented a demonstrably successful SQF Food Safety Program that adheres to the HACCP food safety system. Many large-scale producers, manufacturers, food packaging facilities, and distributors enact the SQF Food Safety and Quality Program in tandem with the Level 2 Food Safety Program.

How Does a Supplier Get SQF Certified?

The SQFI offers detailed step-by-step instructions for achieving SQF certification. The eight-step process entails the following.

- Step 1: Study the SQF Code**
 There are several options for learning about the SQF Code. Between in-person seminars, online courses, and instructor-led classes, suppliers can choose to familiarize themselves with the SQF Code in whatever way suits them best. In fact, suppliers have the option to train themselves if they desire, as [SQF codes are available to download](#) for free.
- Step 2: Register With the SQF Assessment Database**
 The SQF Assessment Database was created to make food safety audits more efficient and effective. An innovative audit management and data capture solution, the SQF Assessment Database sets SQF programs apart from other certifying bodies recognized by the GFSI. [Suppliers can register here.](#)

Registration Fees:		
Classification	Description of Classification	Fee USD
A	Primary Producers (farms, ranches, orchards, etc. or FSC 1, 3, 5, 6)	\$150
B	Suppliers with a gross revenue < \$5 million USD	\$300
C	Suppliers with a gross revenue > 5 million USD < 25 million USD	\$400
D	Suppliers with a gross revenue > 25 million USD < 50 million USD	\$550
E	Suppliers with a gross revenue > 50 million USD	\$650
M	Multi-site Organization	
	Central-site	\$1000
	Each Sub-site	\$25

Figure 1: <https://www.sqfi.com/how-to-get-certified/>

- **Step 3: Identify an On-Site SQF Practitioner**
SQF certification requires that one employee be designated as a primary champion of the site's SQF program processes. This person must be a full-time employee, as well as competent about best practices as they relate to the site's classification. Further, they must complete an HACCP-based training course and have thorough knowledge of the SQF Code requirements.
- **Step 4: Choose Your Certification Program**
The level of certification a supplier pursues will be dependent upon the current safety and quality program in place, as well as the goals of the organization. Because the certifications progress in rigor from Level 1 to Level 3, small suppliers that are just getting started will begin with the Level 1 Fundamentals Program. Suppliers with more established safety processes, however, may pursue the Food Safety Program or the Food Safety and Quality Program depending on their ability to meet retailer demands.
- **Step 5: Explore SQFI-Licensed Certification Bodies**
SQF audits must be conducted by certification bodies that have been licensed by the SQFI. This verifies that they're accredited to meet international standards. These partner certification bodies operate nationwide and around the world. [Find a licensed certification body.](#)



- **Step 6: Schedule a Pre-Assessment**
This step is optional, but it's highly recommended. Working with an auditor in advance of the official audit enables suppliers to identify holes in the process that could impact their certification.
- **Step 7: Schedule an Audit With Your Chosen Certification Body**
Once a supplier is confident in their site's command of the SQF Code, they can select a certification body that best aligns with their needs and schedule their official audit.
- **Step 8: Undergo Official Audit**
To receive SQF certification upon an initial audit, suppliers must pass a document review and facility assessment. This ensures that proper information about food safety and quality is captured and that the process for handling food—including the knowledge of site employees—meets GFSI benchmarked standards.



What Are the Challenges of Implementing an SQF Program?

To achieve SQF certification, suppliers must adhere to a rigorous system of accountability. This means that every aspect of a food and beverage manufacturing company's operation should satisfy the benchmarked standards put forth by the GFSI. Pulling this off at scale requires a robust and highly customizable software solution—one that enables companies to manage large data sets that can be easily accessed and verified in the event of an audit. Further, the solution must afford cost-effective implementation while signaling a clear return on investment from the start.



What Is an SPC Solution?

SPC is a data-driven method that removes the guesswork from quality control. As the industry standard for verifying the safety and quality of food supplier manufacturing practices, SPC provides credible insights about products and processes that validate supplier compliance with industry regulations. All suppliers collect data, but many struggle to make good use of the large data sets they've captured. An SPC software solution helps suppliers mine insights that enable them to reduce risk, improve consistency, and lower operating costs.

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Why Opt for an SPC Solution?

SPC empowers food and beverage companies at every level of the supply chain to preempt costly recall events. With an SPC engine, historical data is well organized and easily accessed. Companies that rely on an SPC solution can readily validate their compliance in the event of an audit. Further, an SPC's real-time insights create meaningful opportunities for process improvements—including waste reduction and streamlined production. This supports a profit-positive business model by lowering production costs, optimizing product quality, and reducing defects. More so, it protects the brand by mitigating food safety risks and ensuring a consistent product.

Many of the world's largest purveyors of food and beverage products require the highest level of SQF certification, which itself requires an SPC. Thus, an SPC solution grants mid- to large-sized suppliers an opportunity to compete on a national or global scale, increasing their market reach.



Better data collection, analysis, and reporting

Reduce data collection time by 14.4% and reporting time by 17.1% ([source](#)).



Insights in real time

Reduce weekly scrap by 12.7% and warranty claims by 14.1% ([source](#)).



Streamlined manufacturing operations

Reduce overtime by 14.1% and rework by 14.3% ([source](#)).

Which Companies Rely on an SPC Solution?

Some of the most recognizable food and beverage brands in the world have implemented an InfinityQS SPC solution. This has enabled them to improve production, reduce waste, and deliver on their brand promise of high-quality food and beverage products. InfinityQS SPC clients include the following.

Nestlé Waters

Nestlé Waters is a leading bottled water company that operates a portfolio of 72 brands in 130 countries. A substantial player in the bottled water market, Nestlé Waters manages 100 manufacturing sites across the globe. Nestlé Waters implemented an InfinityQS SPC solution in an effort to move away from its old and cumbersome paper-based system of collecting and analyzing data. Prior to SPC, Nestlé Waters' quality operators had to halt production to gather necessary data. Nestlé Waters needed a system that would allow them to easily monitor, review, and trend real-time data. Now, with InfinityQS, Nestlé Waters has real-time visibility into production processes across 26 factories. The ability to track trends with quality data enables more accurate and timely process improvements.

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Snak King

Snak King produces food products that provide customers with healthier snack options. The company implemented an InfinityQS SPC solution to combat large variations in product quality. Because of this product inconsistency, Snak King was subject to frequent quality holds and process aborts, resulting in high waste costs. Snak King needed an SPC system that would provide actionable data with ease of use. With InfinityQS, Snak King receives a wide range of data, including customer complaint tracking, incoming receiving tracking, and quality inspections tracking. This has resulted in a 30 percent improvement in customer complaints and a \$1 million reduction of product waste.

Ben & Jerry's

Ben & Jerry's produces a wide variety of premium ice cream products. With more than 500 employees and 700 scoop shops worldwide, Ben & Jerry's products are distributed in over 35 countries. A company known for its use of high-quality ingredients—including family-farmed, hormone-free dairy and Certified Humane cage-free eggs—Ben & Jerry's implemented an InfinityQS SPC solution to streamline quality control. Before the shift to SPC, Ben & Jerry's had been using a cumbersome pen-and-paper system across its three production facilities. The labor required to perform calculation and analysis made this slow and inflexible system very costly. Now, with InfinityQS, Ben & Jerry's can run reports in seconds rather than hours. This has empowered operators to reduce paper use, identify opportunities for cost savings, improve production processes, and deliver a consistently high-quality product.

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Low Risk, High Reward: The Value of SPC and SQF

Food and beverage recall events can be the nail in the coffin for many suppliers, emphasizing the need for a food safety management program that meets global standards. When implemented alongside a quality SPC software solution, SQF certified companies at every level of the supply chain are empowered to prevent recall events from impacting their bottom lines. This return on investment is realized in months rather than years. SPC solutions cut costs, streamline production, and enable safe and quality product consistency that global food purveyors and consumers can trust.



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