



GFSI CERTIFICATION OPTIONS FOR PRODUCE

How to Choose the Right GFSI Certification for Your Business

Due to complex challenges in today's food supply chain, many of the world's food retailers are mandating supplier certification to Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) recognized schemes. GFSI recognized schemes applicable to the fresh produce industry include GLOBALG.A.P., CanadaGAP, PrimusGFS, SQF and BRC. NSF International audits to all of these standards, offering the produce supply chain the widest range of certification options available.

This guide is designed to help your company determine which standard best suits your needs and business goals. In this guide we highlight the scope, benefits, audit scoring and certification process for each of these certifications, and provide links to online resources for these standards. You will also find recommendations and contact information to begin planning your GFSI certification strategy with NSF. Our goal is your successful GFSI level certification to meet buyer requirements and to protect and grow your business.

ABOUT GFSI

The Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) was established in 2000 to promote food safety through benchmarked standards against a common set of criteria as an alternative to private or regional/national schemes. The program is embraced by many of the world's leading retailers, and many foodservice companies have adopted one of the GFSI standards to strengthen their food safety systems and improve brand protection.

Certification to a GFSI benchmarked standard can provide a single solution to meet the needs of many customers, saving both time and money, by eliminating audit duplications and providing consistent processes around the world.

The GFSI benchmarking process was developed by the Global Food Safety Initiative, an independent non-profit organization managed by The Consumer Goods Forum. All GFSI recognized standards measure food safety programs against a similar set of criteria, through some focus on a particular supply chain sector and may include criteria beyond food safety.

NSF offers five GFSI benchmarked standards to the agriculture and fresh produce industry: GLOBALG.A.P., PrimusGFS, CanadaGAP SQF and BRC. These standards incorporate many best practice approaches from the food industry and also address industry-specific criteria for produce. Certification to any of these standards ensures a company is meeting the highest standards, and demonstrates a true commitment to managing quality and producing safe produce.

COMMON REQUIREMENTS AND BENEFITS

All GFSI standards share some components built around fundamental principles of management commitment, risk assessment and preventative controls. All GFSI standards require detailed review of food safety management system documentation in addition to physical site inspection. Most require a minimum of three months of documentation for the audit.

All GFSI standards include the following components:

- > Risk Assessment
- > Management commitment
- > Internal audits
- > Facility conditions
- > Employee hygiene
- > Employee training
- > Control of incoming products
- > Traceability and recall
- > Pest control
- > Recordkeeping and documentation
- > Corrective action of nonconformities on a set schedule with a set minimum performance level.

GFSI standards provide general benefits as well as those unique to each individual certification. All GFSI benchmarked standards:

- > Demonstrate that produce has passed rigorous food safety standards
- > Produce recalls
- > Include a process for continuous improvement which leads to a more efficient and profitable business
- > Reduce or eliminate the multiple audit burden on a supplier
- > Improve customer confidence

CHOOSING A STANDARD

Sometimes a supplier or retailer requires certification to a specific GFSI standard, in which case the decision is easy. However, other retailers, like Walmart, accept certification to any GFSI standard, so how do you know which one is the best fit for your organization?

It is helpful to consider these main factors when choosing a certification:

- > Industry scope: Does the certification cover your company's industry segment? Some apply only to pre-farm gate operations (production and harvest), some only to post-farm gate (handlers and processors) and some to both.
- > Geographical scope: While GFSI certifications are generally recognized by companies worldwide, some are only available or recognized more widely in certain regions of the world.
- > Certification process: It is important that your organization is prepared for the certification process and has incorporated the requirements of the desired standard into the documented system food safety and quality system prior to the onsite audit.
- > Audit process and timing: Consider whether the type of audit scoring (pass/fail or graded) and timing fits with your needs.



The following sections detail the characteristics of each standard for your comparison. After you review these, please contact NSF to develop your GFSI certification strategy.

GLOBAL G.A.P.

In a nutshell: Two types of pre-farm gate agricultural product certification focusing on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP): Harmonized Produce Safety Standard (HPSS), Produce Safety Standard (PSS), and Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) covering food safety plus some environmental and labor practices.

Ideal for HPSS and PSS: North American producers and producer groups of all sizes selling in U.S. and Canadian markets. IFA: Producers and producer groups of all sizes worldwide, selling internationally.

Key benefits:

- > Most widely implemented and accepted farm-level food safety standard in the world (IFA)
- > Versions designed for single and multi-site farms and producer groups fit various types of production systems
- > Improved market access and reduced certification costs for producer groups

Audit scoring:

- > Audit requirements of 100% compliance to major musts and 95% or above compliance to minor musts allows quicker certification
- > Option 1, Multisite, Option 1 QMS and Option 2 QMS: Site downscores are cumulative so it's important that the operator understands how downscores from each site impact overall major and minor must scoring percentages



Certification mark: **GLOBALG.A.P.**

Time to certification:

Certification Milestone	Timeframe
Audit Date	Day 0
All corrective actions responses (CARs) due from client	28 days after audit
Certification decision made	28 days after nonconformances closed
Certificate validity period (additional inspections required mid-year)	1 year

Details:

GLOBALG.A.P. is a worldwide standard that certifies that produce is grown using Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). GLOBALG.A.P. is an affiliate organization of a not-for-profit trade association with the objective of safe, sustainable agricultural production worldwide. GLOBALG.A.P. certification offers options for both a single producer with one or multiple sites and for multiple producers (such as small-scale farmers forming a production group with a common packhouse).

GLOBALG.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA)

The most widely implemented and accepted food safety standard in the world, GLOBALG.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA) certification improves farm management practices and covers agricultural businesses such as fresh produce, field crops, livestock production, plant propagation and compound feed manufacture. It is in compliance with legislation on key issues such as food safety, traceability, environmental sustainability, and worker health and safety.

GLOBALG.A.P. IFA is the most comprehensive GLOBALG.A.P. farm standard producers can currently attain within the GFSI portfolio. Implemented on over 100,000 farms in more than 100 countries, this certification is well known, proven and practical to adopt. It is based on Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) with food safety requirements recognized by retailers and foodservice buyers worldwide.

GLOBALG.A.P. Harmonized Produce Safety Standard (HPSS)

The Harmonized Produce Safety Standard (HPSS) is the combination of the Produce GAPs Harmonized Standards

“Field Operations and Harvesting” (pre-farmgate) and “Post-Harvest Operations” (post-farmgate) checklists in one combined document.

GLOBALG.A.P. Produce Safety Standard (PSS)

The PSS standard is a subset of the IFA standard that was developed for the North American market that looks at only food safety control points.

PSS certification is ideal for producers supplying U.S., Canadian and soon Mexican customers who are mainly concerned with food safety for fruits and vegetables for fresh, cooked or processed consumption.

PRIMUS GFS

In a nutshell: Pre- and post-farm gate certification for fresh or minimally processed produce, focusing on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) and food safety management systems

Ideal for: Fresh produce growers, packers, processors and distributors in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and Latin America

Key benefits:

- > Certification along the entire supply chain from farm production to processing and storing operations
- > Scored audit approach that allows organizations to steadily improve their score over time, while still meeting the base score needed for certification

Audit scoring:

- > Varied compliance based on module type:
- > FSMS, GMP and HACCP modules have multiple compliance levels (full, minor, major and total non-compliance)
- > GAP module has yes/no compliance (full or none)
- > Auto-fails
- > Can achieve certification without performing corrective actions (CAs) if score is 90 percent or greater
- > Submitting CAs can bring score back to 100% if all CAs are accepted fully by the auditor



- > Auditor has ability to award partial score for CA evidence (e.g. a total nonconformance can be brought up to a major, minor or total Compliance depending on the evidence submitted)

Certification mark: 

Time to certification:

Certification Milestone	Timeframe
Audit Date	Day 0
All corrective actions responses (CARs) due from client	Day 30 after audit
Certification decision made	Day 45 after audit
Certificate validity period (additional inspections may be required)	1 year

Details:

PrimusGFS certification is focused on the food safety of fresh or minimally processed products in the agricultural crops sector. PrimusGFS covers various stages of agricultural crop production throughout the entire food supply chain, including pre-harvest, crew harvest and post-harvest farming activities, cooling, packing, processing and storing.

PrimusGFS is a GFSI benchmarked and fully recognized audit scheme covering Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), plus food safety management systems. Since its inception, PrimusGFS has been utilized in 15 countries with over 25,000 certificates issued from accredited certification bodies.

PrimusGFS uses a scored audit approach, with a minimum score of 90 percent overall required for certification. This approach allows organizations to steadily improve their score over time, while still meeting the base score required for certification. A self-assessment must be completed prior to the audit.

CANADAGAP

In a nutshell: HACCP-and GAP-based certification for the safe production, storage, packing, repacking and wholesaling of fresh fruits and vegetables

Ideal for: Canadian companies that grow, pack and store fresh fruits and vegetables and for fresh fruit and vegetable wholesalers.

Key benefits:

- > Specific to the agriculture and fresh produce industries
- > Several certification options: single site, multisite and groups

Audit scoring:

- > A pass requires a grade of 85% or higher and no auto-failures
- > A pass requires no corrective actions
- > If <85% and/or there is an auto-failure(s), certification can still be granted when it's possible to close the corrective action response
- > In addition to the auto-failure criteria, sections of the audit are weighted based on risk

Certification mark: 

Time to certification: CanadaGAP certification requires three months' worth of documentation, or documentation from the start of the current growing season

Certification Milestone	Timeframe
Audit Date	Day 0
Audit report issued	20 days after audit
Certification issued (option C + D)	Audit score 85% and above with no auto-fails: 42 days after audit date Audit score below 85% or critical failure: 42 days after CARs are closed
All corrective action due from client (option C + D)	Initial certification: 60 days from receipt of failed audit
Certificate validity period	1 year + 30 days from certification date

Details:

CanadaGAP is an on-farm food safety certification program for companies that produce, pack or store fresh fruits and vegetables in Canada.



There is also a certification option for companies that repack and wholesale fresh fruits and vegetables. Several Canadian buyers, including Loblaw Companies Limited, McCain Foods Canada, Simplot Canada and Lamb Weston, require growers to become certified under the CanadaGAP program.

Launched in 2008 by the Canadian Horticultural Council, CanadaGAP now has over 2,000 participating producers across Canada is owned and operated by not-for-profit Canadian corporation CanAgPlus.

CanadaGAP is the first food safety program in Canada to achieve GFSI recognition and offers two GFSI benchmarked certification options: C for individual suppliers and B for group certification (such as smallscale farmers forming a produce group) and Option D for repackers and wholesalers.

SQF (SAFE QUALITY FOOD)

In a nutshell: HACCP-based certification that demonstrates a commitment to quality processes and continual improvement pre- and post-farm gate for every link in the supply chain distribution and agent/broker management

- > Recognized by companies requiring HACCP- and ISO-based food safety and quality management systems
- > Two-stage audit (desk and on-site) that allows preemptively addressing issues and nonconformities to improve audit performance over time.
- > Only standard to allow a quality shield on products for retailer and consumer assurance (at Level 3 certification)

Audit scoring:

- > Desk audits are unscored
- > Facility audits start at 100 points, with points deducted for each non-conformance (one point for minors, 10 points for majors and 50 points for a critical)

> Grades:

96 - 100	E - Excellent
85 - 95	G - Good
70 - 84	C - Complies
<70	F - Fails to comply

- > Grades C and F must have an additional surveillance audit 30 days before the 6-month anniversary of the certification audit end date

Certification marks (Level 2 and 3):



Time to certification:

Certification Milestone	Timeframe
Desk audit to determine documentation meets SQF code (Unscored, for initial certification only)	Up to a year before the facility audit (Non-conformances must be closed before start of facility audit)
Facility audit end date	Day 0
Corrective actions due from client	Major non-conformances: 14 days from facility audit date Minor non-conformances: 30 days from facility audit end date
Certification decision made	45 days from facility audit end date
Certificate validity period	365 days from date of certification decision

Details:

SQF was developed in 1994 and is owned and managed by the Food Marketing Institute. SQF certification is based on the SQF Code, a food safety and quality management system that utilizes the National Advisory Committee on Microbiological Criteria for Food (NACMCF) and the CODEX Alimentarius Commission HACCP principles and guidelines.

The SQF Code allows great flexibility in meeting requirements, and risk assessments can be utilized to demonstrate alternative approaches to compliance. After certification, your contact details will be added to SQF's online database, a trusted resource used by retailers and buyers around the world. SQF certification criteria address product traceability, regulatory, food safety and commercial quality criteria in a structured and cost effective manner.



SQF offers two levels of GFSI benchmarked certification: Level 2 requires a comprehensive food safety plan that is founded on HACCP principles and Level 3 requires a food safety plan that includes all elements of Level 2 with additional quality management system component.

The SQF Code is made up of modules. All companies must comply with a set of core system elements (Module 2), plus one other module that defines requirements for their specific industry segment.

Organizations growing and producing fresh produce (whether ready to eat or intended for further processing) must adhere to Module 7, which addresses Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) for farming of fruit and vegetables, or to Module 7H, which incorporates the Harmonized Produce Standards whose development was facilitated by United Fresh and includes elements for produce food safety.

Fresh produce packhouse operations must adhere to Module 10, which addresses Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) for pre-processing of plant products.

Extensive broad acre agriculture operations must meet requirements in GAP for farming of grains and pulses (Module 8).

Processors of fruits, vegetables, grains or nuts must adhere to Module 11 that deals with GMPs for processing of food products and processing of cereal grains and nuts.

Fresh produce wholesalers and distributors must meet requirements for Module 12 on GMPs for the transport and distribution of food products.

BRC (BRITISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM GLOBAL FOOD STANDARD)

In a nutshell: HACCP-based food safety and product quality management certification that helps promote consistency across the supply chain for food and ingredient manufacturers

Ideal for: Produce processing and packing facilities worldwide

Key benefits:

- > First food safety standard benchmarked by GFSI
- > Certification is required by many leading food retailers and foodservice companies in the UK plus many global food purchasers
- > Common sense, risk-based approach with a clear step-by-step path toward certification
- > Company listing in BRC Directory
- > Announced, unannounced and enrollment audit options to suit different levels of readiness and rigor wanted by suppliers
- > Includes assessment of quality management systems and legal compliance

Audit scoring:

- > A, B, C grades
- > A and B are 12 month certification durations, a C grade is 6 months
- > If the audit is voluntarily unannounced, a "+" is added to the grade, e.g. B+

Certification mark:



Time to certification:

Certification Milestone	Timeframe
Audit date	Day 0
All corrective action due from client	28 days from audit date
Certification decision made	42 days from audit date
Certificate generated	49 days from audit date
Certificate validity period	12 months from certification decision date for grades A+, A, B+, B 6 months from certification decision date for grades C+, C



Details:

Developed by the British Retail Consortium, the BRC Global Standard for Food Safety covers food safety and management of product quality in food packing and processing operations. This certification helps promote consistency across the supply chain for food and ingredient manufacturers, wholesalers and distributors. It was the first food safety standard benchmarked by GFSI, and over 15,000 suppliers in over 100 countries have gained BRC certification.

The BRC food safety standard can be used by any food and produce processing operation where open food is handled, processed or packed, and also offers a standard for produce distribution or storage operations. BRC standards do not cover pre-farm gate growing operations.

BRC certification is based on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), a documented quality management system and control of factory environmental standards, product, process and personnel.

BRC certification requires following good manufacturing practices so you'll produce safe, legal products that meet the quality levels expected by your customers.

BRC has certification guidelines specific for the product categories of fresh and prepared fruit, vegetables and nuts. Category 5 includes fresh fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs as well as unroasted nuts. Category 6 includes chilled or frozen prepared and semi-processed fruit, vegetables and salads (including ready-to-eat salads and coleslaws), chips and frozen vegetables.

One of the key strengths of BRC certification is a comprehensive scope that covers safety and quality compliance. BRC certification also allows manufacturers the flexibility to complete risk assessments to justify compliance to the standard and does not require a separate audit for documentation review. Audit results are graded.

NEXT STEPS

The trend toward food safety certification to global standards for the produce industry is expected to continue and extend through the entire product supply chain. Retailers and food service companies remain committed to GFSI certification as an integral part of their supplier management and overall quality systems, and increasingly require that all types of suppliers maintain globally recognized certifications. Moving from a basic GAP or GMP type of audit to one of the GFSI benchmarked standards explained here requires advanced planning and specific training for food safety management personnel.

GFSI Benchmarked Standard Certification Planning

NSF recommends a GFSI upgrade plan that includes the following steps over several months:

Step 1: Choose your standard: Review the standard and criteria in detail.

Step 2: Apply: Choose NSF services including training, consulting, pre-assessment and auditing.

Step 3: Complete training: Enroll in the appropriate training for prerequisites of the standard.

Step 4: Consulting: Get optional on-site or remote guidance and program development from an industry veteran.

Step 5: Pre-assessment: Request a non-scored audit to provide feedback on your food safety program and improve your performance during a scored audit.

Step 6: Audit: Document review and inspection. Certificate issued upon satisfactory completion of corrective actions.



Combining Audits

Audits can be combined with inspections for other claims and certifications to save you valuable time and money. Ask NSF how to combine inspections for any of these standards:

- > Organic
- > Non-GMO Project
- > Costo Addendum
- > Other food safety or quality audits
- > Sustainability audits or claim validation

NSF International, The Most Trusted Name in Food Safety™, works closely with the fresh produce and agricultural sector to achieve GFSI certification with cost-effective and efficient solutions ranging from training and consulting to pre-assessments and bundled inspections to earn other designations with reduced time and cost. With over 70 years of experience and clients around the world from farm to fork, NSF is well positioned to help your organization achieve certification.

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