

GFSI Frequently Asked Questions

Acceptance of Benchmarked Standards

Do all retailers accept all of the GFSI benchmarked Standards, and if not, why not? Will retailers ask ALL their suppliers to comply, or only some of them? Will retailers accept 3rd party not audits instead of their own? (Reduction of multiple audits on suppliers)

The application of the GFSI benchmarked Standards and 3rd Party auditing to particular products is at the discretion of retailers and suppliers. This process will vary in different parts of the world, depending on:

- company policies;
- general regulatory requirements;
- product liability and due diligence regulations.

GFSI does not undertake any certification or accreditation activities. GFSI encourages the use of third party audits against benchmarked Standards, with the goal of enabling suppliers to work more effectively through less audits and reducing travel costs for retailers. Whilst GFSI provides the tools to enable retailers to develop policies on auditing and the use of Standards, retailers will continue to make their own policy. Each retailer will also define their own individual policy regarding liability issues.

Mutual Recognition and Harmonisation

Will the GFSI benchmarking process result in a large number of benchmarked standards – and will there be mutual recognition or harmonisation? Is it an objective of retailers to have mutual recognition and/or harmonisation of all GFSI approved standards? (Certified once accepted everywhere)

The GFSI benchmarking process will enable GFSI to make a shortlist of acceptable Standards, complying with its requirements, as laid down in the GFSI Guidance Document 4th Edition. New editions of the GFSI Guidance Document will be issued at least every three years. As requirements are very strict, it is not expected that this benchmarking process will lead to a plethora of benchmarked Standards. GFSI is constantly working towards harmonisation and mutual recognition by facilitating exchange and better practice between all stakeholders.

Are BRC and IFS trying to bring the technical parts of the Standards (standard, scoring, audit process) closer together, as they seem to be going further apart? Is there going to be harmonisation on reporting styles?

A document outlining the differences between the 4th Version of the BRC Global Food Standard and the 4th Version of the IFS is currently available on www.ciesnet.com.

ISO 22000

How do the retailers feel about ISO 22000? If ISO 22000 is ISO Guide 62, all other standards are ISO Guide 65, how are we going to harmonise? GFSI to make clear statement on acceptance or not of ISO 22000

Retailers will continue to define their own policies concerning ISO 22000 and other existing standards. As defined in the GFSI Guidance Document, the majority of retailers currently support the ISO Guide 65 approach.

ISO 22000 has not been submitted to GFSI for benchmarking. All current benchmarked Standards are managed and owned by legal entities. The legal entity for ISO 22000 is ISO itself. Having said this, ISO is actively participating in the work of the GFSI Technical Committee and both parties are attempting to find a mutually agreeable way forward.

Auditor Competence

How can we achieve better consistency in auditor competencies?

The GFSI Technical Committee is currently looking at this issue and it is part of the ongoing discussion with Standard owners. The responsibility of the expertise and competence for quality in auditing lies with the certification body. The accreditation bodies also play a role in this area by auditing the certification bodies and it is at their discretion how much emphasis is placed on actual auditor competency in the field.

Is GFSI supporting the practice whereby the Standard owner not only specifies the certification bodies but also who the accreditation bodies should be? Why are the accreditation bodies not invited as stakeholders and what is going to be done to standardise their approach/assessment etc. of certification bodies?

The GFSI Guidance Document outlines the specifications for accreditation bodies, which need to be a member of the ISO Guide 65 based MLA for product certification. Accreditation bodies have been invited to join the GFSI Technical Committee. This should help to develop a common approach to conformity assessment by accreditation bodies around the world, towards certification bodies.

For information on the status of accreditation bodies who have signed up to the ISO 65 based MLA for product certification. Please follow the link: www.iaf.nu

Why should certification bodies/auditors have to be accredited to the scope of each standard?

Accreditation bodies prefer to give accreditation to the scope of each individual Standard.

How to establish a mechanism, which would increase the confidence of retailers with respect to audit quality? For example a low-threshold complaints system towards accreditation bodies.

A complaints procedure currently exists for ISO 65 based MLA accreditation bodies and is available from the International Accreditation Forum. GFSI will look further into this issue, if necessary.

Traceability

Is there any guidance on traceability – the degree to which it needs to be achieved?

The GFSI Guidance Document outlines retailer minimum requirements for traceability (Clause 6.1.17).

Standards for small suppliers and SMEs

Is it possible to provide a Standard, which is simpler for smaller food suppliers to comply with, without compromising basic food safety standards?

The development of such a standard has not fallen under the scope of GFSI priorities. However, some retailers are currently looking into this matter and are exchanging information and best practice in this area.

Transportation

Will the GFSI benchmark cover transportation?

The GSI Guidance Document is applicable to transportation as well. No standards have been submitted to date.

Chemical Risks

Should chemical risks (migration of known or unknown compounds) be included into the BRC IOP packaging standard?

This is covered directly in section 3.1.1 under Hazard and Risk Management System in the BRC IOP standard where there is specific reference to chemical contamination.

Labelling

How about making a common retailer policy against warning labelling i.e. “May contain...” This type of labelling should not be accepted!

The scope of GFSI does not cover labelling. Requirements can be found in applicable legislation.