

FAQ

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➤ What is the International Food Standard (IFS)?

The development of the IFS is based on the ever-rising demands of consumers, the increasing liabilities of retailers and wholesalers, the increasing legal requirements and the globalisation of product supplies. All of these points made it essential to develop a uniform quality assurance and food safety standard.

The members of the German retail federation – Hauptverband des Deutschen Einzelhandels (HDE), – of its French counterpart – Fédération des entreprises du Commerce et de la Distribution (FCD) and of its Italian counterparts COOP, CONAD, Federdistribuzione – have drawn up a quality and food safety standard for retailer (and wholesaler) branded food products, which is intended to enable the assessment of suppliers' food safety and quality systems, in accordance with a uniform approach. This IFS Food applies to all the post-farm gate stages of food processing. Retailers from Austria, Poland, Spain and Switzerland also support IFS as their food safety standard.

➤ What are the objectives of the International Food Standard?

The basic objectives of the International Food Standard are:

- to establish a common standard with a uniform evaluation system,
- to work with accredited certification bodies and well-qualified and approved auditors,
- to ensure comparability and transparency throughout the entire supply chain,
- to reduce costs and time for both suppliers and retailers.

➤ How many IFS certificates are issued worldwide and in which countries?

At present most certificates are issued in Europe but, due to global sourcing of the European Retailers, IFS is increasing all over the world.

➤ Which retailers support IFS?

All retailers (and wholesalers) who take part in the HDE Committee for Food Law and Quality Assurance, in the FCD Quality Committee and in the Federdistribuzione Quality Committee, as well as COOP and CONAD support the IFS and demand an IFS certification from their suppliers.

Retailers who belong to these committees are e.g. Metro Group, Edeka, Rewe Group, Aldi, Lidl, Auchan, Carrefour Group, EMC - Groupe Casino, Leclerc, Monoprix, Picard Surgelés, Provera (Cora and Supermarchés Match), Système U, COOP, CONAD and Unes. All of these retailers participated in the redaction of IFS version 5. In addition, further retailers in other European countries, like Spain, Poland, Austria and Switzerland support the IFS too.

➤ Is the IFS applied internationally?

The IFS is a GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative) endorsed standard, like SQF, Dutch HACCP and BRC Standard.

Some retailers, like Carrefour, Tesco, Ahold, Wal Mart, Metro, Migros and Delhaize, announced their recognition of all the GFSI standards.

➤ Which are the recognised and approved IFS certification bodies?

The list of approved IFS certification bodies is available on the website www.ifs-online.eu. They are present worldwide and can provide IFS audits internationally as they have IFS approved auditors for all common languages (English, Spanish, etc.).

➤ Who is affected by IFS audits?

At present, every manufacturer of retailer (or wholesaler) branded food products, who is working with the afore-mentioned retailers (and wholesalers), is affected by IFS audits. IFS is generally applicable for the whole food supply chain excluding the pre-farm-sector.

➤ How is the IFS Food structured in general?

The IFS is divided into four main parts:

- Part 1: audit protocol (scoring of the audit, audit duration, different steps from the audit until the issue of the certificate, etc.)
- Part 2: technical requirements. The check-list contains 250 requirements, which deal with five main subjects:
 - o Senior management responsibility
 - o Quality management system
 - o Resource management
 - o Production process
 - o Measurements, analyses, improvements
- Part 3: requirements for accreditation bodies, certification bodies and auditors
- Part 4: reporting (layout of audit report, certificate, etc.)

➤ Is there a database, where you can find all IFS certificates and audit reports?

IFS provides all information through a database which is available via the website www.ifs-online.eu. Each IFS certificate, IFS audit report and the action plan is stored in a secure area. Only the IFS registered retailers, the IFS certification bodies and the IFS certified food companies have access to the secured area.

➤ Which information do the Internet and the online database contain?

The website www.ifs-online.eu offers the following options to interested parties:

- general information about IFS,
- list of all accredited IFS certification bodies including their regional offices in Europe and world wide,
- online shop to order the different standards of IFS,
- online contact form for the IFS offices in Berlin and Paris.

The secured database of the audit portal contains:

- the list of audited companies / branches,
- the audit scores, reports and action plans of the audited companies / branches.

Each passed audit report with an IFS certificate is included in the online database. Only the name and the address of the audited company / branch are published directly. The audited company can choose independently to make further details of its audit available to customers (retailers, wholesalers). Otherwise this information is strictly confidential.

All IFS audit reports and action plans have the same structure, whatever the country of auditing. This is possible thanks to common requirements laid down in the IFS, Part 4, and to the software AuditXpress, which allow certification bodies to create automatically harmonized audit reports and action plans.

➤ How is it possible to obtain access to the online database www.ifs-online.eu?

All retailers who recognise and use the IFS can have access to the database. In order to obtain access they have to contact the IFS offices.

IFS certified food companies are automatically granted access to the database when their audit data are uploaded into the database by the certification bodies.

➤ What are the extra benefits for the industry to be listed with their IFS audit in the database?

There are several advantages for IFS certified companies to use the IFS auditportal. First of all, they can manage their IFS audit report and IFS action plan. The certification body is responsible for uploading all data of the audit including the audit report and action plan. The companies can provide these documents to their customers (e.g. retailers): with only one "click" they can make it available for them.

On the other hand they can upload additional certificates of other standards like Organic, QS, KAT, BRC, SQF etc. that they have received and want to show to their customers who use the IFS database. All their certificates are available on one view. Furthermore, they can search in the IFS Database. They see every company which is audited against the IFS but not their whole IFS audit report and action plan: they can for instance check if their suppliers are IFS certified.

Finally, they can download the original IFS audit file to use it as a benchmark for their internal audit if they use the IFS-Software "Auditpress for internal audits".

➤ Does IFS have a tool to run Internal Audits?

IFS has developed the software "Auditpress for Internal Audits" to perform internal audits based on IFS. The software tool gives additional remarks on how to implement the IFS requirements in the company. This software further provides the whole IFS checklist and a tool to analyse the audit results. It gives the company a quick response on its status. The software also provides a tool to add further specific requirements of the company to the global checklist and gives the company the flexibility to prepare its internal audit checklist beyond the IFS requirements.

The IFS certification bodies already use this software to analyse the original IFS audits. The company can download the original IFS audit file of its last audit from the database and can use it as a benchmark for its internal audits. Thus, it makes its internal audits most efficient for its daily work. If the company wants to use this possibility please ask the certification body to provide the original IFS audit file in the IFS database. Of course, the company can only read, but not change this file.

The software is available at the online shop at www.ifs-online.eu and is available in German, English, French, Italian and Spanish. Other languages are planned. The software will be available in the summer of 2008.

➤ What are the requirements for the IFS certification bodies?

Certification bodies shall have an EN 45011 accreditation for the certification against IFS. When they comply with these requirements, the certification bodies can be listed and made available for interested parties. After accreditation of the certification bodies, they shall sign a collaboration contract with the IFS owners. Further requirements which have to be fulfilled by interested certification bodies are described in Part 3 of the IFS Food version 5.

➤ What are the requirements for the IFS auditors?

Part 3 of the standard specifies in detail the requirements for IFS auditors.

Fundamental requirements for auditors are:

- audit experience (at least 10 audits during the last 2 years),
- effective knowledge of the HACCP principles,
- qualification in quality management,
- the auditors can only audit in line with their competence in a certain product scope (at least 2 years' professional experience in the specific scope or at least 10 audits in this scope),
- they shall pass a written and oral examination.

Finally, auditors who comply with these requirements shall only work for one IFS certification body accredited for the certification against IFS.

IFS is the only food safety standard which approves auditors through a written and oral examination. Each auditor has to take this examination every two or four years depending on their last results. Through this examination process IFS ensures that only qualified auditors conduct IFS Audits.

➤ What is the process of becoming IFS certified?

The first steps are:

1. Decide which standard is more suitable for the company (IFS Food or IFS Logistic)
2. Order the most recent version of the standard
3. Evaluate the current status (by the company)
4. Select the certification body (quotation, decision and signature of contract)
5. Determine the audit date, the audit times and the audit scope
6. Voluntary: pre-audit to get the status quo
7. Realise the on-site audit at the determined audit date by an auditor competent for the respective product category

➤ How long should an IFS audit take?

To define the amount of time necessary for the audit, the certification body has to ensure that sufficient time is taken for the audit. Experience has shown that the average audit time is about one and a half days in the company / branch and half a day for report redaction.

➤ Is it possible to buy the International Food Standard version 5 and in which languages is it available?

The IFS is now available in the most common languages. The versions in German, English and French are available at a price of EUR 39.00 plus shipping and handling. All other languages, such as Italian, Spanish, Polish, Dutch, Turkish, Bulgarian, Greek, Portuguese, Mandarin, Hungarian, Czech, Russian and others are available at a price of EUR 59.00 plus shipping and handling.

An up-to-date list of all available languages is available at www.ifs-online.eu. If you want to order the IFS please use the online shop at www.ifs-online.eu.

➤ Are other GFSI endorsed standards equally accepted?

Some retailers who support IFS may recognise other GFSI standards, but they trust IFS certificates more since they are deeply involved in the redaction of the standard and in the auditor qualification.

➤ Are there further/other IFS standards than IFS Food?

Yes, all retailers of HDE and FCD have also developed the IFS Logistic (for transport, storage and distribution). New projects are in development, such as IFS for Household and Personal Care or IFS for Cash&Carry.

All IFS standards are developed at the request of retailers.

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