



# 10 Step Guide to Implementing a Food Safety Program & Third-Party Food Safety Audit

## What is a Food Safety Program?

A food safety program:

- 1) Is a **documented system** to manage food safety
- 2) Establishes and implements the **facility conditions** to produce safe food
- 3) Identifies known or reasonably foreseeable food safety **hazards & and implements preventive controls** to 'significantly reduce or prevent identified hazards' from impacting the safety of the food

**A food safety program is specific to a facility and consists of the following elements:**

- 1) Management Commitment
- 2) Prerequisite Programs / Good Manufacturing Practices
- 3) Food Safety Plan (FDA) / HACCP Plan (USDA)

## 10 Steps Implementation Guide

This 10 Step Guide is intended to provide suppliers a high-level overview of what is involved in implementing a food safety program and a third-party food safety audit.

### 1. Leadership Commitment

Support from the most senior level of the organization is imperative in implementing a food safety program as both financial and personnel resources are required.

### 2. Review Food Safety Program Expectations

Suppliers are expected to implement a food safety program that is compliant with regulations, Good Manufacturing Practices & Food Safety Plan/HACCP plan. The program must be fully documented, implemented and maintained. Detailed expectations are provided as part of the guidance material provided by Whole Foods and should be reviewed to understand the scope of the work ahead.

### 3. Assemble the Food Safety Team

One of the first steps in building a food safety program is to assemble a cross functional team and assign a team leader. Depending on the internal resources suppliers may want to hire a food safety consultant. It is recommended you interview multiple consultants to ensure they have the expertise needed to support you. Be sure to ask for references for similar work the consultant has completed in the past.

### 4. Set an Implementation Plan

Implementing a food safety program and preparing for a third-party audit is a significant task and should be planned accordingly. The amount of time and effort required will depend on the current status of your food safety program, the size and complexity of the operation (including number of products) and the capacity of internal staff (both expertise in food safety and time available).



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## 5. Take Food Safety Training

Food safety training is critical in ensuring the effectiveness of your program AND is required by regulations and 3<sup>rd</sup> party audit standards. Training in Good Manufacturing Practices, HACCP, and Food Safety Regulations is recommended.

## 6. Choose a Third-Party Food Safety Audit

There are two broad categories of third-party food safety audits: audits that are certified to a [Global Food Safety Initiative Scheme \(GFSI\)](#), and audits that are not certified to a GFSI scheme. **It is recommended WFM suppliers starting their food safety journey or undergoing their first third-party food safety audit choose a non-certified audit.** A non-certified audit will assess the facilities food safety program however it is a less rigorous standard than a GFSI certified food safety scheme. A regulatory inspection by the local health department, state or federal agency is NOT a third-party audit.

## 7. Pick a Third-Party Audit Company

WFM accepts third-party food safety audits from these accredited auditing agencies. NSF International; Merieux NutriSciences; Food Safety Net Services; AIB (bakeries only); and Primus (produce only).

## 8. Schedule third-party audit

Suppliers should call to book the audit at least 3 months in advance of the desired audit date. Be sure as you enter into an agreement with a third-party audit company and schedule the audit, **you get a copy of the detailed audit expectations.**

## 9. Preparing for third-party audit

Do not move forward with the audit unless you have a copy of the audit expectations from the auditing company. Suppliers should use the expectations in the months before the audit to ensure the food safety program meets the requirements. Suppliers can also schedule a 'gap assessment' or pre-audit assessment at their facility with a consultant or a representative from the third-party audit company in advance of the audit to ensure readiness.

## 10. Benefits of Food Safety Program and Third-Party Audit

- Better management of food safety risks that could negatively impact your business
- Helps you meet regulatory (FDA, USDA, CFIA) requirements
- Provides your customers higher levels of confidence in the safety and quality of your product
- Increased credibility with current and prospective customers
- Improved efficiency through standard operating procedures
- Improved product quality

## Supporting Resources Provided

In addition to this 10 Step Guide, there are multiple resources available in the Food Safety Toolkit to support suppliers in implementing their food safety program and preparing for a third-party audit. Make sure you refer to the appropriate GMP or GMAP resources as they apply to your operation.

**Part A:** Introduction to Implementing a Food Safety Program and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Food Safety Audit

**Part B:** Food Safety Program Expectations (based on a 3<sup>rd</sup> party audit standard)

**Document Templates:** Sample templates to develop and document a food safety program