# The IFS Food Audit and Certification Process

*A customer overview*

## Who can be certified against IFS Food?

Certification is a **voluntary** process and the company is responsible for meeting the certification requirements of the respective scheme. The IFS Food is a reference document designed for auditing of the quality, safety processes and products of the **agricultural and food industry**. It concerns **the food processing companies** or **the packaging companies of loose products**. This program is private and managed by IFS Management GmbH.

## How to be prepared for an audit?


Before being audited, your company **shall review all requirement of the IFS Food Standard** in detail and the latest version of the **IFS Doctrine**. We highly recommend that you do a **detailed gap analyses between your food safety management system and the IFS requirements** and allow at least several months to **resolve the discrepancies** prior to the audit. In order to identify the gaps, you may also carry out a **pre–audit**.

On the day of audit, the current version of the Standard shall be available on the site being audited. Your company is responsible for acquiring the current version of the Standard.

In order to contract our company for an IFS audit, you need to apply for certification. You have to do that **by completing our "Customer Information Sheet" in full detail**. This document is created to ensure that we have the correct information about your company activities to draw up an adequate offer with correct audit time calculation and assign a qualified auditor or team of auditors. **Wrong or lacking information may cause delays in the certification process or lead to exclusion of some of your products.**

If under exceptional circumstances, you decide to **exclude specific products** from the scope of the audit, this **will inevitably appear on the IFS certificate**.

After we receive your data, we will proceed with **defining the scope and duration of your audit and certification**, and will make **a financial offer** for you. The **audit duration** is estimated through the use of **the calculation tool provided by IFS** and available on its website.



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Upon your **acceptance of our offer together with Certima general certification conditions and IFS specific agreement details**, you need to sign the offer and return to us or one of our partners. Your signature will mean that **we have a valid certification agreement**.

Once we have a valid certification agreement, we can proceed with **scheduling of your audit**.

Your company should provide us **the documents necessary for the audit preparation at least 20 days before the audit or 18 weeks before the audit due date for the unannounced audit.**

The submission of these documents is mandatory because it is very important for the preparation of your audit. These document encompass your HACCP plan with detailed description of the CCPs, organizational chart, process flow diagram and any other internal documentation that plays a vital role in your food safety management.

We as a certification body shall provide the **audit plan** with included appropriate details concerning the scope covered **and the audit team**. You can reject an auditor if you are convinced that this person can **jeopardize the impartiality** of the audit and should send **a written reasoning for the rejection** to Certima.
Keep in mind that it is a usual procedure for any certification body to send **observers** with the audit team – this is done for training, witnessing or accreditation purposes and the **observation doesn't affect the smooth performance of the audit**.

Your company can only be audited at the time **when you are actually producing the products specified in the scope of the audit**. On the day of the audit you will have to schedule manufacturing for each family product*: it is **imperative for the auditor to observe all products and technology categories within the scope during the time of the audit**.
Otherwise an audit for extension of the scope will have to be organized or the products will have to be excluded from the scope if the conditions of exclusion are met.

* *Product family = Different HACCP and/or different CCP and/or a different product category and/or a different technology category.*

The result of the audit and whether you would be certified depends on **your ability to implement the IFS certification standard requirements.**



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## What is an unannounced audit?

You have the possibility to be **audited unexpectedly**. In the case of a renewal audit, this choice must be notified to Certima BV **not later than 18 weeks prior to the audit due date** (visible on your valid certificate). If you do not notify us in this period, the audit cannot be registered and performed as unannounced, hence only an announced audit may be performed.

The unannounced audit must take place within the following period: **between 16 weeks prior to the audit due date and 2 weeks after the audit due date**. The audit shall be conducted during consecutive days. You can define **a blackout period** - when the site is not available for the audit due to technical/organizational reasons. The blackout period is **maximum 10 operational days** that can be divided over a maximum of 3 periods, in addition to the days of closure of the site (holidays, halting production for maintenance). Blackout period should be **communicated to Certima BV as soon as possible but not later than 18 weeks before the audit due date**.

## What happens in case of production of seasonal products?

In case of seasonal production, you must notify us the **planned dates of production** and audit should be held on these dates. The notification should happen well in advance of your scheduled or indicative audit date.

## What are multi-site audits?

It is possible to have an IFS Food Audit in multi-site organizations. The specific approach can be defined after you provide us with detailed information about the **different sites, their products, and the integration of activities** in the overall management system.

## How the audit and certification process looks like?

The aim of the audit on site is **to check the conformity of products/systems with the standard criteria** and will be performed **at all operational sites** dealing with the concerned products.



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In case of unannounced audits, the audit should immediately start on the **production area**. Entering the production area shall take place in not more than 30 minutes after the auditor arrives on site. The opening meeting will begin after the site visit. If the **company denies access to the auditor**, the current IFS certificate will be suspended within a maximum of 2 working days. The company shall pay the total cost of the audit. The next audit will be announced.

At the closing meeting, a document called **End of Audit Letter containing the non-conformities** is prepared by the auditor and **signed by you and the auditor** at the end of the audit.
The auditor will send to you a preliminary report (**pre-report**) around the 7th day after the audit and will ask you to confirm the wording of your name, address and scope.


**Within 14 days** of the receipt of the list of non-conformities, you must complete and return to the auditor the corrective action plan. It is your responsibility to **propose corrective actions for each observed deviation** and to specify for each one the implementation deadlines as well as the name of the staff responsible for it.

These **actions must be relevant and complete** and should allow the elimination of the deviation and avoid its re-occurrence. For deviations rated C or D and B for Knock-Out requirements, the action must be put in place before the next renewal audit. **If you do not return the action plan with appropriate corrective actions and within the deadline, Certima BV could not finalize the certification process.**


**Auditor shall validate the relevance** of the corrective actions before preparing the final audit report. If the corrective actions are not valid or inadequate, we will **return the action plan to your company** for completion in due time. The **maximum time** allocated to this process of **approval of the CAP** is **28 days** after the end of the audit.

After the approval of the corrective action plan the audit file is sent for report review and certification decision.
The deadline in which a Certification body has to issue the **certification decision is 8 weeks (56 days) after the audit date**. Our target is to do this **within 6 weeks (42 days)** and this is only possible if we get **your full support to finalize the corrective action plan within the allocated timeframe**.

**In case of a positive decision we issue a certificate.** In case of a negative certification decision, the **negative decision** and the reasons for it is **communicated to you and IFS Management**. A new audit can be organized **at least 6 weeks after the previous audit**.

If the decision is positive we will send you our **Cert Pack** - an email with the **certificate**, the **audit report** and the approved **corrective action plan**. We will also notify you about the **indicative next audit date**.
In parallel to that notification, we **upload the audit documents on the IFS portal**. The IFS portal sends automatic e-mail to you and you can download your audit documents and certificate also from there. The validity and authenticity of the certification may therefore be checked on the website at any time.

An audit renewal should take place annually and must be scheduled **at the earliest 8 weeks before the audit anniversary and not later than two weeks after the audit anniversary** *(reminder on the IFS portal 3 months before the due date).*

In cases the audit is scheduled beyond this period, the **certification cycle** would be **interrupted** leading to a lack of certification during a temporary time period (between the end of validity of the previous certificate and the beginning of validity of the new certificate) and the next audit will be **initial**.


At the next audit **all requirements** of the standard must be assessed **in full again**. A particular attention is given to the deviations identified during the last audit as well as to the **efficiency** and **implementation of corrective actions.** Whatever the length of the time period between the two audits is, the auditor should **always evaluate** the **corrective actions of non-conformities from** the previous **certification audit and** those from **any other audits** – internal or second party – that occur in between.

In order to integrate **new products and/or processes** in the scope of the IFS certification **or when products/processes could not be seen in operation during the main audit**, an **audit for scope extension needs to be performed**. The duration and content of the audit are assessed by us as your certification body. An audit for scope extension is always announced.

It is your responsibility to inform Certima BV of **any changes** that may affect **your compliance to the requirements of certification** within **3 working days** after the event. For example, these changes could be: significant **increase of staff number** or the **size of the facility**; **new activities, processes and products**, **change in management,**

**ownership or location**; any other circumstances that affect the fulfillment of requirements of the IFS standard.

You need to inform Certima within 3 working days **in case of a recall or withdrawal or any crisis situation related to the safety of the produced product.**
In the case of changes or a crisis situation, Certima may need to perform an **additional audit** or an **extension audit** and to **re-assess your certification**.

## IFS Integrity Program

IFS has put into place a robust Integrity Program in order **to assure the quality and integrity of the audits and certifications** performed under its management. All complaints concerning IFS audits, reports, certificates or other **circumstances in which the integrity is in question** are collected and analyzed at the IFS offices.
If IFS Quality Assurance Management is informed of **significant discrepancies between results of an IFS audit and subsequent retailer audit**, this will be investigated as well.
Appropriate steps are taken to **fully investigate a complaint**, which may include a request to a certification body to carry out internal investigations and to provide a statement on the outcome of their investigations to IFS.
When a complaint cannot be successfully resolved by the investigation carried out by the certification body, an **on-site investigation audit** will be undertaken at the certified company. Usually, investigation audits are **announced 48 hours before the audit date**. In special cases these audits are performed as **unannounced**. Witness audits of IFS auditors can also be performed.
All audits within the Integrity Program are carried out by independent auditors directly commissioned by IFS.

## You have more questions?

Please contact us through our website www.certima.org or by sending an e-mail to info@certima.org.

Sincerely,

## Your Certima Team



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