



**Global Standard
START!
ISSUE 2**

Food Safety



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ISBN for PDF: 978-1-78490-470-8

ISBN for print: 978-1-78490-474-6

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Published by:
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Edited and typeset by Williams Lea, London

¹ BRCGS is a trading name of BRC Trading Ltd. BRCGS is part of LGC ASSURE.

Contents

How this publication is organised	4
Part I – Introduction	
The need for the START! programme	6
What’s new for Issue 2?	6
The scope of the START! programme	7
Food safety legislation	7
Benefits of the START! programme	7
Relationship between the full Standard and the START! programme	8
Guidance and training for sites	8
Effective date of Issue 2	8
Acknowledgements	8
Part II – Requirements for the Basic and Intermediate levels	
How to use the requirements section	11
1 Senior management commitment	13
2 The food safety plan – HACCP	15
3 Food safety and quality management system	22
4 Site standards	31
5 Product control	48
6 Process control	53
7 Personnel	56
8 Production risk zones – high risk, high care and ambient high care	59
Part III – Audit protocol	
The START! programme – principles	62
1 Registration and pre-assessment activities	64
2 Announced audit protocol	67
3 Unannounced audit protocol	72
4 Post-audit: general protocol	74
Appendices	
Appendix 1 Production risk zones – high risk, high care and ambient high care	80
Appendix 2 Qualifications, training and experience requirements for auditors	85
Appendix 3 Fields of audit and associated product categories	87
Appendix 4 Certificate template	90
Appendix 5 Corrective action, preventive action and root cause analysis	91
Appendix 6 BRCGS Participate	94
Appendix 7 BRCGS Professional programme	95
Appendix 8 Glossary	96
Appendix 9 Acknowledgements	107

Part I

Introduction

The need for the START! programme

The START! programme has been developed to complement the BRCS Global Standard Food Safety (hereafter referred to as the Standard). As certification to the Standard continues to develop, it is important to provide opportunities to recognise and encourage the development of food safety systems in small sites where the full requirements of the Standard may not always be practical or add value and in sites that are still developing food safety management systems. The START! programme is aligned with the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) Global Markets programme. The START! programme will enable audits and certification against two levels of requirements: Basic and Intermediate.

The Basic- and the Intermediate-level requirements of the START! programme provide recognised stepping stones towards eventual certification to the full Standard (if required). They also provide assurance to customers about the food safety systems operating at those supply sites that have gained certification at either of these two levels.

What's new for Issue 2?

The development of Issue 2 followed a wide consultation to understand stakeholders' requirements and a review of emerging issues in the food industry.

The focus of attention for this issue has been on:

- reviewing clauses at the Basic and Intermediate levels to align with the current requirements of the Global Standard Food Safety
- encouraging understanding and development of a product safety culture
- ensuring global applicability and compatibility with the Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene
- expanding the audit options
- updating the requirements associated with core product safety activities.

The requirements of Issue 2 represent an evolution from the previous issue, with a continued emphasis of the audit towards the implementation of good manufacturing practices.

Unannounced audits

Issue 2 of the START! programme provides sites with two audit options:

- announced audit – where the site and the certification body agree the date of the audit in advance
- unannounced audit – where the audit date is not communicated to the site in advance of the audit.

The unannounced option is voluntary but provides added confidence to sites who may wish to experience unannounced audits in preparedness for their move to certification against the full GFSI-benchmarked Global Standard Food Safety. (The Standard now requires certificated sites to have at least one unannounced audit within every 3-year period, even when they have opted to be part of the announced audit programme.) This option provides greater confidence in certification for customers while encouraging the development of a site's wider food safety culture.

More details on the unannounced audit programme can be found in Part III, section 3.

The scope of the START! programme

The START! programme sets out the requirements for the manufacture of processed foods and the preparation of primary products supplied as retailer-branded products, branded food products, and food or ingredients for use by food service companies, catering companies and food manufacturers. The audit and certification will apply only to products that have been manufactured or prepared at the site where the audit has taken place and will include storage facilities that are under the direct control of the production site management.

The START! programme does not apply to food products that do not undergo any process at the audited site or to activities relating to wholesale, importation, distribution or storage outside the direct control of the company.

Food safety legislation

The requirements at the Basic level of the START! programme are intended, as a minimum, to assist sites and their customers to comply with the legislative requirements for food safety. Legislation covering food safety differs in detail worldwide but generally requires food businesses to:

- undertake a HACCP or risk-based approach to the management of food safety
- provide a processing environment which ensures that the risks of product contamination are minimised
- ensure the traceability of products produced
- ensure staff are trained and aware of their responsibilities to reduce the risk of product contamination
- establish and maintain a risk-assessed programme for product examination, testing and analysis
- monitor and act upon customer complaints.

The Intermediate level builds upon the Basic-level requirements of safety and legality to provide more comprehensive controls on food safety.

Full certification to the Standard provides the highest level of customer confidence in the food safety systems and the management of product quality to meet customer requirements.

Benefits of the START! programme

Adoption of the programme leads to a number of benefits to food businesses. The programme:

- is aligned with the GFSI Global Markets programme (the full Standard is GFSI-benchmarked)
- provides a clearly defined audit and certification process operated in accordance with the requirements of accreditation
- uses auditors that meet the demanding competency requirements of the BRCGS Global Standards
- enables companies achieving certification at the Basic and Intermediate levels to appear in the publicly available part of the **BRCGS Directory**, thereby recognising their achievements
- uses requirements based on the Standard, enabling the Basic and Intermediate levels to provide effective stepping stones towards full certification (if required by customers)
- requires completion of corrective actions on any non-conformities before certification at the Basic or Intermediate level is awarded, thus reducing the need for customers to follow up audit reports.

Relationship between the full Standard and the START! programme

In developing the requirements for the Basic and Intermediate levels of the START! programme, the following criteria have been taken into account:

- All the clauses at the Basic and Intermediate levels are the same as or closely derived from the clauses in the full Standard.
- The requirements at the Basic level are designed to ensure, as a minimum, legal compliance. They match or exceed the requirements at an equivalent level in the GFSI Global Markets programme.
- The requirements at the Intermediate level are more detailed, building upon legal compliance, an expansion of the HACCP process, and the development of a documented quality management system. They again match or exceed the requirements at an equivalent level in the GFSI Global Markets programme.

Each requirement is numbered according to the relevant clause number in the Standard. This helps to identify those areas needing further consideration when moving up from the Intermediate level to full certification. It does, however, mean that there are gaps in the clause numbering system where clauses in the full Standard do not apply.

Guidance and training for sites

BRCGS produces a range of guidance documents, training courses and a self-assessment tool designed to assist sites with the application of the START! programme and an understanding of the core skills needed, such as risk assessment and root cause analysis. Further information about BRCGS training courses can be found on the [BRCGS website](#).

BRCGS offers the BRCGS Professional programme – a learning and development programme which covers the core product safety skills and behaviours required to implement and maintain BRCGS Standards. The programme helps to develop technical competencies and upskill a site's technical team. For details, see Appendix 7.

BRCGS offers further guidance that covers a range of topics including (but not limited to):

- effective internal audits
- vulnerability assessments
- production risk zones
- product safety culture
- allergen management
- category-specific guidance for the red meat, poultry and fresh-produce sectors.

Certificated sites can download BRCGS publications from [BRCGS Participate](#) as part of their service package. For details about BRCGS Participate, see Appendix 6.

Effective date of Issue 2

As with all revisions of Global Standards, there must be a transition period between publication and full implementation. This allows time for the retraining of all auditors and allows manufacturers to prepare for the new issue of the START! programme. Therefore, certification against Issue 2 will commence on 1 September 2023. All certificates issued against audits carried out prior to this date will be against Issue 1 and be valid for the period specified on the certificate.

Acknowledgements

BRCGS wishes to acknowledge all those food industry experts who have contributed to the preparation of Issue 2 of the Global Standard START! All those who participated in the working groups are listed in Appendix 9.