

Case study



BRCGS START! opens up new avenues

Established in 2008, The Pie Life is located in Tean, Stoke and currently employs around 15 full time members of staff. From their origins of pies and suet puddings containing wheat products, in recent years The Pie Life has made the transition to a completely all gluten-free product range. This includes a variety of meat, vegetarian and vegan pies, puddings, quiches and tarts as well as some tasty desserts. Having been certified as part of the SALSA programme for over ten years, The Pie Life recently embarked on a new journey to become BRCGS certificated in order to open up opportunities with new suppliers and take their business to the next level. Speaking of their motivation, Jennie Walton, Technical Manager at The Pie Life says "Having been certificated to SALSA for 10+ years, it started to feel that in order to grow even further, and to be able to start supplying larger suppliers to the service sector, we needed a GFSI recognised accreditation. For us, the START! programme seemed the ideal stepping stone to get us there. BRCGS is well known within the UK and so it felt like the right option".

The ideal stepping stone

The START! Programme recognises and encourages the development of food safety systems in small sites where food safety management systems require development to meet the requirements of the full Food Safety Global

Standard. It provides a clear path towards improved food safety standards and each stage builds on the last to increase compliance with the full standard. For this reason, it has full support of leading global retailers and the end result is that smaller producers can get their products on the shelves of big retailers. "For us, the START! programme was the ideal step to start moving our quality manual, culture, processes and procedures towards the full standard in a way that we can still gain recognition from brands and suppliers".

The Pie Life has recently achieved BRCGS START! Intermediate certification and intends to progress to certification against the full Food Safety Global Standard.

Preparing for audit

The Pie Life already considered themselves to have developed a lot of good processes and procedures as a result of being SALSA certificated for so long. In 2020, a full-time Technical Manager, with previous experience of the BRCGS Food Safety Standard, was employed to oversee the food safety management system and begin the transition to the START! programme. The transition began with two month gap analysis of what was already in place against the requirements of the standard. This enabled

"TO START SUPPLYING LARGER SUPPLIERS TO THE SERVICE SECTOR, WE NEEDED A GFSI RECOGNISED ACCREDITATION"

Completely GLUTEN free

established
2008

them to understand where changes were required to meet the standard and the Technical Manager, Managing Director and Production Manager worked together to determine a plan to implement the changes. "Production staff were regularly included in the implementation process to ensure they understood the difference between the BRCGS START! Standard and SALSA. It was important to keep staff in the loop about how changes to procedures would impact them, and also ensure that the most efficient processes were put in place".

In terms of their approach, they focussed on rebuilding their Quality Manual to stream line it and update it in line with the standard requirements and then the subsequent procedural and process changes then fell in line. "There were a few challenges in regards to upgrading fabrication in areas, which required some down time from production, but these changes have really improved the flow of our process".

"The first audit was a great experience to have the new systems and amended ways of working verified against the standard. It has also allowed us to get some advice on further improvement for a move to the full standard at some point in the future."

Stepping up

In implementing the standard requirements, "the main benefit has been the feeling that standards across all areas of the site have taken a real step up. We feel that the site standards have improved since making the move to BRCGS and we are challenging ourselves to continually improve. It has also given us confirmation that we are ultimately doing things right and that our Food Safety System is fit for purpose".

At The Pie Life, they have seen clear improvements in their processes and procedures and believe they will continue to see further improvements through internal audits. "It made us look at the whole flow of the process again and led to us then making changes to fabrication to improve the flow and reduce cross contamination risks. It's also highlighted how we risk assess our suppliers and led to a more robust system being put in to place".

One of the biggest benefits they have seen is the positive impact this process has had on their culture. "It has brought about a change in food safety culture within the business. Including the staff in the changes that have been made and asking for their input has created an open dynamic where staff are comfortable in reporting issues and suggesting improvements".

It has also been well-received by their customers;



"discussion with our existing customers over the switch to BRCGS has been very positive. It has helped us to secure future work with our largest customer".

The next step

On achieving START! Intermediate certification, The Pie Life said "It brings closer to the full Food Safety certification, which will open up sales avenues to a wider stream of customers and help the company grow. It has highlighted the areas requiring improvement to strengthen our food safety systems when we take the next step to the full BRCGS food safety standard".

Based on their experience of the process so far, The Pie Life have these top tips for other businesses that are considering implementing the Standard:

- Give yourself enough time – it's not a process that can be rushed!
- Undertake a full gap analysis if you are just starting out and don't be afraid of being critical of your current process and systems.
- Be prepared to have to make investments
- Purchase the interpretation guide as this gives a more detailed explanation of what is expected for each clause.
- For those going in to their next audit, make sure you've gone over your internal audits and closed off any actions required for anything that has been picked up. Verify that the actions have been effective and put alternative actions in place if they have not been.
- Walk through the whole process and site with another member of staff with a critical eye and make a note of anything that could be raised during an audit. Where things are noted, put proper corrective actions in place rather than quick fixes.