

The SALSA scheme was explained at a meeting in the Food and Drink Federation offices on 19th January 2007 with many of the stakeholders present. It is hoped that the audit standard will be approved by the stakeholders by 21st February. There will then be an official launch at the IFE in March. This article explains what the scheme is and how it should work.

SALSA

Safe And Local Supply Approval

After several years of patient negotiation and discussion the SALSA project is nearing completion. The bulk of the work has been done by the BRC, NFU, BHA and FDF. Others have put in practical points throughout. Now Defra has made a small grant to get the project into reality.

The problem

Many small food producers want to supply the major buyers both in retail and food service. In order to protect both themselves and their customers, these buyers insist on some form of "accreditation" so that they can be confident that the suppliers are complying with food law and best practice. In the past each buyer has had their own scheme, often at a high price to the supplier, and their own inspectors. Some suppliers were checked by seven or eight buyers at a combined cost of up to £20,000 per year.

The proposal

SALSA is not a standard although it is based on the concept of the BRC global. It is a scheme that seeks to improve the quality of management among small food suppliers. It also takes elements from Cook Safe (Scotland), Safe Catering (Northern Ireland) and Safer Food, Better Business (England). The scheme was launched at a meeting with almost all the major buyers represented in the offices of the Food and Drink Federation in January 2007. It was welcomed by both the Food Standards Agency and Defra.

The Scheme

The scheme will provide an annual assessment of the premises, systems and procedures to see if there were any food safety concerns.

The assessment would be carried out by IFST registered local assessors. This is similar to the current practice of supermarket food technologists.

The assessment will not be to a formal accreditation scheme and so minimise costs and administration.

The assessor will provide advice and guidance and could act as a technical mentor.

The scheme will be recognised by key industry bodies who will support it through regular stakeholder meetings.

It will encourage networking and knowledge exchange.

The scheme should become self-funding, through reasonable fees, fairly soon. Fees are likely to be around £450 plus VAT to cover the assessor's travel and administration.

This would include the cost of one audit, report, publication of the certificate and entry into the approved suppliers directory.

Governance

The scheme will have independent administration paid for from the audit fees. Defra has made a grant to prime the system. The Governance Council is chaired by Lady Sylvia Jay of Food From Britain and has representatives from the BHA, BRC, FDF and NFU. There will be observers from the FSA, Defra, SBS/DTI and Improve – the skills and learning council for training. The IFST and SFQC with relevant experts will provide assistance as necessary, particularly in the training and approval of auditors and mentors.

Benefits

- ✚ The scheme will allow small food product and ingredient manufacturers to provide assurance of food safety and thus increase their access to larger customers.
- ✚ The scheme will assist larger companies in providing confidence to work with small and/or local suppliers. This is encouraged by the Government's sustainability strategy and the Public Sector Procurement Initiative.
- ✚ The scheme will also help fulfil the increasing demand by consumers for local and regional produce.
- ✚ It will discourage the proliferation of similar standards.
- ✚ Recognition of the scheme outside UK would help businesses to export.
- ✚ Some businesses see it as a step towards an internationally recognised QA standard.

Will it work?

The scheme has been piloted in 14 small businesses in some very rural areas of Scotland. There was a range of suppliers including bakers, cheese-makers, dairy (including ice cream), chocolate makers, an abattoir, a brewery and several speciality producers. Those businesses based on Arran and the Shetlands both saw membership of SALSA as a precondition of being able to claim genuine locality. There had been pressure from potential buyers and marketing groups as well as exhibition organisers for businesses to gain some form of recognition. The businesses were generally positive and enthusiastic – apart from the name of the scheme – and said that it concentrated the mind wonderfully on the real job in hand. The guidance was much appreciated, both on line material and the advice of the mentors.

From highly variable levels of compliance at the start all those in the pilot exercise are expected to pass by the end of March. The assessors found that the low risk suppliers were least organised and the heavily regulated ones most organised.

What is the standard?

There are six main sections that the auditor will look at. All these are based on the Food Hygiene Regulation EC 852/2004 with interpretation from both the EC and UK guidance documents.

1 The House Rules (Pre-requisites).

- ✚ Training and Supervision;
- ✚ Personal Hygiene;
- ✚ Cleaning;
- ✚ Cross Contamination Prevention;
- ✚ Temperature Control;
- ✚ Control of Raw Materials;
- ✚ Stock Control;
- ✚ Waste Control;
- ✚ Pest Control;
- ✚ Equipment;
- ✚ Maintenance.

2 Documentation.

- ✚ Document Control;
- ✚ Specifications;
- ✚ Procedures and Working Instructions;
- ✚ Records;
- ✚ Traceability;
- ✚ Incident Management;
- ✚ Complaint Handling.

3 HACCP.

- ✚ A system in place to suit the nature and size of the business.

4 Management Systems.

- ✚ Policy Statement;
- ✚ Internal System Review;
- ✚ Corrective Action;
- ✚ Labelling Compliance.

5 Premises.

- ✚ Location;
- ✚ Perimeter and Grounds;
- ✚ Hand Washing facilities;
- ✚ Equipment Cleaning facilities;
- ✚ Location of Toilets and staff facilities;
- ✚ Condition of Buildings structure and services.

6 Operating Procedures.

- ✚ Control of Process and Reduction of contamination risks;

- ✚ Segregation;
- ✚ Working Procedures and Instructions.

Notes

SALSA, Safe And Local Supplier Approval
BRC, British Retail Consortium
FDF, Food and Drink Federation
FSA, Food Standards Agency
IFST, Institute of Food Science and Technology
NFU, National Farmers Union
BHA, British Hospitality Association,
Defra, Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
SBS, Small Business Service
DTI, Department of Trade and Industry
SFQC, Scottish Food Quality Certification.
IFE, International Food and Drink Exhibition
FPB, Forum of Private Business