



**CERTIFICATION GUIDELINE**

**IFS Food (Issue 7- October 2020)**

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**CONTROL PROGRAM**

**IFS Food V7 October 2020**

1. CERTIFICATION PROCESS AGAINST IFS FOOD (VER. 7)..... 3

    1.1.Application procedure ..... 3

    1.2.registration on the ifs Assessment portal..... 4

    1.3.Initial Assessment (Certification Assessment)..... 4

    1.4.Preliminary Assessment Report and Correction and Corrective Action plan..... 5

    1.5.Assessment Report ..... 5

    1.6.Certification decision ..... 6

    1.7.Notification of certification decision and certificate of conformity ..... 7

    1.8.Mandatory Notifications during the Certification cycle ..... 9

    1.9.Maintenance of the certification: Renewal..... 9

    1.10. Cancellation of the certification ..... 9

    1.11. Complaints, Appeals and Lawsuits ..... 10

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**1. CERTIFICATION PROCESS AGAINST IFS FOOD (VER. 7)****1.1. APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

Once ACERTA is aware of the interest about the certification in accordance with IFS Food by a company, ACERTA Administration Department will contact this company to request some basic information that will let ACERTA make the appropriate budget. In order to make the process easier, the applicant may use the document **“Information Request Form”**.

Next, an appropriate budget is made by using the ACERTA management computer system (SIG), to be then reviewed by the Administration Manager.

The budget includes the costs derived from the certification process and a specification of the items detailed in the said costs: application procedure, file opening, certification inspection, certification decision-making process, issue of the certificate, and, only at the customer's request, a previous inspection of the facilities. The method of payment and the IFS fees, paid by the customer through ACERTA, are also specified in the budget.

The applicant who wishes to begin the certification process shall send this budget appropriately accepted. The Technical Department includes then the accepted budget in the SIG and files the document in hard copy in the appropriate folder.

Once the approved budget is received, the Technical Department sends the applicant the **“Certification Request Form”**, to be sent back to ACERTA duly filled in. This form includes all relevant details concerning the scope of the certification, like **“products”, “activity/production processes”, “manufacturing facilities”, “outsourced processes and/or products”** to be certificated, and it also includes a link to the **“IFS Certification Guidelines”** and to the **“User Guidelines of ACERTA Hallmark”**.

Together with the **“Certification Request Form”**, the **“SGC Certification Agreement”** is sent. This document establishes the conditions that will regulate the commercial relationship between ACERTA and the applicant company. The duration of the agreement will be 1 year. The applicant shall send back ACERTA this **“SGC Certification Agreement”** duly dated, signed, and if possible, sealed.

This document will be accepted by ACERTA if it is received by email.

The Technical Department will then review the **“Certification Request Form”** sent by the customer, and once this document is checked, a file will be opened in the SIG, assigning a code automatically. The file code assigned is made up of the acronym “IFS”, the code of the customer, the digits of the year in which the certification is made and a correlative number to identify the works undertaken in that site.

E.g., IFS.00085-10/003

Then, a folder is opened for each certification applicant, identified with the appropriate code, so that the hard copies are adequately filed and maintained. The electronic records will be also filed in the appropriate computer folder.

The customer will inform in the **“Certification Request form”** the chosen Assessment option:

- **IFS Food “Announced” Assessment:** The Assessment date will be notified to the company in advance to the Assessment.
- **IFS Food “Unannounced” Assessment:** The Assessment date will not be notified to the company in advance of the Assessment.

The “Unannounced” Assessment option may apply to companies already IFS Food certified (renewal Assessment) or companies without IFS Food certificate (initial Assessment).

To get registered for an unannounced Assessment, the customer shall notify ACERTA sending the "**Certification request form**" complete or by written notice always 20 weeks before of the Assessment due date (four (4) weeks before the start of the unannounced Assessment time window -16 weeks + 2 weeks of the due date).

Also, in case of unannounced Assessment, the customer will inform in the section of the "Certification request form" of:

- **Blackout period:** Maximum 10 operational days, plus not operating periods, when the site is not available for the Assessment (reason must be provided). The company may only split the 10 operational days into a maximum of 3 periods (e.g., planned customer visit, holidays of Quality manager, etc....)
- **Name of the person to be contacted on-site** to facilitate the Auditor entry when entering the site, the day of the unannounced Assessment.

The Manager of the Technical Department (or the Technical Assistant Manager in his absence) will then draw up a plan for the Assessment work by using the SIG from the review of the "**Certification Request Form**". He will assign the Auditor or Assessment team based on the following conditions:

- The Auditor or Assessment team is approved by IFS for the product scopes and technology scopes required by the Assessment.
- No site can be assessed more than 3 consecutive times by the same Auditor.
- Language from the production site where is performing the Assessment.

The working days needed for the Assessment will be also determined, defining the specific time period established for the Assessment and detailing the Auditor or Assessment team assigned from the use of the **Work Order**.

The Assessments against the IFS Food May be conducted by ACERTA own staff or by external Auditors with exclusivity with ACERTA or subcontracted external Auditors provided that they are previously approved by IFS and ACERTA for the certification of the standard and communicated to IFS according to the Management of the IFS Auditors Outsourcings Procedure of ACERTA.

Then, each Auditor is responsible for arranging the specific previous / certification Assessment date, by following the instructions detailed in the **Work Order**.

## **1.2. REGISTRATION ON THE IFS ASSESSMENT PORTAL**

Once the Technical Department and ACERTA have reviewed the Certification Request Form, the company is registered on the on-line database of IFS. IFS database assigns an identification specific code for the company (COID) that will be included in the documents generated from certification process.

## **1.3. INITIAL ASSESSMENT (CERTIFICATION ASSESSMENT)**

Once all relevant aspects of the Assessment scope have been determined, the Auditor will draw up the "**Assessment Plan**" to be sent both to the applicant and to ACERTA Technical Department. If the Assessment is going to be undertaken by an Assessment team, the Assessment Plan will detail the specific Auditor and specific product scope(s) and technology(ies) assigned for that Auditor, as well as the chapters to be assessed by each Auditor.

If the announced option has been chosen, the time schedule shall be sent to the site before the Assessment. If the unannounced option has been chosen, it shall be shared during the opening meeting.

If the applicant does not agree with any aspect detailed in the "**Assessment Plan**", he/she shall communicate it within 3 days from the reception of the document, and a new "**Assessment Plan**" will be issued.

The applicant is aware that only the auditors identified in the Assessment Plan or equivalent document can perform the assessment and commits to report immediately ACERTA in case of any incidence in this regard, as well as prevent

access to the facilities of persons who claim to act on behalf of ACERTA but who are not identified in the aforementioned documents.

The Assessment date will be registered by ACERTA in the <diary> function of the IFS Assessment portal 14 days before performing it (minimum). In case of unannounced Assessment, ACERTA will register in the <diary> function of the IFS Assessment portal the dates when the Assessment has been performed, **at latest 2 working days after the first Assessment Day**.

Then, the Auditor will conduct the Assessment by using the document: "Checklist" in accordance with IFS Food.

The on-site Assessment is made up of 5 parts:

1. Opening meeting.
2. Assessment of the quality and food safety systems through the control of the appropriate documents (HACCP, Quality Manual).
3. On-site facility inspection with interviews to the appropriate staff.
4. Final review of findings by the Auditor and preparation for the closing meeting.
5. Closing meeting.

#### **1.4. PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT REPORT AND CORRECTION AND CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN**

Once the Assessment is finished, the Auditor will draw up the "Preliminary Assessment Report", by using the Assessment "Checklist". This report will be made in computer format and sent (PDF format) to the customer together with the document "Correction and Corrective Action Plan", within 2 weeks after the Assessment.

The Auditor shall include all deviations/non-conformities arisen during the Assessment in the "Correction and Corrective Action Plan", and the deadlines for submission of Correction and Corrective Actions by the assessed.

The Assesmentee shall then draw up and submit the "Correction and Corrective Action Plan" within two weeks (recommended) and maximum 4 weeks from the reception of the "Preliminary Assessment Report" and "Correction and Corrective Action Plan" sent by ACERTA for completion.

If the "Correction and Corrective Action Plan" is submitted **after 6 weeks from the day of the Assessment**, a complete new Assessment shall be undertaken. That is, **6 weeks** from the day of the Assessment and the uploading of the Assessment report in the IFS Portal and issue of the certificate (8 weeks at the latest).

#### **1.5. ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Once the "Correction and Corrective Action Plan" has been assessed by the Auditor, an "Assessment Report" will be issued (including a positive or negative recommendation by the Auditor) and this report will be sent to the person(s) responsible for the certification decision.

For every Assessment undertaken, the appropriate Assessment report will be issued, complying with the format defined by the IFS organization. The report will be issued in Spanish and English language and/or, when appropriate, only in English, depending on the needs of the assessed company. The option "Unannounced" will be clearly stated in the Assessment report.

The report includes the following sections:

- ✓ Company profile, with general information of the company.
- ✓ Final result of the Assessment, with an accurate description of the Assessment scope; if under exceptional circumstances the company decides and is able to exclude some specific products (lines of products) from the

Assessment scope, these shall be detailed in the **Assessment scope (see IFS guidelines for exclusions)**. If outsourced processes and/or products exist, the following sentence must be added in the scope: "Beside own production, company has partly outsourced processes". The Assessment scope must be always translated to English.

- ✓ General summary table for all the chapters. The result of the Assessment will detail the level and percentage score obtained.
- ✓ Time scales for re-Assessment due dates (**at earliest 8 weeks before and at latest 2 weeks after the Assessment due date**), or "**Unannounced**".
- ✓ Overall summary for all the chapters and comments about the monitoring of the Correction and Corrective Actions implemented from the previous Assessment.
- ✓ Observations regarding KO's and Majors.
- ✓ Summary of all the deviations and non-conformities found in every chapter (1 to 6).
- ✓ A separate list of all the requirements scored with N/A (not applicable), with appropriate explanations.
- ✓ Detailed Assessment report with compulsory explanations for some IFS Food requirements, to be filled in by the Auditor(s).

The report shall accurately detail the findings obtained by the Auditor at the time of the Assessment.

The final reports (including the Correction and Corrective Actions submitted by the customer) shall be issued and sent to the customer within 42 calendar days from the day of the Assessment, unless special circumstances occur. **In total, 6 weeks** from the Assessment date and the uploading of the Assessment report in the Portal and the awarding of the certificate (**8 weeks at the latest**).

ACERTA shall send the customer the "**Assessment Report**" after the certification decision, and a copy of this report will be kept in a safe place for 5 years together with any other document related.

In relation to the translation of the non-conformities and deviations C, D and KO requirements scored with C or D, this translation shall be always detailed below every appropriate clause of the original version and shall be always included in the appropriate section of the "**Assessment Report**" and "**Correction and Corrective Action Plan**".

ACERTA will upload the Assessment data in the IFS Portal together with the "**Assessment Report**", "**Correction and Corrective Action Plan**" and "**Certificate of Conformity**".

The "**Assessment Report**" shall not be reproduced fully or in part by ACERTA without the written permission of the holder (unless the law so requires); express consent may be given as a part of the contract between the company and the user, or between the company and ACERTA.

#### **1.6. CERTIFICATION DECISION**

In order to make the certification decision, the appropriate responsible person, according to the structure detailed in the quality procedure PC-03 "Assessment of results, certificate awarding", shall consider what is described in the chapter 3 of this document.

To begin the certification decision process, the Technical Department is in charge of collecting all documents to be assessed, which shall include, at least, "**Certification Request Form**", "**Assessment Report**", "**Correction and Corrective Action Plan**" and objective evidence.

The Technical Department shall be responsible for the file and for the process to be completed, providing the person responsible for the "**Technical Review and Certification Decision Report**" with all the documents needed.

**1.7. NOTIFICATION OF CERTIFICATION DECISION AND CERTIFICATE OF CONFORMITY**

ACERTA shall assess all information included in the file of the applicant and shall issue the certification decision through the **“Technical Review and Certification Decision Report”**. Once the “Technical Review and Certification Decision Report” has been issued, the Technical Department shall inform the applicant, within 42 calendar days after the Assessment, of the certification/no-certification decision. In the case of a justified delay, the awarding of the certificate could be made within the 8th week at the latest (56 calendar days) from the Assessment date.

The time scales between the Assessment date and the certificate awarding would be as follows:

- ✓ 2 weeks to draw up the Preliminary Assessment Report.
- ✓ 4 weeks to submit the Correction and Corrective Action Plan by the Assessed company. ACERTA will recommend the customer to send the action plan in 2 weeks instead of 4 weeks.
- ✓ 2 weeks for the verification of the Correction and Corrective Action Plan by the Auditor, certificate awarding and uploading of the appropriate documents in the IFS Portal.

**In total, 6 weeks** from the day of the Assessment and the uploading of the Assessment report and certificate in the IFS Portal (**8 weeks at the latest**).

When the certification decision is positive, the **“Certificate of Conformity”**, duly signed by ACERTA representative, will be sent to the holder together with the **“Assessment Report”**, once the payment has been confirmed. ACERTA will then upload the appropriate Assessment data in the IFS Portal (Assessment details, Assessment report, Correction and Corrective Action plan and certificate of conformity).

**Certificate validity:**

- ✓ The validity of the certificate will be determined from the last day of the Assessment + 8 weeks. The certificate validity date shall remain the same each year.
- ✓ The certificate will be valid from the issue date to: second day of the initial Assessment + 8 weeks – 1 day + 1 year.
- ✓ For subsequent years, the certificate expiry date and the re-Assessment due date shall remain the same (+ 12 months).

**Minimum requirements for IFS certificate:**

- ✓ The name and address of the **certification body**, including its logo.
- ✓ The logo of the **accreditation body** or its name and registration number (requirement mentioned in the ISO/IEC 17065:2012). The logo of accreditation body shall be used in conformity with the accreditation body’s rules.
- ✓ The name and address of the **Assessed company**.
- ✓ The **COID**, as defined in the IFS portal.
- ✓ If the company is a subsidiary, the name of the **company’s headquarters**.
- ✓ GLN number and, where applicable, the **packing code** and the **veterinary agreement number/sanitary registration number**.
- ✓ **Assessment scope** (with mandatory detailed description of processes/products).

If under exceptional circumstances the company decides (and is allowed) to **exclude specific product ranges** (product lines) from the scope of the Assessment, this exclusion shall be noted and included in the **Assessment scope**.

If partly **outsourced processes** and/or products exist, the following sentence must be added in the scope: "Beside own production, company has partly outsourced processes". The Assessment scope shall always be translated into English language.

- ✓ **if the company performs additional broker or logistics activities**, provide the certification status by writing the sentence: "*The company has own broker/logistics activities which are/are not IFS Broker and/or IFS Logistics/other certified standard recognised by GFSI*"
- ✓ Name and number of **product scope(s)**.
- ✓ Code/number of **technology scopes**.
- ✓ **Level achieved**.
- ✓ **Assessment score in percentage**
- ✓ **Date of the last unannounced Assessment** (last day of the Assessment). If an unannounced IFS Food Assessment has not yet been carried out for the relevant COID, the certificate must state the following: "Last Assessment conducted unannounced: N/A"
- ✓ **Date of Assessment** (last day of Assessment).
- ✓ **Date of follow up Assessment**, if appropriate.
- ✓ **Time scales for re-Assessment** (last day of the initial Assessment – 8 weeks/+2 weeks) or "Unannounced".
- ✓ **Certificate issue date** (Assessment date + 8 weeks at the latest).
- ✓ **Certificate expiry date** (Assessment due date + 8 weeks – 1 day + 1/2/3 year/s).
- ✓ **Place and date of signature**.
- ✓ Name and signature of the **certification body's person(s)** responsible for certification decision.
- ✓ **IFS Food logo**.
- ✓ **Certificate number**.

The Assessment, the "**Assessment Report**" and the "**Certificate of Conformity**" will be specific for the "manufacturing site" and its products. If the production process detailed in the certification scope includes more than one manufacturing site, one Assessment per site will be undertaken, and one certificate per site will be issued accordingly.

ACERTA will advise the holders of the appropriate **certificates** to verify the scope detailed in the certificate, so that the information shown meets the company's own requirements. Although the certificate is granted to the company, it will remain property of ACERTA, the one to control its use, ownership and display.

The company has the right to appeal the certification decision made by ACERTA, and any appeal should be made, in writing, and sent within 7 calendar days from the reception of the certification decision.

If the interested party does not agree with the decision, ACERTA Technical Department will give him/her the appropriate format established for appeals. The appeals will finish within 20 calendar days after its reception. The appeal procedure as described within ACERTA internal quality procedure: PC-05 "Appeals, complaints and lawsuits" will begin once the appeal record, adequately completed, is received. Once a thorough and exhaustive investigation process on the subject is finished, the definitive answer will be communicated in writing to the company.

In the event of an unsuccessful appeal, ACERTA has the right to charge costs for conducting the appeal.



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### **1.8. MANDATORY NOTIFICATIONS DURING THE CERTIFICATION CYCLE**

During the validity of the certificate granted, **the company shall inform ACERTA of any change or relevant information** involving that the products included in the certificate may not comply with the certification requirements e.g.:

- Withdrawal,
- product alerts,
- organisational and management changes,
- major changes in products and/or production methods,
- changes in contact address and production sites,
- new production site address:

**For specific situations:**

- in case of product recall,
- withdrawal(s) and/or recall(s) of product by official order regarding food safety and/or for food fraud reasons,
- any visit by the health authorities resulting in notifications and/or sanctions issued by the health authorities.

**the certification body shall be informed within 3 working days at the latest.**

### **1.9. MAINTENANCE OF THE CERTIFICATION: RENEWAL**

Once the validity of the certificate is over, the certification maintenance process will begin.

For this purpose, about 4 months before the expiry date, ACERTA Technical Department will inform the certificate holder of the new activities to be carried out to maintain the certification. A new "**Certification Request Form**" will be sent to identify the current certification scope. The Technical Department will contact the certificate holder to agree the re-Assessment date.

If the renewal assessment was "**Announced**", the Assessment shall be scheduled at earliest within 8 weeks before and at latest 2 weeks after the Assessment due date.

If the renewal assessment would be "**unannounced**", the customer will need to inform ACERTA always 20 weeks before the "assessment due date " (4 weeks before the unannounced audit window -16 weeks + 2 weeks of the due date).

Once the Assessment date is agreed, the Technical Department will upload the appropriate Assessment date in the "Agenda" of the IFS Portal, at least 14 calendar days before the Assessment. If the re-Assessment date is not undertaken within appropriate time interval, the Assessment will be considered as a first Assessment and the certification cycle would begin accordingly.

### **1.10. CANCELLATION OF THE CERTIFICATION**

ACERTA will be able to cancel the certification for justified reasons.

If certification is cancelled by ACERTA, the company shall immediately inform the customers and make them fully aware of the circumstances relating to the cancellation. Likewise, appropriate information about the Correction and Corrective Actions to be taken to reinstate certification status will be also provided to customers.

#### **I. Definitions:**

**CANCELLATION OF THE CERTIFICATION:** It is the complete cancellation or invalidation of a certificate granted to a company, due to different causes. ACERTA will cancel the certification in the following cases:

| Causes of cancellation   |
|--|
| C1. If during the renewal Assessment one or more KO requirements are scored with D, ACERTA shall immediately cancel the certificate in the IFS Portal within 2 working days at the latest from the date of the Assessment.   |
| C2. If during the renewal Assessment one or more Major non-conformities are detected, ACERTA shall immediately cancel the certificate in the IFS Portal within 2 working days at the latest from the date of the Assessment. |
| C3. The certificate holder does not meet the appropriate economic agreements with ACERTA.  |

**(\*) ACERTA reserves the right to establishes shorter periods of time for solving the causes of suspension.**

### 1.11. COMPLAINTS, APPEALS AND LAWSUITS

For the purposes of this document, the following definitions are established:

**COMPLAINT:** Act by which a natural or legal person states his/her disagreement with ACERTA's procedures in any issue related to its activity (administrative, economic, technical, etc).

**APPEAL:** Act by which a natural or legal person states his/her disagreement with a decision made by ACERTA.

**LAWSUIT:** Act by which a natural or legal person, or even ACERTA, decides to settle the resolution of any discrepancy to the arbitration of a third party.

**Complaints:** Any natural or legal person will be the right to issue a complaint against ACERTA. The complaints may be communicated oral or in writing. In both cases, ACERTA shall record it in the corresponding Complaint Form. The complaint will be internally assessed by ACERTA.

An initial response will be given within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. A letter confirming receipt of the complaint will be issued within a maximum of 5 working days. A full written response will be given after the completion of a full and thorough investigation into the complaint.

**Appeals:** Any customer or applicant for certification has the right to give notice of appeal against the decisions adopted by ACERTA. All appeals shall have to be communicated in writing (fax or letter) addressed to ACERTA by using the Appeal Form to detail the reasons why the decisions made by ACERTA are not agreed. ACERTA Senior Management will consider the issue and will inform the applicant in writing of the decisions made within a maximum of 10 working days. Appeals will be finalised within 20 working days of receiving information from the assessed.

The decisions about appeals shall not be re-appealed.

**Lawsuits:** In order to solve the lawsuits arisen in connection with the certification or any other activity between ACERTA and other party, these will be ruled by arbitration of the Madrid Chamber of Commerce and Industry, by one or more arbitrators to be appointed in accordance with those rules.

**Note:** the notification of changes of certification requirements is made through ACERTA website: [www.acerta-cert.com](http://www.acerta-cert.com)