

BRCGS Food Safety Issue 9: What You Need to Know

The BRCGS Food Safety certification standard is one of the most well-known food safety certification options available worldwide since its inception almost 25 years ago. It was the first certification scheme to be recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) and has over 25,000 certified sites in more than 100 countries. With a basis in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles and supported by thorough QMS documentation, BRCGS Food Safety is a risk-based approach that includes requirements based on industry best practices.

This popular standard is now facing an update from Issue 8 to Issue 9, with audits to the new version beginning in February of 2023 – so what’s new?

Broadly speaking, Issue 9’s focus lies in promoting understanding and development of product safety culture, with emphasis on ensuring that the principles are globally applicable and in-line with GFSI benchmarking requirements. Issue 9 also incorporates an expansion of audit options to include new information and communication technology, while updating core product safety activity requirements (e.g. internal audits, preventive actions, etc.).

Within the updated standard, there are some requirements that have been earmarked as “fundamental,” or crucial to effective development and operation of a food quality and safety operation; a selection of these clauses and concepts will be summarized here.

• 1.1 Senior Management Commitment & Continual Improvement

This clause has been updated to include five new behaviors necessary to attain a positive culture change. This plan must be reviewed and updated at least annually.

• Food Safety Plan (e.g. HACCP)

Having a fully-implemented and effective food safety plan is key in BRCGS Food Safety. Section 2.2 compounds on environmental and operation programs as needed to create safe products by providing the correlating sections to provide the procedures for compliance. Section 2.12 has also been altered to include not only the establishment of verification procedures but also HACCP plan validation, which includes product safety points such as CCPs. Previously, this information was in its own section (2.14) but has been moved to 2.12.3 in Issue 9.

• 3.4 Internal Audits

This section outlines the need for demonstrating the verification of the food safety plan’s effective application – ideally through a scheduled program of internal audits. The clause specifies the requirement of at least four audit dates dispersed throughout the year, with the frequency of each activity’s audit being related to the risks associated. Every activity involved in the food safety and quality system (including food safety, authenticity, legality and quality) must be audited at least once a year.

• 3.5.1 Management of Suppliers of Raw Materials & Packaging

This clause is meant to ensure the presence of an effective supplier approval and monitoring system to prevent risks from raw materials to the final product’s safety, authenticity, legality and quality. 3.5.1.2 specifies that the approval procedure should be risk-based and must include at least one (or a combination) of: valid certification to an applicable BRCGS or GFSI-benchmarked standard, supplier audits with adequate scope, or (in cases of low risk) completed supplier questionnaires for initial approval.





• 3.9 Traceability

The tracing of all raw material product lots from suppliers through every stage of processing and beyond is emphasized in subclauses 3.9.1 and 3.9.3. These cover the establishment of an effective, documented traceability procedure as well as the testing of that system (with traceability being achievable within 4 hours).

• 7.1 Training: Raw Material Handling, Preparation, Processing, Packing and Storage Areas

Including subclause 7.1.3, the intention of this fundamental requirement is for the company to ensure the competency of personnel who work with anything affecting product safety, legality and quality. This program must be documented, including at least: identification of necessary competencies, providing training to ensure staff competencies, reviewing training efficacy, and delivering training in the language most appropriate for trainees.

• BRCGS Audit Protocol Summary

One major change in Audit Protocol from Issue 8 to Issue 9 is the requirement for all sites to have at least one unannounced audit in every 3-year period regardless of whether they have opted in to the announced audit program. The certification body will notify the company which year the unannounced audit will occur within, but the specific date will not be shared prior.

Adapting to changes like those coming in BRCGS Food Safety Issue 9 can seem daunting, but PJRFSI is here to help! If you have questions or are looking for more resources to help prepare you for your first Food Safety Issue 9 audits, reach out to us today – visit PJRFSI.com or call (248) 519-2523! •

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