

Chapter 1

Food Safety Audits: Ensuring Quality and Safe Food to Our Plate and Palate

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ABSTRACT

Food safety has gained global attention due to rising issues of food-borne illnesses, adulteration, and increased consumer awareness about food safety worldwide. It is a challenge for the governments and the food industry itself to maintain food safety throughout the food and supply chain. There are several systems and processes adopted by various countries to ensure food safety, and the food safety audits are one of the indispensable tools to achieve the goals of food quality and safety. Rising trends of consuming processed foods, eating out in restaurants and cafes, home deliveries of food from outside worldwide have made the auditing process very essential to ensure that the food products are being manufactured, stored, and sold in compliance with national and international standards. This chapter aims at providing an overview of the food audit processes, scope, importance, challenges, and future trends.

INTRODUCTION

The global food industry has witnessed large expansion in productions and markets due to globalization. Besides that, the increase in the education level of consumers; the health and awareness campaigns run by various national governments and

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international agencies like WHO; and the top of it the advertising industry have made the consumers worldwide very health conscious. These days consumers consider it essential to have a look at the label of the food product not only to know its cost but also to know about its nutritional value as well as whether the product quality and safety are being audited/certified by any national or international agency or not. Therefore, consumers want food packed, high nutrition, ready to eat, longer shelf life, but not at the cost of food quality and safety.

Food quality is a holistic concept that includes all the factors that will influence consumers' acceptability of any product including positive attributes such as nutritional value, cultural value, color, taste, flavor, texture as well as negative attributes such as spoilage, contamination, adulteration, and food safety hazards. On the other hand, food safety means the assurance that a given food will not cause any adverse health effect, toxicity, or injury to the consumers as it has been handled, prepared/manufactured, and stored in compliance with the food standards laid down by various governments and international bodies and it is free from any contaminants and adulterants or any non-permitted additives (The National Council of Educational Research and Training [NCERT], 2021-22).

As food safety has gained utmost importance, the food manufacturers, processors, retailers, and regulatory agencies across the globe are increasingly turning to the food safety auditing process to assure their consumers base about the safety and quality of their products. The auditing process involves the inspection of the food business unit, starting from the raw material to the manufacturing processes and systems; the manufactured products and throughout the supply chain till it reaches the end consumer, in a very detailed and systematic manner by a trained individual (auditor) possessing the experience, education, and knowledge of the above disciplines, but they must also have skills in conducting auditing in a systematic, objective and professional way (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India [FSSAI], 2006). For the food industry the auditing process has become indispensable as it effectively ensures food quality and food safety in several ways:

- The given food products, processes employed and the systems involved comply with national and international standards.
- The audit programs find deficiencies and non-compliances in the audited elements thereby create room for further improvement in the operations, processes, and systems of a food manufacturing and processing unit.
- Food safety and quality audits are used to evaluate management systems in the food industry followed by prioritization of management actions.
- Audits help a business unit to obtain certifications to certain food safety and quality standards.

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