



# Accreditation Standards: Review and Decision from the GFSI Board

2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009

## Background

Currently only scheme owners whose scheme has been developed and operated in compliance with ISO/IEC Guide 65:1996 (General requirements for bodies operating **product certification** systems) can be considered for recognition against the GFSI Guidance Document. (Ref GFSI Guidance Document 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, 5.6). In the case of ISO/IEC Guide 65 certification of 'product' is a term used to include a process or service.

The definition of accreditation is:

*The procedure by which an authoritative body gives formal recognition of the competence of a certification body to provide certification services, against an international standard.*

In the case of GFSI, the authoritative body is a national Accreditation Body, which must be a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), and the international standard is currently ISO/IEC Guide 65. The accreditation process is critical to the integrity of GFSI, scheme owners and certification bodies alike. The Guidance Document has been used as the basis for GFSI benchmarking process since it was first drafted in April 2001. In the first draft it was recognised that accreditation had a key role in the integrity of the standards used by those seeking recognition. It was decided for the purposes of the GFSI Guidance Document, that product certification accreditation (ISO/IEC Guide 65) would be appropriate providing all necessary assurances of certification body operation and management. The rationale at the time was that the standards were based upon HACCP, GMP and process control and the assessment of 'process' was pertinent.

## Product and Management System Certification

Management system certification **delivers ongoing assurance of what the company does on a daily basis** and product certification **delivers ongoing assurance of the product, process or service that the company provides**. Management system certification is applicable to any industry, but product certification is meant for products with a bespoke specification (e.g. frozen, canned, chilled, etc.). Certification of a product is a means of providing assurance that it complies with specified standards and other normative documents.

The applicable accreditation standard for management system certification is ISO/IEC 17021:2006 (Conformity assessment – Requirements for bodies providing audit and **certification of management systems**).

## Why GFSI Should Review This Issue?

With the introduction of ISO 22000:2005 (Food safety management systems - Requirements for any organisation in the food supply chain), the debate concerning management system certification and product certification has been reopened. ISO 22000 brought together for the first time management system and HACCP, within a 'public standard'; the accreditation community has however, designated that only management system accreditation is applicable to ISO 22000.

One must also consider that ISO has developed a specific standard, ISO 22003 (Food safety management systems -- Requirements for bodies providing audit and certification of food safety management systems, which can be regarded as a normative document to be used in any scheme supporting ISO 22000; this type of document is unique in the ISO series and the relationship between these standards has been clarified in March 2009 by the publication of an EA mandatory

policy document (EA/3/11 on Food Safety Management Systems and Scope of Accreditation) .

Since the introduction of the GFSI Guidance Document in 2001, there has been considerable activity on management systems accreditation standards, such as ISO/IEC 17021, issued in 2006 and a supplement, ISO/IEC 17021:2 is currently being developed with a strong focus on auditor competence and is expected to be published in 2010. In addition, ISO/IEC Guide 65 has also begun a revision process, with the final document expected to be published in 2011 under the name of ISO/IEC 17065.

A comparison of ISO/IEC 17021, ISO/IEC Guide 65 and the current draft of ISO/IEC 17065 shows that with respect to the major criteria regarding the activities of certification bodies, namely organisation structure and governance, operational procedures, competency of personnel and certification decision making, there are few differences.

## **Product and Management System Accreditation Standards – Meeting Output - 7<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

Given the recent developments in regard to the revision and impending revision of ISO standards relating to the accreditation of product certification and management system certification, the GFSI Board asked at their May 2009 meeting, that accreditation experts should provide a recommendation as to whether management system certification could be considered as providing equivalent results to product certification, as outlined and required in the current GFSI Guidance Document version 5. Furthermore, the GFSI Board asked that if the results can be considered as equivalent, necessary revisions be considered and made within the GFSI Guidance Document to reflect this.

A meeting was held in Paris on October 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 to review these questions and the experts present agreed and recommended to the GFSI Board that although both approaches (ISO/IEC Guide 65 and ISO/IEC 17021) are different, the activities undertaken and outcomes that are achieved are very similar.

## **GFSI Board Meeting Decision and Next Steps – October 20<sup>th</sup> 2009**

After a review of the recommendations from the 7<sup>th</sup> October meeting, the GFSI Board agreed during their meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009 that an addendum should be added to GFSI Guidance Document Version 5 as soon as possible to reflect the following:

- There will be a GFSI requirement for formal accreditation against a management system or product certification standard (ISO/IEC 17021 or ISO/IEC Guide 65), but the type of certification would be granted in accordance with procedures dictated by organisations responsible for the harmonisation of conformity assessment i.e. EA or IAF.
- Additional accreditation requirements for scheme owners in relation to the accreditation of Certification Bodies will be developed from specific criteria within management system and product certification standards and will be maintained in the new addendum to the current GFSI Guidance Document, to ensure consistency between the two approaches.
- Once published, this addendum will be available for any new scheme coming forward for benchmarking.
- Current GFSI recognised scheme owners will not have to change their current accreditation approach.
- GFSI recognises that scheme owners or end users of third party certification can also stipulate further requirements, in addition to product certification and/or management system certification requirements, in order to provide confidence in the production of safe food for consumers.
- This approach allows the scheme owner flexibility to determine the most appropriate accreditation standard for their respective schemes, in accordance with procedures put in place by authoritative bodies responsible for conformity assessment.
- Agreement from accreditation bodies in regard to the most appropriate accreditation standard should be a pre-requisite for any schemes coming forward for benchmarking to GFSI in the future.

Any further questions should be addressed to [gfsinfo@theconsumergoodsforum.com](mailto:gfsinfo@theconsumergoodsforum.com).