FAQ

What is IFS?
The IFS is an association of retailers and industrial companies with a common aim. They inspect their producers, logistics companies, brokers and agents according to a set of harmonized standards to establish whether they are able to manufacture and handle safe products in accordance with customer specifications.

Who is IFS and who owns it?
The IFS is a legally independent company headquartered in Berlin under the full name of IFS Management GmbH. Its shareholders are the HDE, German Retail Federation and the FCD, French Retail Federation. Its decision making body, the Board, and the International Technical Committee are composed of representatives from retailing, industry, food service companies and certification bodies. They control the development of the IFS. The IFS operates branch offices in Europe, China and North and South America. It provides its documents in over 20 languages.

Which standards does the IFS operate?
The IFS operates the following standards:

- IFS Food for the auditing of food product manufacturers
- IFS Logistics for the auditing of companies and service providers which handle food and/or non-food products in terms of logistics
- FS Broker for the auditing of brokers and agencies in order to thoroughly examine whether they have implemented e.g. a functioning suppliers’ and crisis management plan
- IFS HPC (Household and Personal Care) for the auditing of household and personal care product manufacturers
- IFS Cash & Carry for the auditing of wholesalers, packaging companies and cash-and-carry stores
- IFS PACsecure for the auditing of packaging material manufacturers
- IFS Food Store for the inspection of retail food stores/supermarkets

IFS has also published the IFS Global Markets–Food Program. This is an assessment (not yet accredited) by which, companies which are not immediately able to implement the relevant IFS standard, are able to achieve the IFS standard requirements over a defined period and with intermediate stages.

Who supports the IFS?
Retail, logistics and industrial companies from all over Europe and the rest of the world contribute to the working groups, are sometimes themselves IFS certified and also require certification from their business partners. Included among these companies are: METRO (D), Carrefour (F), EDEKA (D), AUCHAN (F), REWE (D), ALDI (D), LIDL (D), Kaufland (D), Group Casino (F), Coop (IT), COOP (CH), CONAD (IT), Dachser (D), Kraftverkehr Nagel (D), US Foods (US), Dawn Foods (US), Concho Y Toro (Chile), Mercadona (SP), DIA (SP), Billa (AT), Superunie (NL), VION Food (NL).

Is the IFS recognized by the large retail chains and international food manufacturers?
IFS Food, IFS Logistics and IFS PACsecure are standards recognized by the GFSI (Global Food Safety Initiative). Ahold, Wal Mart, Migros (CH) and Delhaize on the retailing side and Coca-Cola, Nestlé, Danone and Cargill on the manufacturing side are just a few of the companies that support GFSI and recognize certificates from GFSI recognized standards.

Information about IFS: www.ifs-certification.com
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Why IFS Food?
Up to the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s, each of the large retailing and manufacturing companies had their own audit checklist to assess their suppliers. That meant that during their supplier audits the food producers were confronted with a highly diverse and repeated range of requirements. However, since they all covered the same areas, namely food safety, the implementation of product specifications and operational processes, the sector came up with the idea of developing a common audit checklist that would be applicable to all companies.

What is the core philosophy of IFS?
IFS gives every food manufacturer the flexibility to adapt the processes for the implementation of the IFS requirements to suit their company and production. At the end of the day, all that needs to be ensured is that the implemented processes really work and that safe products are manufactured in accordance with customer specifications and in compliance with applicable legislation.

What are the objectives of IFS Food?
The food manufacturers are assessed to verify that they are capable of producing safe products conforming to customer specifications. The standard pools the supplier requirements from retailing and industry into one common standard with a standardized checklist and assessment system across the market. This means food manufacturers do not have to implement different requirements for their various customers. Acceptance audits are carried out by auditors and certification bodies approved by IFS and accredited by accreditation bodies. The ultimate objective is to achieve the comparability and transparency of all audits within the entire supply chain.

What are the benefits of IFS Food?
IFS can help every company to introduce a quality and food safety management system that covers all aspects of quality/ food safety assurance and ensures that the necessary processes are implemented throughout the business. In other words, everything needed by a functioning quality and food safety management system in the food sector.

What advantage does IFS offer the food manufacturer with several production sites?
Food manufacturers with several production sites use IFS to align all their production sites according to a uniform quality and food safety management system.

Does IFS Food only apply to private labels?
The IFS was not written in such a way that it only applies to private labels, but is a standard that can be implemented by any manufacturer, regardless of what subsequently appears on the packaging/ labelling. There are leading brand manufacturers that have implemented the IFS requirements from the start, simply because they wanted to use IFS to align all their production sites in accordance with a uniform quality and food safety management system.

How does IFS differ from other standards?
The IFS not only includes criteria for food safety but also for the basic quality of the products. No other standard offers this now. These basic quality criteria are in the IFS because the IFS is also a reflection of the private labels in the retail sector. The reputation of the retail sector is accountable for these brands. So it is natural that the retailers want to ensure that, for example, labelling and filling quantities are really complied with and that in the audit process the product specifications are checked for compliance.
The IFS is the only standard in which the auditor asks to see the customer’s specification for the product. During the IFS audit, the manufacturer must then demonstrate how it ensures compliance with the specification.

Furthermore, the IFS is a process-oriented standard. The company is not told that for example, he must buy a particular machine but that a suitable process is required for handling a certain subject.

The IFS is not a pure management system in that it is only aimed at the implementation of a system. The IFS focuses on the product and the validation of those processes that are necessary for its manufacture and supply to the customer.

The final assessment of the requirements is carried out using a scoring system. This enables a numerical comparison of the audit results and the development of the company.

**What is structure of the IFS Food standard?**

The IFS Food is composed of four parts:

- **Part 1** Audit protocol (audit assessment, conduct of the audit, various stages to certification etc.)
- **Part 2** Technical auditing requirements: the checklist comprises 278 requirements, divided into six chapters:
  - Senior management responsibility
  - Quality and food safety management system
  - Resource management
  - Planning and production process
  - Measures, analysis, improvements
  - Food defense
- **Part 3** Requirements for accreditation bodies, certification bodies and auditors
- **Part 4** Reporting (layout requirements of the report, action plan, certificate)

**What should a company consider if it wants to obtain certification, how should it proceed?**

All the IFS approved certification bodies are listed on IFS website, and companies have a completely free choice in selecting one. The certification body usually then asks about the type of company, the number of employees and type of processes etc. This forms the basis of the duration required for certification audit, which on average takes two days. In some cases a preliminary appointment is made to establish the current status. Many companies have a consultant who advises them on the implementation just in case that not everything has yet been implemented.
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What steps must a company take to achieve IFS Food certification?
The first steps are:

1. The decision about which IFS standard to apply for.
3. Assessment of the current status of the company (self-assessment by the company itself or pre-assessment by an external expert).
4. Implementation where necessary of the missing processes and requirements from the selected IFS standard, also possible with the aid of a consultant.
5. Selection of the certification body – the list is available for download on the IFS website.
6. Determination of the date, duration and scope of the audit (coverage of the audit).
7. Conduct of the audit on the appointed date by an experienced and competent auditor in the corresponding product scope(s).

How long does an IFS audit take?
In order to determine the period of time to set aside for an audit, the type of products, the technology used there and the number of employees of the company are factored into the calculation. The tool for calculating the audit period is available on the website www.ifs-certification.com. Every certification body shall use the same tool and can calculate the audit period provided by IFS directly after collecting all the necessary data. Experience shows that the typical audit takes one and a half to two days plus the additional time required to prepare the audit and to complete the audit report (approximately half a day).

What happens during an audit?
The auditor arrives, checks the documentation and assesses the processes. All 278 IFS criteria are checked and marked with an A, B, C or D. There are 20 points for an A, 15 for a B, 5 for a C and -20 points for a D. A percentage is then calculated from the actual scores and the maximum possible number of points. If the company scores an overall rating of 95% or more it has complied with the IFS at the higher level. A company with a rating of between 75% and 95% meets the IFS at the foundation level. Ratings below 75% are deemed to have failed the audit.

How does IFS support food companies so that they can continue to improve?
The scoring system provides the company with a highly differentiated picture of its performance. In awarding a B, C or D mark, every auditor must also give their reasons. There again that is the first step for the company to define its corrective actions. Every IFS audit includes the preparation of such a corrective action plan as part of the post-audit work. It is only by submitting the corrective action plan that the audit can only be passed. The corrective action plan is one element in the introduction of a process of continuous improvement.

Is it true that the IFS not only helps companies to create safer but also more effective processes?
The IFS is not only a food safety and quality standard; it also helps companies to optimize their processes and thus make the enterprise more efficient. In 2009, an analysis was carried out with a certification body and the University of Rostock in which 250 IFS certified companies took part. Almost two-thirds of these companies indicated that their operating results had increased by up to 10%. They were able to reduce the internal failure rate by 40%, and the recall rate was reduced by almost 20%, regardless of whether they were the result of public recalls or returned goods. That has then paid off in terms of higher customer satisfaction.
Apart from the improvement in food safety and product quality, companies that have implemented IFS Food have also noticed:

- A reduction in the failure rate
- A decline in the number of recalled goods
- An improvement in the cost-income ratio
- An increase in legal compliance

Generally speaking, companies are satisfied with IFS. SMEs in particular appreciate the value of the standard. The costs for the implementation and maintenance of the IFS can work out higher than if only a management system had been implemented due to the higher level of investment required. Among the certified companies, the introduction of the IFS led to an increase in competitiveness. Customer relations were also improved because due to better processes, there were fewer faults and thus ultimately the costs of defects are minimized on both sides. The quality and food safety management system is better equipped as a result of the introduction of the IFS.

What particular points must a food manufacturer pay attention to when he implements the IFS?

At the core of food processing production must be a correctly implemented HACCP system. There are times however, when the critical control points are not properly implemented. Those are the milestones through whose deviation it is possible to detect when something is going wrong in the production. The second point is traceability. The implementation of functioning traceability system is always a great challenge, especially for medium-sized enterprises.

Sometimes problems are caused by the production premises. In principle it is also possible to produce foodstuffs in a 100-year-old building, but companies must be able to guarantee the exclusion of hazards such as contamination caused by flaking walls or floors. Sometimes that is somewhat difficult to achieve in old buildings.

Which certification bodies are recognized and approved by the IFS?

A list of approved IFS certification bodies is available online at www.ifs-certification.com. There are certification bodies all over the world that are able to carry out audits in all the major languages.

What are the requirements for IFS certification bodies?

Certification bodies must have accreditation in conformity with ISO 17065 (formerly EN 45011) for IFS certification. As soon as the accreditation is in place, the certification bodies are listed and displayed on the IFS website. When the certification bodies submit their accreditation they sign a contract with the owners of the IFS standards. Further details of the requirements of the certification bodies are described in Part 3 of IFS standards.
What are the requirements for IFS auditors?

Part 3 of the IFS Food Standard describes in detail the requirements for IFS Food auditors. The basic requirements are:

- Auditing experience (a minimum of ten audits in the last two years),
- Verifiable knowledge of HACCP principles,
- Knowledge of quality management,
- The auditors can only carry out audits on the basis of their knowledge of the product scopes (a minimum of two years’ experience in the scope or at least ten audits in the scope),
- They must pass both a written and an oral examination.

In addition, auditors may only carry out audits for one certification body.

The IFS Food is the only standard that tests auditors by means of a written and an oral examination. Every auditor must sit the examination. Furthermore, every IFS approved auditor must participate in calibration training every two years thereafter.

Does the IFS have an accessible database containing all audits?

IFS provides all necessary information via a database: www.ifs-certification.com. All audit reports, action plans and certificates are stored in a protected area of the website. Only registered users, IFS certification bodies and IFS certified companies have access to this protected area.

What information is available on the internet and in the database?

The website www.ifs-certification.com provides the following general information:

- General information about the IFS
- A list of all IFS certification bodies with a list of worldwide regional offices
- A download area from which the various standards and related documents can be downloaded free of charge
- IFS Academy course offerings

The protected database contains:

- The list of all IFS certified companies
- The audit assessments, reports and action plans of the companies
- The assessments and benchmarks of all worldwide programs and standards

Every successful audit report with an IFS certificate is included in the database. Only the name and address of the company are published directly. The audited companies can decide whether to provide their customers with further information.

All IFS audit reports and action plans have the same format structure irrespective of the country in which the audit was carried out. This is safeguarded by clear specifications in Part 4 of the IFS standard and by the auditXpress software that enables certification bodies to produce automatic, harmonized reports and action plans.
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What additional benefits are there for IFS certified companies in being listed in the IFS database with their IFS audits?

There are various benefits for IFS certified companies in using the IFS audit portal. Firstly, there is the ability to manage their own IFS audit reports and action plans. The certification bodies are responsible for uploading the audit data (including the report and action plan). Companies can make this data available to their customers (e.g. retailers) with a single mouse click.

Furthermore, companies can post online the certificates from other standards that they have complied with such as organic certification, QS, KAT, BRC, SQF, and make them available to their customers via the database. All certificates can be accessed from one overview.

Certified companies are also able to search in the database for other certified companies and to manage them via the 'My favorites' function. They can then check whether their upstream suppliers are IFS certified. They can call up the general data, but not the report and action plan, which requires special activation.

Finally, the companies are still able to download the original audit file of the auditXpress software and to use it for their internal audits, provided that they have the necessary 'auditXpress for internal audits' software.

How to get access to the IFS database www.ifs-certification.com?

All retail, industry, food service and logistics companies that recognize and use IFS certifications have access to the database. To gain access they have to contact one of the IFS offices. IFS certified companies gain access automatically when their audit data is entered into the database by the certification body.

Do the IFS have a tool for carrying out internal audits?

The IFS has developed the software ‘auditXpress for internal audits’ to carry out internal audits based on IFS standards. The software contains further details about how certain requirements can be implemented in the company. The software also provides the complete checklist and a tool for the assessment of the audit results. Furthermore, additional company requirements can be entered via the software. This gives the company the flexibility of compiling an internal audit list based on their needs beyond those of the IFS.

The IFS certification bodies are already using the software to carry out IFS audits. Companies can download the audit file online and use it as the basis for their own internal audit. This tool supports companies in their daily work. If companies want to use this audit file, the certification bodies must upload the file online. In this case, companies can only read the data and not modify it.

The software can be bought via the online shop www.ifs-certification.com and is available in German, English, French, Italian and Spanish.