



# Good Assessment Practices Guideline

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# Good Assessment Practices Guideline

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# 0 Introduction

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## 0.1 Purpose of the Good Assessment\* Practices Guideline

This guideline is a support to all IFS Auditors who conduct IFS Certification Assessments against any kind of the IFS product Standards (IFS HPC, IFS PACsecure or IFS Food) and IFS Global Markets Development Programs. In many parts it fits to IFS Logistics and IFS Wholesale/Cash and Carry standards as well.

**Note:** \*In this document, the term IFS Assessment is used instead of IFS Audit. This wording and its definition are introduced with IFS Food Version 7 and will be included into the other IFS Certification Standards successively.

The aim of this guideline is to describe the specifics of an IFS Assessment, the role of the IFS Auditor and the steps to follow in order to ensure the high level of quality and effectiveness of an IFS Assessment.

### Overall, the objectives of the IFS GAP guideline are:

- To support new IFS Auditors in understanding the systematic and intended approach of an IFS Assessment based on ISO/IEC 17065, to allow them following this approach directly from the beginning (e.g. demonstrate their knowledge during their IFS Sign-off Audit/initial Witness Audit).  
This Guideline is applicable for the IFS split Assessment approach having an on-site and a remote assessment part, as well. For more information about the main differences between ISO/IEC 17065 (accreditation norm addressing requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services) and ISO 17021-1 (accreditation norm for bodies providing audit and certification of management systems), see Annex 1.
- To provide basics on the evaluation of product and process compliance, based on product sample(s).
- To apply a harmonised IFS Assessment trail (more information in Annex 2), in order to ensure consistent IFS Assessments with uniform and repeatable results, leading to the result of a trustworthy relationship between retailers, industry and Certification Bodies.



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## PART 1: Fundamentals of the IFS Assessment



# PART 1: Fundamentals of the IFS Assessment

## 1.1 Purpose and core features of the IFS Assessment

IFS Certification is a product and process certification, which aims at confirming the compliance of the manufacturing processes of the production site (including related product flows and infrastructure), resulting in a safe, legal and per customer specification compliant process output (product).

The IFS Assessment is product and process oriented and ensures the processing of safe, legal and defined products through correspondingly functioning processes.

### **It includes the following steps:**

- Opening meeting,
- Review of core Safety and Quality Management System documents,
- On-site evaluation, which can also include documentation and record review and personnel interviews,
- Cross-checking, reflection, inspection and re-confirmation of information gathered during the on-site evaluation and auditing of the remaining documentation/elements of the management system,
- Closing meeting.

The on-site evaluation includes the inspection of the production site as well as the procedures application/records review and interview of employees as main determining stages during the assessment of IFS requirements.

### **The on-site evaluation of the production site shall include (but may not be limited to) the following areas:**

- Production processes,
- Receipt, storage and dispatch areas,
- Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), including maintenance, hygiene, pest control and cleaning and disinfection activities,
- Product development, especially pilot equipment,
- On-site laboratory and /or maintenance facilities,
- Staff and sanitary facilities,
- External areas.

Operating process evaluation: whilst observing and following running production lines, the IFS Auditor shall, through her/his selected samples, collect information on key process parameters, such as critical control points (CCPs) and other control measures as well as their monitoring in order to cross-check them with the HACCP and Risk Management plan information. She/he shall also observe and interview employees, inspect product and technology characteristics, take further samples for cross-checking when necessary, review recipes used during the manufacturing process, observe actual finished products dispatch, cleaning activities and changing shifts or raw materials delivery and audit the implemented product safety and quality management system in practice.



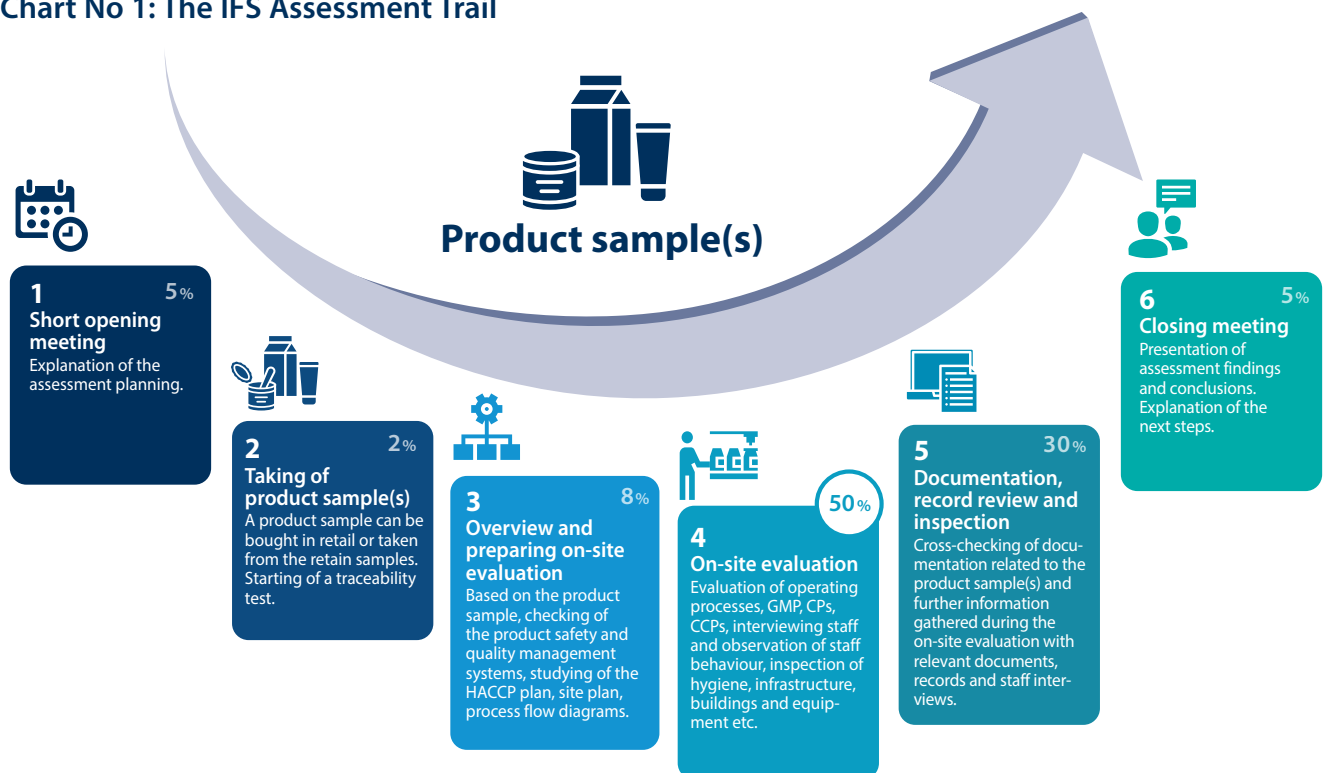
One core feature of the IFS Assessment is a continuous cross-check of information gathered by observation and interviews during the assessment of the Standard requirements.

**The main focus of an IFS Assessment is consisting of:**

- HACCP/Risk assessment and quality system principles defined by the company, as well as consistency with their specific products and the IFS requirements.
- A detailed observation and inspection of all on-site storage area, production areas, production lines and production processes, including interviews and reconfirmation with the working personnel, collecting information and the inspection of key process parameters, like monitoring of critical control points (CCPs) and other control measures to link with the HACCP plan information, as well as the collection of data for the traceability test.
- Records evaluation, which proves the compliance of the sampled products and processes with the customer/companies own specifications, country(ies) of origin and destination legal requirements, as well as the process requirements, including the review and performance of the traceability test.

During the IFS Assessment, the IFS Auditor collects objective evidence to be able to evaluate the compliance of the sampled products and the related operating processes with the defined Assessment requirements (Part 2 of the relevant Standard). This also includes the evaluation of compliance with further specific requirements, for example customer specifications and legal product safety compliance. To achieve this, the IFS Auditor needs to apply different types of auditing and /or inspection techniques, depending on the purpose of the evaluation.

**Chart No 1: The IFS Assessment Trail**



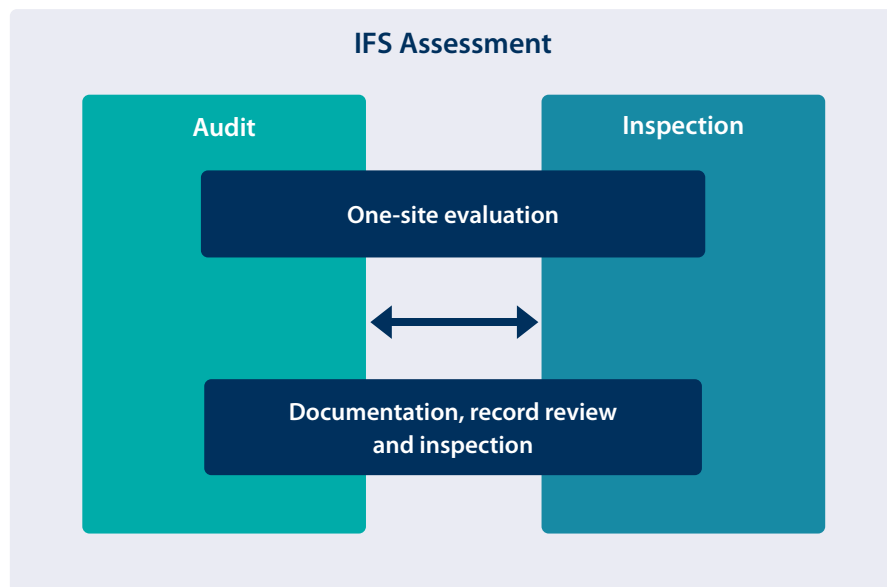
% = percentage share of the assessment time

## 1.2 Methods applied during the IFS Assessment

The following methods are applied during the IFS Assessment:

- **Auditing** of supporting product safety and quality management system requirements, that are necessary to lead to conforming processes/products, including verification and inspection of related procedures.
- **Inspection** of product specification and process characteristics, facilities and infrastructure, technology, methodology and company personnel, to ensure the compliance of the process/product with legal requirements, additionally specified customer requirements, and those of IFS.
- **Review** of corrections and/or corrective actions, logo usage and company profile information.

**Chart No 2: Methods within the IFS Assessment**



### 1.2.1 Auditing of supporting management processes

The aim of this technique is to evaluate whether the procedures or systems implemented in the company are effective and able to support the production related processes. During an IFS Assessment, the IFS Auditor analyses the real situation (implementation) first and verifies the gathered information via inspection and review of related documents (procedures, work instructions, etc.) as laid down in the company's product safety and quality management system documentation.

To check whether a system works or not is one element to ensure product conformity more efficiently.

#### **Audit techniques can be broken down into the following elements:**

- Observation of the sites installations and processes to gain a first idea of the sites order and atmosphere
- Audit of procedures/systems/specified requirements
- Audit of risk based systems
- Interview of employees
- Review of documents and challenging of information
- Reflection of information gathered during shop floor inspections



### 1.2.2 Inspection of product characteristics, compliance with customer requirements, persons, facilities, technologies and methodologies

The aim of this technique is to evaluate whether defined product and process characteristics have been comprehensively transferred to the production process and its output – the final product. During the IFS Assessment, the IFS Auditor has to collect and gather all necessary parameters in order to cross-check them against relevant process steps, infrastructure and records. Moreover, these techniques are also applied for the evaluation of further defined IFS requirements, where relevant.

#### **Inspection techniques can be broken down as follows:**

- Inspection and cross-checking of documents and records
- Inspection and cross-checking of records adhered to a specific product
- Inspection of infrastructure facilities, process characteristics, technology, methodology and company personnel
- (Re)Confirmation of gathered information with operative employees
- Observation of employees at work and of (automated) production processes



The above stated techniques are typically used in conjunction to allow an efficient Assessment process.

### 1.3 Attributes of the IFS Auditor

IFS Assessments are specific to detailed products and technology scopes as laid down in each IFS Standard. The IFS Auditor's scope specific expertise is a crucial basis for the IFS Assessment. Consequently, IFS Auditors have an extraordinary profile, with a high professional qualification in the field they would like to conduct assessments in. The technical expertise and auditing/assessment experiences provided in the Auditor's CVs are checked and approved in line with the IFS requirements for auditors and the auditor is put through an additional IFS examination process.

An elementary prerequisite for an IFS Auditor is that she or he is able to demonstrate a robust knowledge about the products and technologies she/he is assessing and therefore can understand the IFS requirements with the proper risk-based and product/process knowledge. While in-depth and up-to-date knowledge about the products and processes and technology used to produce those products is vital for conducting an IFS Assessment, attention and awareness are also crucial for the confident application of the right assessment techniques to ensure an effective IFS Assessment. Finally, it is the IFS Auditor who shall take responsibility and fulfil her/his professional due diligence obligations for the evaluation of IFS requirements within the specific scope of the IFS Assessment.

### 1.3.1 Application of evaluation techniques

The IFS Auditor shall be able to adjust her/his evaluation techniques during the IFS Assessment. She/he shall be able to apply different techniques according to the collected findings and the evaluation stages.

For example, when the whole documentation of the company is under evaluation, the main goal is to evaluate if the procedures and production processes defined by the company are suitable to guarantee the fulfilment of legal, customer and IFS requirements.



#### Typical questions are:

- How are customer needs and expectations identified? How often are these identified?
- What were the results of the last customer survey?
- Do specific customer requirements for purchased products exist and how are those communicated within the company?
- How is it ensured that customers are informed about product changes?  
Are the HACCP/Risk assessment and quality systems consistent with the products, the relevant regulations as well as with the IFS and customer's requirements?
- How does senior management ensure that employees are aware of their responsibilities?
- Has a traceability system been defined to enable the identification of product lots and their relation to batches of raw materials, packaging in direct contact with product and packaging intended or expected to be in direct contact with the product?

When the products and/or processes are under inspection, through the on-site evaluation and record checking, the main aim is to check if they are safe, legal and in accordance with customer specifications.

If, during the inspection, clear inconsistencies are detected, KO's or Major non-conformities shall be issued on relevant requirements, even if the inconsistency concerns one product/process characteristic, only.

**Attention:**

Data collection is part of the IFS Assessment aiming at collecting evidence or information on specific process elements to determine compliance to a given Assessment criteria. Data may evolve around people, equipment, environment, control measures or testing methods. The IFS Auditor shall be able to explain why certain specific evidence is requested instead of others. All collected data (Assessment report and personal notes) shall follow a logical approach with regards to the Assessment trail and the linked findings.

**Example 1:**

- Is the final product consistent with the technical specification?  
If the answer is no, the finding leads to a non-conformity, even if the company has a system and/or a procedure implemented for the development and update of specifications. Further investigations are always required and the outcome must be documented.

**Example 2:**

- Are the ingredients, semi-finished and finished products as well as packaging materials properly identified during all stages, including work in progress, post treatment and rework?  
If the answer is no, the following question on ingredients, semi-finished and finished products as well as packaging materials shall be asked:
- Is the company able to trace the ingredients, semi-finished and finished products as well as packaging materials and give solid proof about the traceability of specific batches of that specific product?  
If they answer both questions with “no”, the finding is a non-conformity.

**Further hints:**

- The declarations of conformity concerning packaging materials or equipment shall be linked to the sampled products and/or equipment evaluated during the on-site evaluation.
- If some pieces of equipment were considered as not in good condition during the on-site evaluation, the evaluation of the maintenance system and relative records should be more thorough for those pieces of equipment.

### 1.3.2 Dealing with critical situations and Assessment efficiency

Everybody wants to avoid critical situations and although they may not arise, it is important to be prepared if they do. Often it is already helpful to step back and pause the IFS Assessment for distancing or to calm down the situation. Here are some typical critical situations each IFS Auditor shall be prepared for:

- **Each Assessment generates stress** for company employees, which should be tried to be minimised, for example by adopting a positive approach to support open conversation. Positive body language and a smile cost nothing and may help a lot!
- **Lack of product and/or technology scopes because the company did not clearly communicate all of them:** IFS Standards clearly state that the senior management of the company shall ensure that the Certification Body is informed about any changes possibly affecting their ability to conform to the certification requirements. If the IFS Auditor identifies that some product and/or tech scopes are actually implemented by the company but not addressed in the IFS Assessment scope, she/he shall contact the responsible Certification Body for agreement on further actions.
- **Delays:** The IFS Standards have specific requirements concerning availability of resources and documentation storage. Delays may lead to a lack of time to complete the IFS Assessment of all requirements in due time. This is not acceptable! All requested documents and records must be evaluated during the IFS Assessment. Proposals such as the forwarding of documents after the end of the IFS Assessment are not tolerable. Company shall also be informed and aware that the IFS Assessment is finished when all questions are answered and when the IFS Auditor got the chance to check all necessary information, practices and documentation; not when the originally calculated time is over. In case significant more time is needed the auditor shall contact the responsible Certification Body for agreement on the further procedure.
- **Answer questions:** Often, the company director, or more likely the quality manager, will accompany the IFS Auditor during the whole IFS Assessment. They might try to answer all questions. However, the person actually responsible for the activity being assessed shall always be asked directly. For example, when visiting raw materials receipt area, the person performing the receipt checks shall be asked rather than her/his manager or the quality manager. When following the metal detector testing, the operator responsible for the testing shall be the person of choice for questions. The IFS Auditor shall be able to decide when it is good to listen to whom.
- **Not acceptance of a non-conformity (or less frequently deviation) by the companies' management:** A robust evidence of the finding, a clear explanation on the finding, a good connection with the exact IFS requirements and an immediate communication of every finding to the company is a good prevention here. In this way, there will be no surprise during the closing meeting. In case this happens, the IFS Auditor has the chance to refer to the Certification Body's complaint/appeal procedure.
- **Threats, insults and bribery suggestions:** Such behaviors are clearly not acceptable. In these situations, it is necessary to be rational and act professionally. Identify the real problem and take notes of the situation and events that have occurred. Do not make harsh comments, but identify the issue and communicate it to your Certification Body.
- **Tips and hints:** Attention – in line with accreditation rules, providing consultation is not allowed in an IFS Certification Assessment. By writing your finding in a clear manner which is directed to the relevant requirement on the checklist, the auditor provides the right tools for the site to address the correction and corrective action effectively.

### 1.3.3 Effectiveness of the IFS Assessment

There are many important factors influencing the effectiveness of the IFS Assessment, such as:

- The IFS Auditor is aware that she/he is conducting a **product and process** IFS Certification Assessment.
- The IFS Auditor determines the Assessment process and maintains an overview of the remaining time and the outstanding points to look at throughout the Assessment.
- The IFS Auditor chooses the right time and person to ask questions. These questions shall be formulated appropriately and respectfully so the company staff can understand. An atmosphere of hierarchy should be avoided. Facts are recorded neutrally, questioned/challenged professionally and evaluated appropriately.
- The IFS Auditor should spend as much time as possible listening – the IFS Auditor's share of speaking should be less than the one of the companies' staff.

Moreover, be aware of the following to be able to perform the IFS Assessment efficiently:

- Lead the Assessment. There is limited time dedicated for the Assessment and all areas/all requirements need to be assessed within this timeframe. Relevant priorities need to be set by dividing the time between the areas of assessment, documentation and the on-site part, auditing and inspection and the individual departments, which is in the responsibility of the IFS Auditor. Leading the Assessment means that the IFS Auditor manages the time, uses her/his own sampling approach, follows the Assessment trail and manages the situation when a company lets her/him wait for documents or records. The Auditor need to be able to stick to the schedule but also remain sufficiently flexible if there are sound reasons for any changes. The duties include evaluating the situation at hand and making decisions with respect to this specific situation.
- Rather than going through the checklist and spending too much time on the documentation review, as much time as possible shall be dedicated to the practical Assessment as part of the on-site evaluation. The minimum Assessment time allocated to the on-site evaluation is set in the relevant IFS Standard but can be extended whenever considered necessary based on the complexity of the company. This time shall be used to look for details to enable a comprehensive Assessment of all relevant requirements. Observe the operators, working areas, equipment and spend enough time talking to employees of all relevant functions.
- Proper selection of questions during the interview and reconfirmation with the management and the employees shall be made. Never start an interview with direct or closed questions but with open questions. Instead of "Are you checking the metal detector?" or "How often do you check the metal detector?", the IFS Auditor shall start with an open question and see how the interview develops. If needed, further clarification shall be requested and, only if necessary, a specific question shall be asked at the end in order to close the topic. For metal detection, the question to the operator might be "What does your work position entail?". In case the answer does not lead to the topic of detector checks, a more focussed question like "Do you do any checks?" shall follow. Never use questions suggesting the solution as the interviewed person may want to please the IFS Auditor with the answer. Multiple questions at the same time shall be avoided as this might generate stress, possibly causing the interviewed person to lose concentration.
- It might happen that the IFS Auditor repeatedly needs to ask the same question to get a comprehensive understanding about compliance. It might be necessary to listen to the manager's version as well as the operator's version, and sometimes even the version of several operators' need to be heard. It is often good to verify the findings and see if consistent information is being delivered.





**Finally, the IFS Auditor is required to:**

- Stay focussed for the whole time of the assessment,
- Remain unbiased, even if she /he has assessed the company before,
- Consider every assessment as new assessment, like if the auditors would be there for the first time,
- Connect the relevant dots and be sensitive to contradictions,
- Adapt to changing situations,
- Take notes on the observed situation, documented information and evidence.

**In addition to the above-mentioned points, the following soft skills are very important for IFS Auditors:**

- Trustworthiness: a consistent display of honesty and integrity
- Time-management: the ability to completely evaluate each requirement in due time, also when facing critical situations
- Empathy: skill of understanding other people's perspective and diplomacy
- Communication: skill of listening and sending clear and well-tuned messages, taking into account cultural variations, which may include different considerations of authority and hierarchy
- Adaptability: skill of adjusting to changing situations and overcoming obstacles
- Self-confidence: a strong and positive sense of self worth
- Conflict management: the ability to de-escalate disagreement

### 1.3.4 IFS specific features



**In addition to all the above features, IFS Auditors must be aware of the following conditions:**

- IFS Management GmbH is certified to ISO/IEC 27001:2013, therefore a specific part of the Annex 1 of the Framework Agreement is related to the IFS Auditor Data privacy protection.
- As described in Annex 4 (Integrity Program) of the Framework Agreement, IFS Management GmbH carries out a number of different Integrity Program measures to assure the quality of IFS Assessments and to provide trust in the brand. The above-mentioned measures include Integrity on-site Checks, Integrity Witness Audits and Integrity Certification Body (CB) Office Audits. Activities of the IFS Integrity Program may lead to breaches and sanctions, also for IFS Auditors.
- IFS Auditors (non-exclusive Auditors) or (in general) the Certification Body (for exclusive Auditors) need to take care of maintaining her/his own IFS Auditor approval which includes:
  - Annual minimum number of Audits/Assessments performed according to the IFS Standards rules
  - Participation every two (2) years in a calibration training organised by IFS.
  - Annual IFS in-house training by the responsible Certification Body
  - Witness audit every two (2) years.



# 2

## PART 2: Before the IFS Assessment

# PART 2: Before the IFS Assessment

## 2.1 Basic considerations



**IFS Auditors must be aware of and ensure compliance with the following IFS rules, among others:**

- Her/his IFS qualification for product and technology scopes must comply with the company's product and technology scopes, depending on the Standard's requirements.
- Language requirements need to be fulfilled.
- Impartiality:
  - More than three (3) consecutive Assessments of the same production site are not allowed, in order to ensure impartiality of the IFS Auditor.
  - The Certification Body has to ensure that IFS Auditors act impartially (e.g. not acting against IFS rules, not having acted as a consultant or having had involvement with or acted on behalf of the companies being assessed during the previous two (2) years).

## 2.2 Assessment preparation

The objective of the Assessment preparation is to gather all information which may have an impact on the execution of the IFS Assessment. IFS Standards require a mandatory preparation time to the IFS Auditor which needs to be documented.

**For better preparation, a minimum of the following information shall be studied in advance:**

- Previous Assessment report and action plan, as the IFS Auditor will need to check if all corrective actions are implemented.
- Available information from the company's website. This may help in understanding the company's products, processes and customers as well as if there are other sister companies or outsourced processes, etc. If the website presents the full range of products made by the company, this can also help in the product sampling strategy.
- Assessment scope defined by the Certification Body: The Auditor shall check and ensure that she/he has all necessary information relating to the list of all products and related processes (also if any seasonal processes occur) – including decentralised structures, outsourced processes and exclusions, if any.
- Assessment details (e.g. whether the IFS Assessment is performed under unannounced or announced condition).
- Current requirements latest changes in legal or regulatory requirements of the applicable production and destination countries/regions the production site is dealing with. This is particularly important, for example, for legal requirements on quantity/weight control of the finished products, labelling and allergens (in other countries than Europe).
- Information about the last IFS Food Safety Check, if applicable.

- If any, product recall(s) and/or withdrawal(s) internally or by official order concerning product safety & product fraud reasons or any visit from health authorities which resulted in notifications and/or penalties issued by authorities, if available.
- Whenever possible, the different recall portals shall be checked for any information related to the company and/or type(s) of manufactured products, e.g. European Safety Gate, RASFF, RFR, OECD global recall portal, etc.
- If possible, check and be aware of risks specific to raw materials and food fraud aspects related to the sites products. The IFS Trend Risk Monitor (in the IFS Auditor Login area of the IFS Database) could be a good source for further information here.
- Other company crisis (e.g. fire, blackmail, shut-down etc.), if applicable.
- It might be helpful to ask the company to send documents before the Assessment, for review.
- Self-preparation:
  - Ensure the full address is correct
  - Evaluate business trip options: the production site must be reached and left in due time in order to comply with the calculated Assessment duration.
  - Detectable pencil
  - Notebook/material for documentation of notes
  - Document template to be signed each day by you and the assessed company
  - Flashlight, if possible according to the sites rules
  - (Recommended) a calibrated thermometer or use of the company's thermometer, if possible according to the sites rules
  - (Recommended) You may also purchase a sample of the product for the traceability exercise (see chapter 3.2).
  - Remember the compulsory fields and the process in case you would identify a non-conformity during the Assessment.

Furthermore, the IFS Auditor shall take into account any relevant and applicable IFS rules (e.g. from the IFS Doctrine) related to the Assessment, including outsourcing, trade information and/or product exclusions. Remember that the normative documents are both the IFS Standard and the IFS Doctrine.

Some Certification Bodies send pre-questionnaires to the companies to be certified in the offer stage and ask companies to present other relevant documents upfront which are necessary to be reviewed for a good preparation.

The IFS Auditor needs to consider that all information collected during the Assessment preparation stage can only be used as a basis to organize the on-site evaluation. All information collected in advance must be verified during the calculated Assessment time.

A comprehensive IFS Assessment time schedule shall be developed, considering all information gathered and the agreed Assessment time. The developed time schedule shall be provided to the site well in advance of the planned IFS Assessment day(s) or at the beginning of the Assessment in case it is unannounced. This enables an effective Assessment and supports the time management of the IFS Auditor, as the site is able to prepare and allocate staff to the planning before the Assessment starts. Nevertheless the Assessment time schedule shall allow sufficient flexibility to react on changing situations.

#### **The Assessment time schedule shall contain at least:**

- Name(s) of IFS Auditor(s) or other attendees and their roles (e.g. witness auditor),
- Type of Assessment (announced, unannounced, initial, follow-up, recertification, extension)
- Assessment scope including: description of product and technology scopes, company's information and the indication of exclusions and outsourced processes, if applicable. If your Certification Body has agreed on product exclusions, the questionnaire on exclusions (if available for the IFS Standard) shall be part of and be reflected in the time schedule.
- It shall reflect the start and finish time and the correct number of hours/days which were defined by the calculation tool if available for the Assessment duration.
- It shall reflect the planned time for the on-site evaluation, as IFS Standards define minimum time for this step.
- Minimum Assessment time is defined in the relevant Standard. One Assessment day is equivalent to eight (8) hours and shall never exceed ten (10) hours. Breaks do not count as Assessment time; so be sure that the total numbers of Assessment hours, excluding breaks, correspond to the time calculated and defined.
- Sequence of all topics/chapters of the IFS Standard and parts of the company, production areas and scope, time allocated and reserved for (specifically for the assessed site) the different parts of the Assessment activity, which shows that a relevant part of the time is available for the on-site evaluation.
- In case the company has off-site storage areas under their own supervision, appropriate time for a visit and transfer has to be allocated.
- Allocate enough time to review the action plan from the previous Assessment, as this step may take time according to the number of identified deviations and/or non-conformities.
- Depending on the type of production site (see definition IFS Food version 7) it might need to include the Assessment of a decentralised structure and/or centrally managed functions. The time schedule shall reflect that.
- In case of combined Assessment with another standard or norm, it shall clearly specify which part of each standard/norm will be assessed at which moment.
- In case of an Assessment team, it shall be noted which IFS Auditor carries out which part of the Assessment having in mind IFS rules. The additional Assessment time needed for an Assessment performed with a team needs to be allocated.
- If the Assessment is announced, the time schedule shall be sent in advance of the Assessment, to allow the company to get organized and ensure the availability of relevant personnel on the days of the Assessment. Usually a deadline is defined by the Certification Body.
- If the Assessment is unannounced, it shall not be sent in advance: it shall be shared during the opening meeting and might be modified and adapted if necessary (for example to ensure availability of relevant personnel or production lines are running during the Assessment).
- In case of a split approach IFS Assessment having an Assessment part with the use of ICT and one part at the physical site without the use of ICT (only applicable for certain IFS Standards), the time schedule shall clearly indicate which parts of the IFS requirements will be done remotely and which not.



The general Assessment elements are:

1. Opening meeting
2. The evaluation of the status of the existing product safety and quality system achieved by checking documentation (HACCP, site plans, etc.)
3. On-site evaluation, operating process evaluation, observation and interviewing of the personnel, inspection of infrastructure, buildings, equipment and staff behaviour
4. The cross-checking, inspection and re-confirmation of gathered information during the on-site evaluation with relevant documents, records and staff and the auditing of the remaining documentation and management system elements
5. The final preparation of conclusions drawn from the Assessment
6. Closing meeting





3

## PART 3: During the IFS Assessment



## PART 3: During the IFS Assessment

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### 3.1 Opening meeting

One of the objectives of the opening meeting is to introduce the different Assessment attendees company personnel, etc. and their role, in order to avoid misunderstandings and loss of time during the Assessment.

The opening meeting shall also ensure that all planned Assessment activities can be performed in due time by reviewing the Assessment time schedule.

**The following points will be discussed during the opening meeting:**

- The IFS Auditor introduce her-/himself and her/his role (including further Certification Body personnel such as co-Auditors, translators, technical experts and witness Auditors, trainees, AIP or other Certification Body personnel, if applicable)
- Let the representatives of the company briefly introduce themselves
- Invite the company to give a brief overview of the company, especially in case the IFS Auditor is completely new to the site.
- Confirm confidentiality and data security
- Check and confirm the Assessment scope/scope of the certificate including the product and technology scopes, seasonal processes, outsourced processes, exclusions, etc. In case differences are identified between the Assessment scope defined by the Certification Body and the current one, an IFS technical responsible of the Certification Body has to be contacted. Pay attention to the consistency with the previous Assessment and matching of the company's product/technology scopes with the IFS Auditor's/Assessment team's product/technology scopes, if applicable. If the IFS Auditor/Assessment team does not cover the company's product/technology scopes of the IFS Assessment, immediate actions must be taken.
- Ask if major incidents, such as recalls, Authority notifications or other major events, etc. occurred since the last Assessment. These should have been previously communicated to the Certification Body but it's worth double-checking.
- Check and confirm the total number of employees (including part time workers, shift workers, temporary staff, administrative people, etc.), considering the total maximum number of employees over a year.
- Get a confirmation of the spoken language of the employees, to ensure you'll be able to perform proper Assessment and interviews (and that you're qualified in this working language).
- Check and confirm the Assessment duration, taking into consideration that a variation of the product/technology scopes and number of people could affect the Assessment duration. If the Assessment duration has to be longer than indicated in the Assessment time schedule, immediate actions must be taken.

- Ask about actual production times, shifts, breaks, change situations, receiving, production and packaging schedules in order to be sure that all processes are running during the on-site evaluation. If the Assessment time schedule does not fit with the production/packaging schedules, it can be rearranged within the calculated Assessment time; if it is not possible, the Certification Body has to be contacted to get further instructions, e.g. to add Assessment time, to add an additional IFS Auditor or to rearrange the Assessment including the consideration on an extension Assessment. Keep in mind that during the Assessment, all products (group of products) and production processes have to be assessed while running.
- Agree on the Assessment schedule including breaks, any progress meetings and the availability of senior management, relevant process managers or their deputies during the IFS Assessment.
- Collect or verify all data requested for the mandatory information to be provided in the company profile of the Assessment report.
- Explain the IFS Assessment methodology and clarify the sampling process.
- Explain that the Auditor is looking for compliance with the Standard requirements rather than finding as many issues as possible. Observed potential deviation or non-conformity might just need further explanations, which may finally consider being a different approach which still may be compliant.
- Explain the meaning of the IFS Scoring System and the consequences in case any non-conformity (Major or KO scored with D) is issued.
- Explain that even in case of a non-conformity (Major or a KO scored with D), the IFS Auditor is required to complete the Assessment and to assess the remaining IFS requirements.
- Clarify that a summary of the progress, status and any findings will be communicated at the end of each day.
- Confirm the time of the closing meeting.
- Clarify when the last unannounced audit/Assessment of a GFSI recognised standard in a similar scope has taken place.
- Inform about the IFS Integrity Program, including possible IFS Integrity on-site checks.
- Ask if any representatives of the company have questions or requests for clarification.
- Identify the product sample taken for the traceability exercise. Start the traceability exercise.



#### **Relevant considerations:**

- At least one member of the senior management should (in IFS Food v7 – “The most senior manager on the date of the Assessment shall be present”) attend the opening meeting. If the senior manager is not available on the days of the Assessment, a nominated deputy shall attend.
- Time management is very important, as the evaluation should start as soon as possible. The opening meeting should be kept short, as it is expected that the IFS Auditor(s) will go on-site (to the production floor) as soon as possible. Beforehand, the IFS Auditor shall initiate the traceability test and see the site plan, HACCP plan, organisation chart and the index of the Safety and Quality Management System.

## 3.2 Product Sampling

IFS Auditors are required to take several product samples for the traceability exercise and for the overall evidence-based Assessment. The full vertical Assessment on the basis of (a) product sample(s) provides a very good Assessment trail at the same time, as it is always based on:

- Risk based chosen product sample(s) which take into consideration the kind of products as well as the number of different products.
- The sampled product(s) production flow/production line(s).
- “Other items”, i.e. samples gathered during the on-site evaluation (devices, agents, employees, baits, etc.).

The aim is to make a representative selection of all products and processes included in the certification scope, in order to gain maximum information about the production site and its products. Within the IFS Assessment, vertical upstream and downstream traceability is a process of deep analysis by using the traceability dimensions. All input into the production process is analysed regarding safety and quality validity and the accuracy of the measurements. In addition, the process is analysed with respect to the sites’ conditions, environment and the production control methods. The IFS Auditor’s experience is highly demanded at this point. The IFS Auditor shall always select her/his samples. Samples especially prepared by the company for assessment through the IFS Auditor should be ignored. Mathematical or statistical approaches cannot be used as a basis; the number of samples is too small for this.

Depending on the complexity of the final products chosen, at least one of the chosen products must be used to perform the traceability exercise, which includes the mass balance of the final product and its raw material(s) as well as the distribution list and associated documents (e.g. production records, specifications, training records from people involved, lab reports etc.).

- Samples selected carelessly can falsify the Assessment result.
- Due to the limited time on site, the selection must be as efficient/systematic as possible in order to be able to check as many aspects as possible in the time available.
- When information is requested, communication is very important. The company must be made aware of when the specified information is to be delivered by and how it is to be prepared. If necessary, it can be helpful for the IFS Auditor to create her/his own investigation form/sheet with detailed specifications and to use these during the Assessment.

In general, two or three different product samples for traceability shall be taken, but it may vary in relation to the number of different product groups, complexity of the product and different processes/lines. In case it is not possible to cover all different processes of the assessed site with the samples chosen, further samples shall be taken and assessed.

If possible, the IFS Auditor should buy the sample (e.g. in a retail store, online shop, etc.) in advance of the Assessment for the traceability exercise.

If this is not possible, the batches should be chosen from the list of orders/delivery notes, by selecting them from the sample rooms or by choosing a particular production day/week during the opening meeting of the Assessment.



**There are a few basic things to consider when choosing a product sample:**

- If the selection from the retained sample is made on site, the production of the sample should have taken place far enough in the past that the product has already left the factory. This way, often the production documents including traceability are filed already and the company has to collect them from their system. An orientation could be between at least 2 month but not more than 8 month depending on the kind of product.  
In this way it could be avoided that documents and records are already been archived and maybe not on-site anymore.
- It is quite possible that no retained samples are available, in which case the selection must be made using production lists or delivery notes.
- The sample should reflect the complexity of the production and, if possible, also contain semi-finished products and/or rework produced by the company itself.
- Depending on the complexity of the product and the available Assessment time on site, two or more samples should be selected.
- The sample label should also contain claims (origin, free of XYZ, etc.), if possible.

The exact product(s) sampled (including batches) should preferably be communicated at the end of the opening meeting. Following the announcement of the selected sample, the company has to start collecting all documents and records, which are necessary to comprehensively assess the conformity of the product to the technical specifications, customer's requirements and the Assessment criteria of the Standard (see Annex 2 and 3 for more information about the traceability exercise). The time needed to collect all relevant traceability information has to be documented by the IFS Auditor.

**Based on the label(s) of the sampled product(s), the following points should be particularly emphasised:**

- If the list of ingredients is consistent with the ingredients in the specifications and in the product recipe
- Quantity/mass balance (it should also be noted that the quantity finished/stored may differ from the quantity of the starting material)
- If the claimed quantities of certain ingredients are correct, e.g. QUID (Quantitative Ingredient Declaration)
- If claims are legal and backed up by company's documentation
- Furthermore, the following aspects regarding the sample should be checked comprehensively:
  - Customer agreement, e.g. recipe, technological aspects, approved production site, required analysis, etc.
  - Delivered to which customer/distributor
  - Supplier contracts/agreements (also including entries in a customer portal) or the raw materials
  - Proof of supplier approval, if necessary, also certificates (also applies to service providers)
  - Supplier evaluation (also concerns service providers)
  - Label of finished products
  - Recipes of finished and semi-finished products entering production and, if necessary, rework

- Laboratory analyses to verify the information in the specification/contract of the sample (also applies to the Best Before Date)
- Batch records for the production of the sample including possible semi-finished products, rework, packaging material, etc.
- Cleaning and disinfection records of the week of production
- Cooling proofs for the week of manufacture or for a storage period, if applicable
- Hazard analysis including flow diagrams
- All additional documents that have arisen during the production such as: HACCP documents (temperature protocols for storage and heating, residual oxygen measurement, metal detector control, leakage test, weight test, loading documents, goods receipt protocols, etc.)
- Maintenance plan/proof of the equipment used for production for a time window to be defined
- Listing of the test equipment used and their verification of monitoring/calibration
- Delivery notes of the raw materials including their documents for incoming goods inspection
- Specification and, if applicable, declarations of conformity for the raw/packaging materials
- etc.

If the sampled product does not comply with the customer specification and/or the relevant legal requirements and the company cannot demonstrate having informed all the involved parties in order to fix the issue, the finding will directly lead to a non-conformity.

#### Relevant considerations:

In many situations, the IFS Auditor will need to extend the sampling for the vertical Assessment trail e.g. product(s) selected for the traceability exercise plus typically also product(s) seen in production during the on-site evaluation. An example may be the product development, as the check of any newly developed or modified product might not be in connection with the chosen sample from the Assessment trail and the traceability exercise.

The number of other, further random samples can only be planned in a very theoretical way. The planning must be adapted to the situation on-site at any time. Experience shows that several samples should be selected, in order to be able to assess different specific situations accordingly without losing Assessment time.



**Note:** Useful information on this topic is given in ISO 10576-1, ISO 2859-10, ISO 3951-1 and ISO 22514-1.

Nevertheless, the Assessment trail shall be followed, where possible to obtain the complete picture. Sufficient time must be calculated by the IFS Auditor for the evaluation of all sample related records.

### 3.3 Evaluation of the Safety and Quality Management System (documentation review)

The objective of the Safety and Quality Management System evaluation is to verify if the system elaborated by the company are consistent with their specific products and processes as well as the IFS requirements.

In order to gain appropriate understanding of the assessed site's compliance with the relevant IFS Standard, it is essential for the IFS Auditor to start by familiarising her/himself with the process flow diagram, along with HACCP/Risk assessment or selected quality management documentation.

This will provide the IFS Auditor with a good overview of the assessed site's process elements, adequacy of controls and associated risks.

The on-site evaluation will allow the IFS Auditor to conduct detailed verifications and ultimately draw conclusions on compliance with customer specifications, legal requirements and IFS Standard requirements.

### 3.3.1 Evaluation of the senior management commitment including product safety culture

One of the fundamental features of the whole IFS Assessment is the active evaluation of the actions implemented by the senior management in order to demonstrate the company's commitment including elements of product safety culture.

During the course of the evaluation, the commitment of the senior management regarding the product safety culture is challenged at several stages. If the senior manager is not available on the days of the Assessment, a nominated deputy shall attend.



#### **The senior management shall be able to present:**

- The corporate policy with specific reference to:
  - The short-term and long-term objectives and the actions implemented for their achievement
  - The fixed deadlines and the review process
  - The management of unsuccessful objectives
- The methods implemented to make all involved internal and external personnel aware of their responsibilities and duties.
- In relation to the applicable IFS Standards, the implemented methods in order to communicate, share and evaluate the product safety culture.

Within the IFS Assessment, the continuous combination of documentation review and on-site evaluation allows the IFS Auditor to conduct detailed inspection and verification activities and ultimately draw conclusions on compliance with customer specifications, legal requirements and IFS Standard requirements.

To be efficient during the Assessment, the senior management should be evaluated towards the end of the Assessment in order to have a sufficient amount of samples, questions and observations collected during the Assessment which shall be discussed and challenged with the senior management.

The judgement for the KO requirement of the senior management commitment is usually finally evaluated at the end of the Assessment. At this stage the IFS Auditor presents – if any – the findings related to deficient staff awareness and/or issues concerning deficient resources in regards to infrastructure and equipment found during the on-site evaluation. To interview the senior management at the end of the Assessment has the benefit to be able to present all those findings within the right context.

### 3.3.2 Minimum list of documents to be viewed prior to the on-site evaluation

A company should be informed by the Certification Body, that specific documents as listed below in the blue box are available for the IFS Auditor, at latest during the opening meeting.

On the one hand, this should allow enough time for the collection of sufficient information, while on the other hand the Auditor shall be allowed to proceed to the on-site evaluation as soon as possible.

This way the IFS Auditor gains quickly a clear understanding of the company's production processes. In case an IFS Auditor is completely new to a site, it is necessary that she/he can familiarise her-/himself very fast with the most important key information of the company. The already prepared documents (e.g. flow chart, CCP overview and plant layout) can be taken by the IFS Auditor to the on-site evaluation for efficient cross-check.

Thus said, to receive those documents before or during the opening meeting does not have the objective of their immediate evaluation, as this will be carried out in depth during the course of the Assessment.

Especially for the unannounced and split protocol, the special time restraints have to be fulfilled. The objective of receiving these documents is not their immediate evaluation, as this will be carried out in depth during the record cross-check, but to proceed directly to the on-site evaluation and to enter critical areas/the production/packaging/storage facilities as quickly as possible, especially in case of an unannounced Assessment.

**List of typical documents which need to be received in advance and/or at latest during the opening meeting:**

- Organisational chart
- Company's own hygiene rules
- Production plan/Dispatch lists for each Assessment day
- Site map and product(s)/personnel flows covering all buildings of the plant
- Flow diagram(s)
- HACCP plan overview
- CCPs monitoring system procedures and (critical) limits
- Corrections/corrective actions plan from the previous IFS Assessment or (any other GFSI recognised Standards) audit (if applicable)



### 3.4 On-site evaluation

**The objectives of the on-site evaluation are:**

- Operative process evaluation and execution of a comprehensive on-site inspection of buildings, facilities, equipment, processes and staff behaviour.
- Collection of thorough information and inputs for the company's process and procedure review and cross-check, which includes the sampling of further information for the next evaluation step.

The on-site evaluation in general follows the product flow, always respecting the hygiene and safety rules of the site, to ensure that all the products and processes subject to the IFS certification are going to be evaluated comprehensively.

It needs to be ensured that all inside and outside areas of the production site have been entered and inspected. The IFS Auditor should follow a clear Assessment path. Even though the path through the company might be given through the product and process flow, it has to be ensured that the IFS Auditor is taking the lead regarding the speed and depth of the inspection along the whole product flow and production lines. During the on-site evaluation, special focus shall be given to areas being identified as critical. It might be necessary to return to an area already visited later again for clarification, depending on the trail and observations made.



**Attention:**

Consideration needs to be given where specific company rules need to be followed. For example: In meat processing plants, the IFS Auditor may need to follow the division of the company by zones, starting in the clean zone, followed with “clean” part of slaughter and finishing in “dirty” part of slaughter.

During the on-site evaluation, it is recommended that responsible managers of the concerned processes and departments shall attend while their departments are under evaluation. If the department manager is not available on the days of the Assessment, a nominated deputy shall attend.

In addition, during the on-site evaluation, the IFS Auditor collects information about the identification of the product during the different production steps. Outcomes of processes will be recorded and will be cross-checked with the internal/external technical specifications, the HACCP/Risk assessment and the quality management documentation.

All the above information is gathered through detailed evaluation of all on-site production areas, production lines and production processes, which includes interviews and observation of the working personnel and collecting of information on key process parameters, like monitoring of defined critical control points (CCPs) and control measures.

Preferably, the on-site evaluation should be split over the Assessment days. Focus should also be given to different production stages as well as product and shift changeovers. If possible, cleaning activities and release of equipment to production shall be observed. The relevant IFS Standard indicates how much of the total Assessment duration shall be allocated to the on-site evaluation.

**If applicable, the IFS Auditor must evaluate the following critical aspects:**

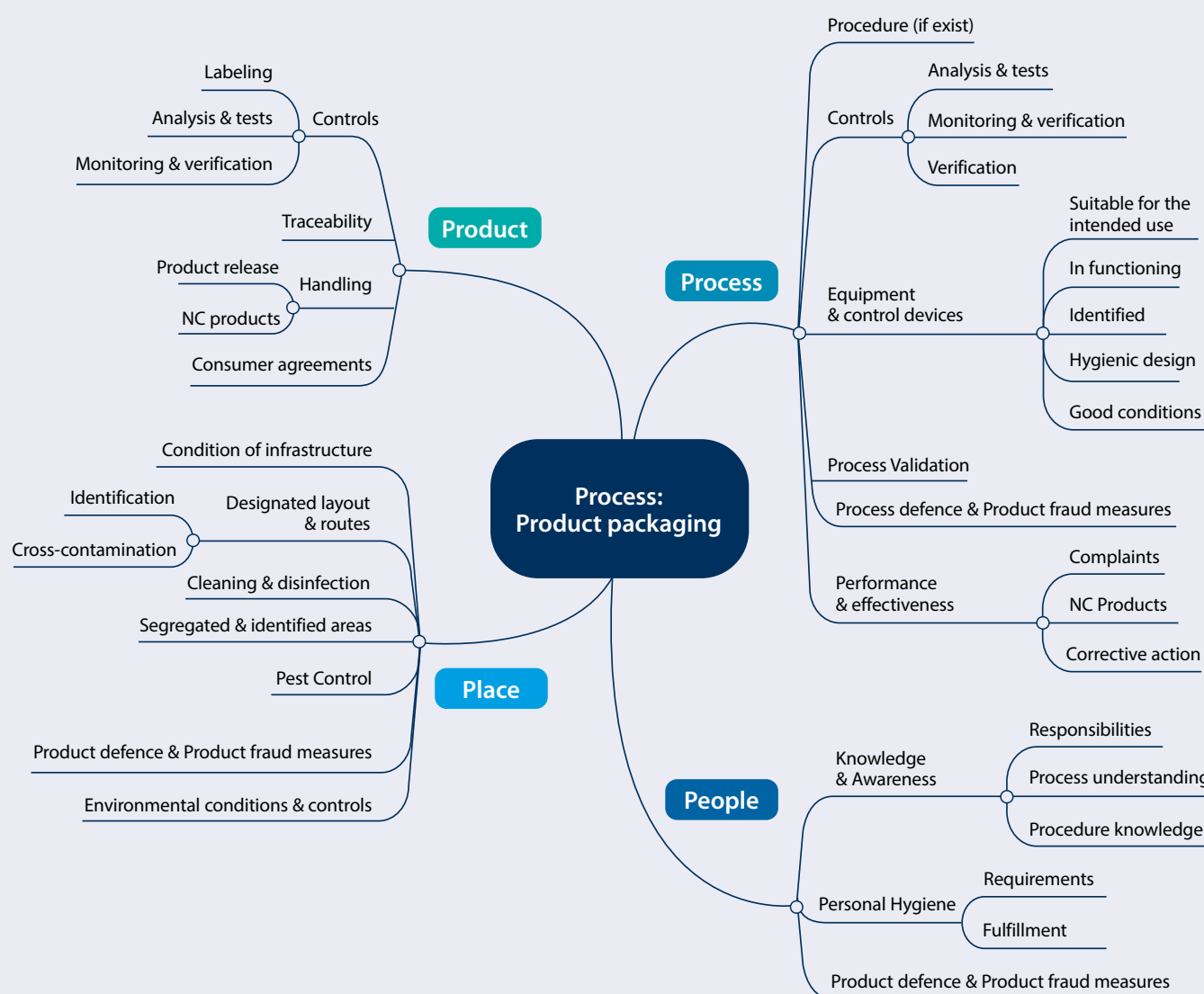
- Product changeovers (production of a product with different characteristics from the previous one)
- Packaging changeovers
- Shift changeovers
- Cleaning and disinfection operations
- Pre-operative inspections
- Post-maintenance inspections
- Special activities during night shifts (if they are not carried out during the day)

### **3.4.1 Operating process evaluation and execution of a comprehensive on-site evaluation of buildings, facilities, equipment and staff behaviour**

Whilst observing and following running production lines, the IFS Auditor shall collect information on key process parameters, such as critical control points (CCPs) and control measures as well as their monitoring in order to cross-check them with the HACCP plan information. She/he shall also observe and interview employees, inspect product and technology characteristics.

While inspecting the product safety and quality and risk management system implemented in practice, the IFS Auditor shall also review recipes used during the manufacturing process, observe raw materials and finished products handling as well as the processes connected to the processing areas. One main objective for the on-site part is also to take further samples for cross-checking. When entering each area of the production site, the IFS Auditor shall take the process and product inspection approach into consideration, which can be grouped into four different sections: process, product, personnel and place.

**Chart No 3: Examples of common topics to look at for the Process of Product packaging**





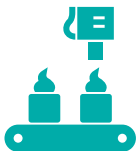
### Product

- Are products handled according to defined conditions?
- Are all products identified?
- Is a contamination risk observed?
- If applicable, do exclusions have no negative influence on the products in scope?
- Are non-conforming products stored/marked according to defined conditions?
- Is the status of products identified?
- Are the on-site controls related to products available and executed according to the defined methodology?
- Are there unsafe conditions in terms of product defence/product fraud?



### Place

- Condition of infrastructure
  - Are ceilings, windows, walls, floor, lights, hygiene devices in a good/acceptable condition?
  - Is the infrastructure in an appropriate condition?
  - Is a physical or cross-contamination risk from infrastructure observed?
- Layout and routes
  - Does it fit with the flows described in the maps?
  - Are products/areas specifically marked due to certain risks (e.g. non-conforming area/allergens area)?
  - Is a cross-contamination risk observed?
  - Is the risk of cross-contamination minimised through effective measures (e.g. hygienic design, layout, others)?
  - Are products stored according to defined parameters?
  - Pest control: are the devices identified in good condition, and according to legal considerations? Are pests and their traces absent?
- GMP
  - Are hygiene tools and chemicals marked and stored under defined conditions?
  - Is waste managed in defined conditions?
  - Is the area clean and organized?
  - Are there unsafe conditions in terms of product defence/product fraud?
  - Are storage areas and/or lorries used in good condition, checked and used according to defined conditions?



### Process

- Is the equipment related to products and personnel in proper condition?
- Is a chemical, physical or cross-contamination risk from equipment observed?
- Are the on-site controls related to processes (other control measures/CCP) available and executed according to the defined methodology? Are storage conditions, duration and availability of records appropriate?
- Are the control/monitoring devices in operation and identified?
- Are there unsafe conditions in terms of product defence/product fraud?



#### Personnel

- Are the personnel aware of their tasks?
- Are the personnel aware of product risks (safety, quality, etc.)?
- Are the personnel executing their activities according to defined procedures/instructions?
- Do the personnel follow the hygiene code (personal hygiene, routes, clothes, etc.)?

### 3.4.2 Interview, (re)confirmation and observation

Evaluation of IFS requirements includes different techniques that need to be applied alternatively in order to gain the necessary evidence.

Investigation through **interviews** is a fundamental method to:

- Gather information about the application of procedures in regards to products/processes
- Evaluate the staff awareness and the effectiveness of training/instruction measures
- Gather information about the commitment of senior management including aspects of product safety culture.

#### REMINDER

When asking questions, make sure to:

- Address the question to the right person in charge of the specific process/control to be evaluated
- Include internal and supervisors of external staff from all involved departments (production, warehouses, drivers, laboratories, maintenance, cleaning, etc.)
- Include staff with different levels of responsibility and adapt the questions in relation to the expected expertise
- Detect any cultural/language barrier and make an effort to overcome obstacles and misunderstandings
- Balance open/closed (for (re)confirmation) questions and, when necessary, repeating and challenging questions
- Summarise the outcome and highlight if any finding is detected
- Ask open questions and listen carefully



Some examples of questions are:

- Could you please explain your work, the relative checks and records?
- Could you please demonstrate your work?
- Please explain how you perform the relative checks and where/how do you record them?
- Please explain to me, how you know what you have to do?
- What are you doing in case process parameters extend (critical) limits?
- What are you doing in case of detection of non-conformity?
- Now imagine you are coming back after a medical leave of two (2) months, where do you find information?

The IFS Auditor will also act as a silent observer. She/he will take the time to step back and just watch and observe the company's processes and the employee's activities. The IFS Auditor needs to be clear about what she/he wants to observe. A reconfirmation of the observations with the floor staff might be a consequence of the observation activities.

For example, the IFS Auditor summarises: "You explained/I observed the following xxxxxxxx; is it correct?" In case the confirmed summarised explanation or observation does not comply with the procedure/technical specification, the IFS Auditor will state this and conduct further investigations to find out the real situation.

### 3.5 Documentation and record review and inspection (cross-checking of documents and records)



The objective of this evaluation stage is to:

- Cross-check relevant documentation to evaluate whether procedures and records are consistent with the processes observed during the on-site evaluation.
- Cross-check relevant documentation to confirm whether they comply with customer requirements, such as recipes, origin of raw materials, defined analyses, declarations, etc.
- Cross-check other samples taken during the on-site evaluation.
- Evaluate further requirements regarding pest control, product fraud, internal audits, etc.
- Verify whether the findings obtained during the on-site evaluation are due to circumstantial situations or if there is a severe issue caused by a lack of definition or management.
- Collect and verify all data requested by the company profile of the IFS report.
- Collect and verify all data requested by the compulsory fields of the IFS report.
- Check corrective actions from the previous Assessment to ensure effective implementation and continuous improvement.

The **procedure implementation** should be checked during the entire Assessment, however, at the end of the on-site evaluation, the IFS Auditor has the possibility to verify the information gathered during the on-site evaluation stage with the company's written procedures, to determine whether the processes are known by the relevant personnel and are applied consistently.

In particular, the conformity and/or contradictions with the HACCP/Risk assessment and quality systems must be identified. During the Assessment, the IFS Auditor checks further important documents for plausibility and implementation. These documents may include complaints, agreements/contracts, audit/inspection reports from other organisations, internal audit reports, etc.

One of the crucial points during the cross-check of documents and records is the evaluation of the traceability test including the results of the mass balance.

After a set time (either by the customer, the company, by the Standard or legal requirements - whatever is the shortest time), the company must be ready for the evaluation of the documents and records, which prove the conformity to IFS and if available, legal requirements, as well as to customer requirements.

Additionally, the IFS Auditor needs to physically check raw materials, related processes and storage during the on-site evaluation.

If the sampled products do not comply with the customer specifications and/or with applicable legal requirements, the finding leads to a non-conformity.



#### Relevant considerations

- In some situations, there is a need to return to a specific working place a second time. Be prepared and flexible to return to an already visited production area in case of a breakdown, equipment failure, or in case of an issue to re-evaluate the situation after some time. In addition, product or shift changeover, which is difficult to foresee in advance in the Assessment time schedule, shall be taken into consideration.
- Given information need to be backed up by evidence. Re-check documents with the situation on-site and with records. Re-check actual records and historical records, verify by asking the same or similar questions several times to different persons. Only by following these steps the IFS Auditor will get the complete picture.
- Do not leave discussing of findings for the closing meeting. The closing meeting should not be a surprise for the company. It is very important to discuss all findings immediately.

It may be, that what seems to be a deviation or non-conformity, is just another way to solve a situation, perhaps some further information is missing, or perhaps what appears to be a C deviation is in reality a D deviation or non-conformity, as discussion provides the opportunity to investigate and find out further additional information. Always discuss perceived findings, as they are otherwise likely to be challenged and not accepted during the closing meeting. In this case, the IFS Auditor might not have enough evidence to justify the findings.

### 3.6 Closing meeting

The objective of the closing meeting is to present all Assessment findings and conclusions. Furthermore, the additional steps of the certification process need to be explained. Before proceeding to the closing meeting, the IFS Auditor should take some time to recap the Assessment, compile the findings, screen and sort evidence and to build the right Assessment conclusions.

**The closing meeting shall include, as a minimum, the following points:**

- Acknowledgments
- Overall summary of the Assessment, summarising the strong and the weak points (start with the positive feedback).
- Confirm the Assessment scope, highlighting any changes from the previous one, and including any exclusions, if applicable. This is done by confirming the mandatory IFS exclusion questionnaire after verification of the information during the Assessment.
- Explain that the Assessment outcome is a provisional result, as the Certification Body will be responsible for performing a technical review and for making the decision about whether to award the IFS Certificate or not.
- Present a draft of the Assessment findings with their objective evidence.
- Clarify if any representatives of the company have questions or requests for clarification.
- Any diverging opinions shall be discussed and, if not resolved, must be recorded.
- Explain the appeal process of the Certification Body and the IFS, especially in case the company disagrees with some findings and scorings.



**Besides all of the above points, the IFS Auditor must be aware of the followings IFS specific requests:**

- Reconfirm the Assessment scope
- Reconfirm confidentiality
- Explain that the Assessment was undertaken on a sampling basis and all ratings are based on that.
- Explain the further steps of the certification process, paying particular attention to:
  - Timing for sending the proposed corrections/corrective actions (two (2) to maximum four (4) weeks after having received the provisional report of the Assessment and the action plan template).
  - Corrections shall be implemented before issuing the IFS Certificate.
- Explain that the Assessment report, the action plan and the certificate will be uploaded to the IFS Database and that the two first listed documents will be visible to all their business partners which they gave access to.
- Explain that being an IFS certified company implies acknowledging and accepting the IFS "Integrity Program".

#### **Relevant considerations:**

During the closing meeting, at least one member of the senior management should (for IFS Food v7 – "The most senior manager on the date of the Assessment shall be present") attend. If the senior manager is not available, a nominated deputy shall attend.



Expect that the management may challenge the findings and ensure to be well prepared for the final meeting, even though there is limited time for it. Explain the findings and grading clearly during the closing meeting to ensure they are accepted by the assessed company. The better the description of the findings is, the easier they will be understood and accepted. This will also facilitate proper actions of the company after the Assessment. Remember that no advice or consultancy is to be given.

Remind the senior management that the Certification Body must be informed about any changes that may affect the ability of the company to conform to the certification requirements. This includes beside other product recalls, visit(s) from health authorities that resulted in notifications and/or penalties issued by authorities or potential legal proceedings against the company.

**The mandatory document with the starting and ending times of each assessment day shall be signed by all attending Certification Body members and one representative of the company.**





# 4

## PART 4: After the IFS Assessment

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### 4.1 Action plan

The first step after the IFS Assessment is the writing of a provisional Assessment report with the action plan template, in which all deviations as well as non-conformities determined during the Assessment, including a short explanation, are provided by the IFS Auditor. The action plan format defined in the Annex of the according IFS Standard shall be followed.

Depending on the process of the Certification Body, the provisional report and action plan shall be provided to the company no later than two (2) weeks after the last day of the Assessment. The action plan will be used as the basis for defining relevant corrections and corrective actions by the company and shall be completed and sent back to the IFS Auditor/Certification Body within two (2) to maximum four (4) weeks.

After receiving the completed action plan by the company, the IFS Auditor shall validate that all deviations and non-conformities have been addressed using relevant corrections and corrective actions within an appropriate timeframe. Starting with the publication of IFS Food v7, evidence for the implemented corrections shall also be included. The following definitions of corrections and corrective actions and the respective differences between both shall be taken into account:

- **Correction:** Action to eliminate a detected deviation and/or non-conformity. It shall be implemented and closed before a certificate is issued.
- **Corrective action:** Action to eliminate the cause of a detected deviation and/or non-conformity. It shall be implemented and closed latest before the recertification Assessment.

In each case, it is the responsibility of the IFS Auditor or a representative of the Certification Body to judge if the evidence for a correction and the proposed corrective action including the time frame can be accepted.

#### Typical examples of evidence for corrections include:

- Training records
- Updated procedures with traceable modifications:
- For a revised document, it may also be necessary to obtain evidence of training or communication related to the updated document for the company staff, in case other staff/another department has to work with it.
- For a revised form, it may be necessary to receive a completed form (e.g. for important tasks). However, this depends on the importance/frequency of use of the form.
- Before and after pictures
- Evidence (e.g. e-mail) of communication of documents to the relevant personnel
- Internal assessment/audit or inspection report
- Invoices of repairs.  
**Note:** offers of repairs shall not be accepted, as it is only proof of the intention of correction, not evidence of correction. This is only accepted in combination with evidence of robust temporary solutions (or e.g. evidence of increased monitoring and cleaning). Repair is part of the corrective action.

Evidence shall be sent to the IFS Auditor/Certification Body by the assessed company, to be able to validate the relevance of the corrections. In accordance with the given timeline defined within the respective IFS Product Standard, the assessed company shall send the evidence either to the IFS Auditor or, if required, to the Certification Body. The Certification Body shall ensure, that the evidence and described corrective actions are reviewed preferably by the IFS Auditor who performed the IFS Assessment or by competent staff of the Certification Body. The documentation of this activity shall provide sufficient proof that the relevance of the correction has been validated.

All corrections need to be included in the action plan, even if an issue is solved during the Assessment. After validating (including validation date) the action plan and if no further amendments are necessary from the company's side, the IFS Auditor can proceed with the preparation of the final Assessment report.

## **4.2 Assessment report**

### **4.2.1 General points and criteria of a good Assessment report**

The overarching aim of the IFS Assessment report is to provide information that helps ensuring transparency in the Assessment process, results, as well as the related scoring. The report needs to include all findings and needs to reflect the situation at the site. In order to inform the reader in the most effective way, the report should be written in a clear and concise manner, with clear connections between scoring and findings, avoiding general statements (e.g. "not complete", "not demonstrable") wherever possible.

It is guaranteed by using the auditXpressX software, that all compulsory fields are filled out, which is essential to end up with a complete and informative Assessment report.

The Assessment report can be considered as written professionally when it enables a third person to acquire a clear and specific view of the situation in the company. The information about conformity and safety of the company as well as the deficiencies need to be easily understood by a person who has not visited the site. Products and the related processes need to be comprehensively described in line with Standard requirements. The clearer the findings are written, the fewer number of exchanges are required with the technical reviewer!

## 4.2.2 Structure and contents of the Assessment report

The Assessment report is structured in a standardised manner as explained in the relevant Standard's Part 4 using the auditXpressX software. Below an example of IFS Food Version 7.

### 1) The Assessment overview, consisting of:

- Cover page
- Assessment details
- Assessment scope
- Additional information, like details about outsourced products/processes, multi-locations, etc.
- Final Assessment result
- Observations regarding non-conformities
- Comments concerning follow-up of corrections and corrective actions
- Company profile

### 2) The "main content" section, consisting of:

- General summary: in a tabular format for all chapters, listing the number of assessed requirements per scoring for each chapter and the result (in percentage) per chapter.
- Overall summary: table of compulsory fields for specific IFS requirements. For those specific requirements, the IFS Auditor shall provide minimum explanations, additional justifications and/or further background information, even in case of an A scoring. Even if the assessed site fulfils all IFS Food requirements, this will lead to a more significant and descriptive report and increases the value for the user/reader. The overall summary table, which includes compulsory information, shall be translated into English. Additional information to provide the reader a clear understanding on the assessed site or the IFS Assessment is given here, too.
- List of all identified deviations and non-conformities per chapter.
- Summary of points of attention (requirements scored with a B, newly defined as "points of attention" in IFS Food Version 7);
- Requirements evaluated as N/A (not applicable) including explanations, if requested by the relevant IFS Standard.
- Detailed Assessment report (checklist).
- Annex of the Assessment report, including:
  - List of Assessment participants': list of key personnel present during the Assessment.
  - Reminder of IFS rules: tables on product and technology scopes, explanations of processing steps, IFS Scoring system and conditions for issuing of certificate.

A template of the IFS Assessment report can be found in the Annexes section of the relevant IFS Standard (e.g. IFS Food Version 7, ANNEX 9). The language of the report shall be the working language of the assessed company, although there may be exceptional cases and/or customer requests, where the report might need to be translated into another language. Those cases need to be defined between the company and the responsible Certification Body.

The company profile, the overall summary of compulsory information tables, all deviations and non-conformities found and the Assessment scope need to be translated into English if the overall report is written in a different language, as stated in the relevant IFS Standard.

### 4.2.3 Guidance on IFS Scoring to specific requirements

#### Allocating a specific deviation or non-conformity to the right requirement

The objective Assessment findings shall be precisely described and verifiable. When allocating a specific finding to the right requirement and defining the scoring, the IFS Auditor should ask her/himself, as a minimum, the following questions:

- What is the risk triggered by the identified issue?
- Does the identified issue have an impact on product safety, legality or quality of a product or process?
- To what extent does the identified issue influence the degree of fulfilment of the requirement?



#### Avoidance of double punishment:

When one observed issue has an impact that is connected with several requirements, read carefully what each IFS requirement is asking to understand its specific content.

The justification of a deviation or non-conformity scoring shall be assessed to the specific objective of the requirement and cannot be the same for all linked requirements.

When a Major or KO is scored to one requirement, the connected requirements to the same situation will still be scored in accordance with their impact. The Major or KO will be addressed at the requirement, which reflects the situation best.

A Major can be given to the fitting requirement where there is evidence of an impact on food safety and/or legal issues, customer issues or substantial failure.

#### Example for substantial failure on internal audits:

- Not being scheduled according to a risk assessment
- Important areas as production not being audited annually
- Auditors not being independent (e.g. quality manager is the only internal auditor and therefore audits her/his own work).

#### A finding should be presented in such a way that it:

- Refers to a specific IFS requirement,
- Relates to objective facts,
- Ensures verifiable Assessment findings,
- Represents facts for others in an understandable manner (usually there is no photo),
- Provides a basis for the evaluation according to the IFS system which shall match with the score issued for the requirement,
- Acts as the basis for a relevant correction/corrective action

Where necessary, the impact of the findings should be indicated. Furthermore, in case of different product groups or processes within the company, it should be clearly indicated to which of these products or processes the findings relate to.

For example: If a C scoring was identified, the finding shall not raise any question why a C instead of a D was issued; that's why the full negative form and other terms, like "is not", "does not", "absence", "failure", etc. should preferably not be used for the description of C finding, to avoid misunderstanding. The finding shall reflect the fact that a part of the requirement, not all, has not been implemented.



Same applies for a D scoring: the way the finding is described should not give the impression to the reader that this could have been a Major non-conformity. If necessary and relevant, provide information on the level of risk to justify this is a D but not a Major non-conformity.

### 4.3 Technical review

Once the IFS Auditor has completely finalised the preparation of the IFS Assessment report and the validation of the action plan, a technical review of the report shall be carried out. This shall be done by a person nominated from the Certification Body, who is either another IFS Auditor of the Certification Body who is qualified for the specific IFS Standard, or a person who is qualified as a pure reviewer for this Standard and who did not attend the Assessment. Questions arising during the technical review shall be clarified between the reviewer and the IFS Auditor.



**The technical review shall include, as a minimum, the following tasks:**

- To check the overall consistency of the IFS Assessment report.
- To check if the IFS Assessment report is properly completed (e.g. compulsory fields, etc.).
- To check if the findings are well described and if the justifications are relevant.
- To check if the description of findings are matching the grading.
- To check if the correction and corrective actions, as well as the deadlines for implementation proposed by the assessed company, have been validated by the IFS Auditor (or by a representative of the Certification Body) and are relevant.

### 4.4 Certification decision

After completion of the final technical review, the certification decision shall be made. The certification decision is based on a recommendation by a competent person (an IFS Auditor or pure reviewer) or a committee that includes at least one IFS Auditor or pure reviewer.

The final certification decision shall always be made by the Certification Body. The IFS Auditor who performed the Assessment shall not take part in the final certification decision.

### 4.5 Upload of the IFS Assessment report to the IFS Database & Issue of the IFS Certificate

After the final certification decision, the Certification body issues the IFS Certificate, preconditioned the IFS Assessment is passed. The report of the IFS Assessment is in any case uploaded to the IFS Database, accompanied by other documents e.g. released corrective action plan and IFS Certificate in case of passed IFS Assessments. The certified company will receive access to the IFS Database at the time when the report of their first IFS Assessment has been uploaded.

### 4.6 Storage of the Assessment report, notes and evidences

The Assessment report as well as all notes shall be stored for a period of five (5) years at the Certification Body. The evidence that are relevant to the Assessment outcome, the corrections and corrective actions, shall be stored safely and securely in accordance with the Certifications Body's procedure and for a period of three (3) years.





ANNEXES



# ANNEXES

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## ANNEX 1

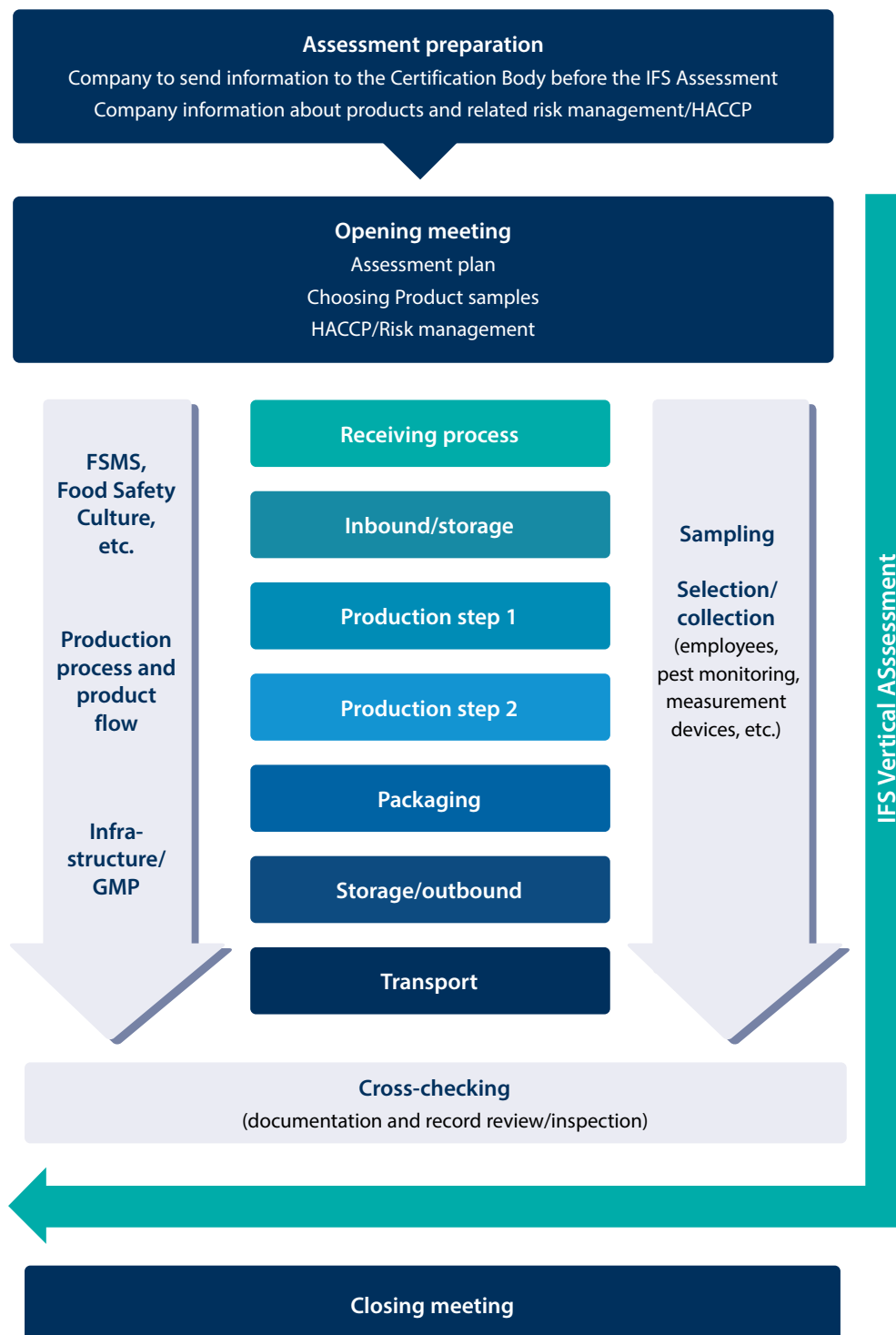
### Main differences between ISO/IEC 17065:2012 and ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015

	ISO/IEC 17065	ISO/IEC 17021
<b>Certification cycle</b>	Full scope every year	Full scope once every 3 years Surveillance with limited scope
<b>Assessment techniques</b>	Auditing, inspecting, sampling	Auditing management system
<b>What is assessed?</b>	Product/process characteristics compliance	Management system allowing improvement
<b>What is the main question/objective to reach?</b>	Do the conducted processes lead to the desired outcome: overall and continuous safety, legality and quality compliance?	Does the company's management system work and is there continuous improvement?
<b>Auditors competencies</b>	Product/process knowledge is a must	Product/process knowledge is not the main area of focus: competences on management system is a must
<b>What is certified? What is mentioned on the certificate?</b>	Process leading to compliant products	Management system

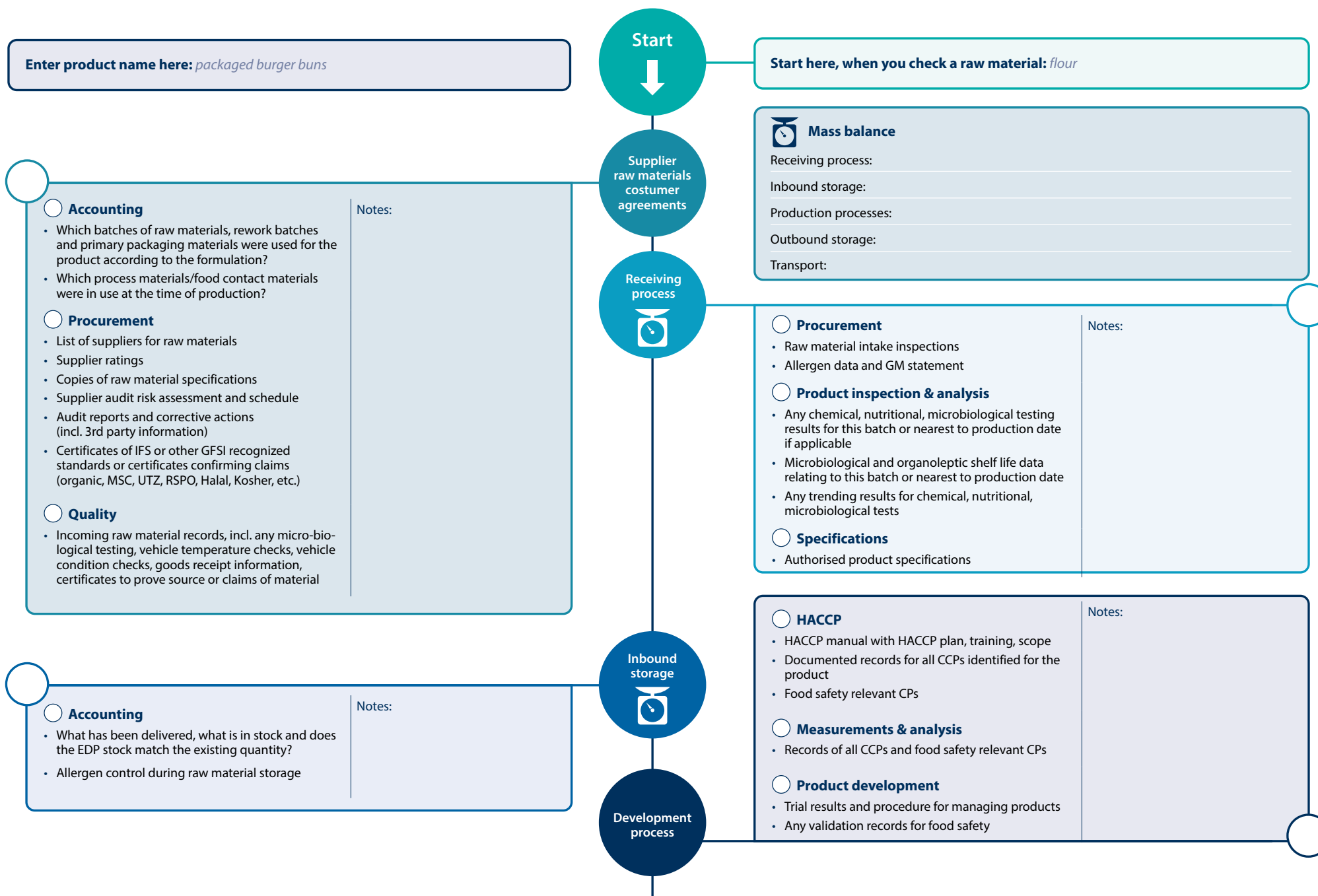


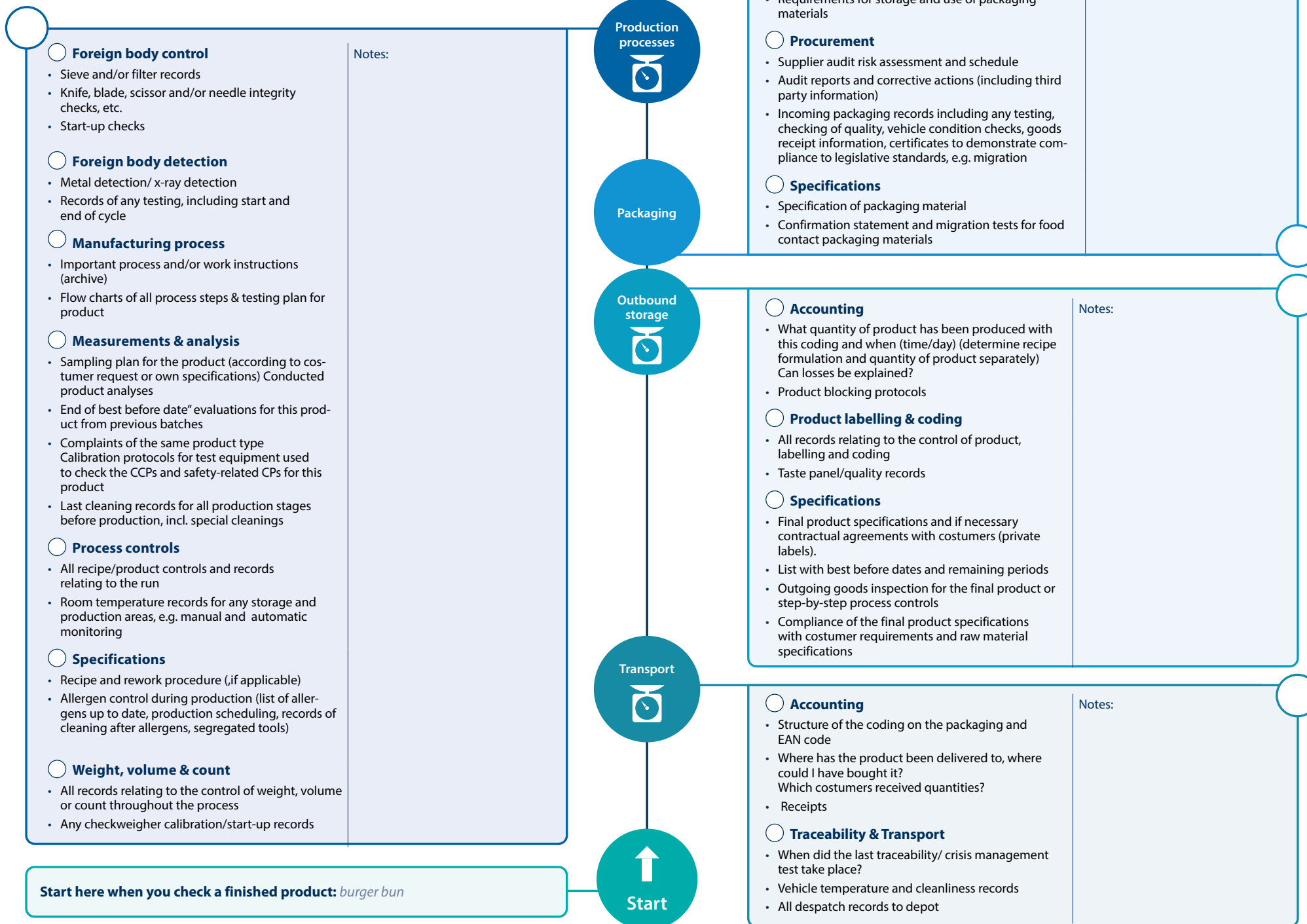
## ANNEX 2

### The IFS Vertical Assessment including the traceability exercise based on sampled product(s) (example)



## ANNEX 3: The traceability exercise based on sampled product(s)





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