A4 STAGE-GATE REVIEW SERIES · FOOD SAFETY

CERTIFICATION READINESS CHECKLIST

A pre-audit self-assessment covering what food-safety certification audits consistently examine — management commitment, the HACCP plan, prerequisite programmes, traceability and recall, supplier control, and verification. Written to the common ground across FSSAI Schedule 4, Codex HACCP, ISO 22000 and the GFSI-benchmarked schemes (BRCGS, SQF, FSSC 22000).

VERSION 1.0 · JUL 2026 48 CHECKS · 6 SECTIONS GATES: PRE-AUDIT · ANNUAL REVIEW

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

1. Tick only what you could **put in front of an auditor today** — a record, a signed procedure, a completed form. An intention, a draft, or "we do that but don't write it down" is not a tick.
2. Section 4 (traceability and recall) is a **hold point**: an untested recall procedure is the single most common major non-conformity, and it is the one you cannot fix during the audit.
3. This is the **common ground** across the major schemes, not a substitute for your scheme's own standard. Read it alongside the current issue of the standard you are certifying to.
4. Run it at least 8–12 weeks before the audit date — several gaps below need **records over time**, which cannot be created retrospectively.

01 MANAGEMENT COMMITMENT & FOOD SAFETY CULTURE

Auditors read the culture off the records long before they ask about it — who signed, how fast issues closed, whether anyone acted on the last audit.

- [ ] A documented food safety policy exists, is signed and dated by senior management, and is communicated to all staff in a language they read.
- [ ] A food safety team is appointed with a named leader, defined responsibilities, and evidence of the competence behind the appointment.
- [ ] Management review is held at a defined frequency, with minutes showing inputs (audits, complaints, non-conformities, trends) and decisions with owners and dates.
- [ ] Resources committed to food safety — people, equipment, laboratory, training budget — are identified and demonstrably provided, not merely stated.
- [ ] A food safety culture plan exists with defined activities and a way of measuring whether behaviour actually changed.
- [ ] A confidential reporting route lets any employee raise a food safety concern, and there is evidence that reports were received and acted on.
- [ ] The organisation chart, deputies and cover arrangements are current — including who holds food safety authority when the leader is absent.
- [ ] Licences and registrations (FSSAI licence, local approvals, export registrations where applicable) are valid, displayed and cover the actual product scope.

02 HACCP / FOOD SAFETY PLAN

The plan is judged on its reasoning, not its formatting — why this hazard, why this limit, why this is a CCP and that one is not.

- ☐ Process flow diagrams exist for every product family, cover every step from receipt to despatch, and have been **verified on the floor** and signed off.
- ☐ Hazard analysis covers biological, chemical, physical and allergen hazards at every step, with the reasoning and a stated likelihood/severity basis (Codex CAC/RCP 1-1969).
- ☐ Radiological hazards and food fraud/adulteration vulnerabilities have been considered explicitly, with a documented conclusion either way.
- ☐ CCPs are determined by a documented method, and the decision to *reject* a candidate step as a CCP is recorded with its justification.
- ☐ Every critical limit is supported by validation evidence — scientific literature, a validation study, a process authority letter or regulation — not by custom.
- ☐ Monitoring for each CCP states what, how, how often and by whom, and the records show it was actually done at that frequency.
- ☐ Corrective actions define both the treatment of affected product and the correction of the cause; deviation records show both were applied.
- ☐ The plan is reviewed at a defined frequency and on every change of product, process, equipment, supplier or regulation, with the review recorded.

03 PREREQUISITE PROGRAMMES

Most audit findings land here — not in the HACCP plan, but in the housekeeping the plan quietly assumes is already working.

- ☐ Cleaning and sanitation schedules cover every area and item of equipment, define chemical, concentration, contact time and method, and are verified — not just recorded as done.
- ☐ Personal hygiene rules, protective clothing, hand-wash and change-room flow are defined by zone and enforced, with visitor and contractor rules included.
- ☐ Pest control is under a documented programme with a site map, defined inspection frequency, trend analysis and evidence that recommendations were closed out.
- ☐ Allergen management covers segregation, dedicated or validated-cleaned equipment, production sequencing, labelling control and validated cleaning between allergen changeovers.
- ☐ Foreign-body control covers glass and brittle plastic registers, metal detection or X-ray with defined test-piece checks, and the action on a failed check.
- ☐ Water, ice and steam contacting product meet the applicable potable standard (IS 10500 or local equivalent), on a defined sampling plan with results on file.
- ☐ Maintenance is planned, food-safe (approved lubricants, correct materials, post-work hygiene clearance) and its records show temporary repairs were closed properly.
- ☐ Waste, drainage and chemical storage are controlled and segregated so they cannot cross product zones or contaminate materials.

04 TRACEABILITY, WITHDRAWAL & RECALL

HOLD-POINT SECTION

The one section you cannot repair during the audit — it needs a test that already happened, with a record and a time on it.

- [ ] Traceability runs one step back and one step forward for every input — raw material, packaging, processing aid and rework — down to the batch or lot.
- [ ] A traceability test has been performed within the defined period, is recorded with the **time taken**, and reconciles quantities to an agreed tolerance.
- [ ] Rework is traceable to its origin batch and its use is controlled and recorded — the most common point at which a trace breaks.
- [ ] A documented withdrawal and recall procedure names the crisis team, their deputies, and reachable out-of-hours contacts including the regulator and key customers.
- [ ] A mock recall has been run within the defined period, with the result, the time achieved, the gaps found and the corrective actions recorded.
- [ ] Non-conforming product is identified, physically segregated, and released or disposed of only under a defined authority, with the decision recorded.
- [ ] Customer complaints are logged, categorised, trended and investigated to root cause, with evidence that trends drove action.
- [ ] Labelling and date coding are verified at start-up and at changeover, covering allergen declarations and the legally required particulars.

05 SUPPLIER & RAW MATERIAL CONTROL

Your food safety plan ends at your gate; your liability does not.

- [ ] A documented supplier approval procedure exists, based on risk, and every current supplier has actually been approved through it.
- [ ] Supplier performance is monitored against defined criteria and reviewed on a schedule, with evidence of action on poor performers.
- [ ] Agreed specifications exist for every raw material, packaging item and finished product, are current, and are agreed by both parties.
- [ ] Goods-in checks are defined per material (documentation, temperature, condition, seal integrity, analysis) and the records show rejections were handled.
- [ ] Food-contact packaging carries suitability declarations, and migration or compliance evidence is held where required.
- [ ] Outsourced processing and third-party storage or transport are covered by the same approval regime, with the controls specified in the contract.
- [ ] A food fraud vulnerability assessment covers the materials most at risk, with mitigation for those scored high.
- [ ] A food defence assessment covers site access, storage security and vulnerable process points, with the resulting controls implemented.

06 VERIFICATION, RECORDS & IMPROVEMENT

A system that never found a problem is not a compliant system — it is an unused one, and auditors know the difference.

- [ ] An internal audit programme covers the whole system across the year, is run by trained auditors independent of the area, and the schedule was actually followed.
- [ ] Internal audits have raised real findings, and each has root cause analysis, a corrective action, an owner, a due date and verified closure.
- [ ] Environmental and product monitoring programmes are risk-based, with sampling points, frequency, trend review and defined action limits.
- [ ] Laboratory testing is done in an accredited laboratory or one demonstrably competent for the method, with proficiency evidence held.
- [ ] Measuring and monitoring equipment on CCPs is calibrated to a traceable standard on a schedule, with the action defined for out-of-calibration findings.
- [ ] Training is role-specific, delivered and assessed for effectiveness, with records covering permanent, temporary and contract staff.
- [ ] Documents are version-controlled with only current versions in use at the point of work, and records are retained for the defined period and legible.
- [ ] A change management procedure ensures new products, equipment, suppliers or layouts are assessed for food safety impact *before* implementation.

ENGINEER'S NOTE

A large share of the findings we see are designed in, not managed in: a layout where high-care and low-care share a corridor, drains running the wrong way, no space for a proper change room, a metal detector sited where rejected product can be recovered by hand. Procedures cannot compensate for those — they can only document the risk. If you are still on paper, fix them there; it is the cheapest hour you will spend on certification.