



IFIA Food Committee Principles Paper

Quality and Safety Services for the Food Industry

Introduction:

The certification industry operates as an open market, offering a wide choice of expert services to users. IFIA, which represents a number of major international providers of the services, is aware of cases where the food industry, in contrast to other industry sectors, has organised its use of certification in ways that do not, we believe, allow optimum use to be made of this industry.

The following paper, which was developed by IFIA's Food Committee, describes the principles on which the open certification market generally operates and aims to provide guidance to food industry participants on how the certification industry's services can be used to obtain the most reliable and economical testing, inspection and certification of food products.

IFIA and its Food Committee members welcome discussion with food industry representatives on the practical implementation of these principles on a case by case basis.



How to make effective use of the testing, inspection and certification market

The testing, inspection and certification of food products at different stages of their development, from their agricultural origins to consumption, serves to assure the integrity of the production chain.

To ensure that this assurance is provided in a manner that is reliable and economical, parties in the production chain make use of the services of independent professional testing, inspection and certification bodies to perform these services.

Principles

For economic and credibility reasons it is desirable that there are not too many certification schemes. This is best achieved through the different market participants agreeing to recognise the results of independent third party schemes. Different schemes may be necessary for different market interfaces, but where possible there should be no duplication of schemes addressing the same interface. The ultimate objective should be 'once certified, accepted everywhere'.

To serve the global market, schemes should be designed so that a wide spectrum of service providers will be qualified to give choice to the market and provide for the likelihood that those parties in the production chain seeking the required testing, inspection or certification will be able to use the same chosen provider as they use for other related business. Where possible, a single source of accreditation or similar approval of testing, inspection and certification bodies should assure their competence to deliver the services required to operate under all valid schemes in support of the aspect of food quality and safety in question.

Where retailers, for example, instigate second party schemes to assure the integrity of their own supply chains, such schemes should where possible make use of the resources in the same pool of accredited independent bodies that provide third party services. Second party scheme owners should accept assurances of competence that are common to other schemes to which the producer is subject, and where they introduce specific requirements, they should have them assured through mechanisms that are common to other schemes, not introducing a requirement for new auditor qualifications just because there is a new audit process. (Additional scheme specific requirements such as training should be restricted to what is essential to the scheme in question.)

Practical Considerations

1. Certification scheme owners should build on standardised accreditation requirements as the basis for their schemes wherever possible. They should aim not to require variants to these requirements, but may add to the requirements where greater specificity is needed.
2. For the assurance of such specific requirements, scheme owners may either manage their schemes themselves or outsource the management of the scheme to a neutral party. Such party

should have the independence to manage fair competition between participating testing, inspection or certification bodies.

3. Special requirements for auditors etc. should be confined to those specific to the scheme requirements. Any training and/or evaluation should be provided by a neutral party (including the scheme owner, but not a competing supplier of such auditors etc), at reasonable cost and accessibility.

4. It stands to reason therefore that

- The design of schemes should not interfere with market processes that allow choice to be made from a pool of qualified suppliers
- The design of schemes should seek to avoid creating requirements that conflict with other requirements for either market participants or the testing, inspection and certification bodies
- No scheme should require exclusive participation from its participants
- No scheme should require its participants to buy services from a competitor organisation
- The business confidentiality of scheme participants should be respected, e.g. client lists, auditor pools.....

June 2010