



GFSI BENCHMARKING REQUIREMENTS
VERSION 2024

PART I **THE GFSI BENCHMARKING PROCESS HANDBOOK**

Part I - The GFSI Benchmarking Process Handbook

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Introduction

The Global Food Safety Initiative aims to improve food safety and business efficiency. The Global Food Safety Initiative Coalition has three key objectives:

1. Benchmarking and Harmonisation:
2. Capability Building:
3. Public-Private Collaboration:

GFSI's work in benchmarking and harmonisation fosters mutual acceptance of GFSI-recognised Certification Programmes across the industry and enables a simplified "once certified, recognised everywhere" approach. This reduces inefficiencies from duplication of audits and helps reduce trade barriers.

Part I of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements specifies the GFSI Benchmarking Process, the method for the recognition of food safety Certification Programmes. The objective of this document is to give a clear insight into this process. Further details may be provided on request and during the application process.

A 'Glossary' of terms used within the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements is provided in Part IV. This document is an integral part of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements; therefore, definitions shall be applied accordingly within the Certification Programmes

The steps and procedures detailed in this document ensure that the GFSI Benchmarking Process is:

- Carried out in an impartial and transparent manner by a technically competent Benchmarking Leader under the supervision of the GFSI Senior Technical Manager,
- Transparent and open to stakeholder scrutiny,
- Reviewed, maintained and updated to ensure consistency and integrity.

All engagement with GFSI is underpinned by three key elements and all stakeholders shall adhere to these at all times:

- CGF Antitrust statutes.
- GFSI Governance Model and Rules of Procedure.
- GFSI Code of Ethical Conduct.

Any demonstrable breach to the above would allow GFSI to discontinue all communication with the stakeholder and further action in line with GFSI Governance rules will be followed.

For further information and support: gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com.

This Implementation Handbook provides detailed guidance and clarity on the Benchmarking Process outlining key steps, best practices, and examples where necessary to support with the implementation process for Certification Programmes Owners.

The Key Procedural Steps

The GFSI Benchmarking Process shall be carried out in accordance with the following key procedural steps

STEP		REQUIREMENT	TYPICAL TIMELINE AND SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS	IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE
A	Application	This step verifies that the applicant Certification Programme Owner meets the GFSI eligibility criteria and ensures that a workplan is agreed.	Typical timeline: The GFSI Benchmarking Process must be completed in a maximum of 12 months from the date GFSI accepts an application. However, the GFSI Steering Committee has the authority to extend this timeline.	Certification Programme Owner is responsible for the workplan and should ensure that they have resources in place to ensure the timeline of 12 months is met. However the GFSI Steering Committee has the authority to extend this timeline where examples may include feedback from public consultation leading to a delay in Programme recognition, failure to address the closure of non-conformities, and resource constraints at GFSI.
	Initial Benchmarking:	The Certification Programme has not previously undergone GFSI benchmarking.		Applicants shall meet all eligibility criteria and successfully complete all steps A to G
	Re-submission:	A previous benchmarking application was initiated but withdrawn before completion, requiring a completely new submission or a previous application resulted in non-recognition.		Applicants shall meet all eligibility criteria and successfully complete all steps A to G

New version of Benchmark requirements is published:

The Certification Programme has successfully completed benchmarking against an earlier version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements and now seeks recognition of its currently recognised Programmes to meet the new version of the Benchmarking requirements.

To obtain recognition after a new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements is published, Certification Programme Owners must apply for re-assessment for all scopes within nine months of the new version's release date. The GFSI Steering Committee may extend this deadline in special circumstances such as delays attributable to GFSI and on a case-by-case basis.

Applicants shall meet all eligibility criteria and successfully complete all steps A to G.

Application Restrictions Ahead of GFSI Benchmark Requirements Update:

In the year prior to the publication of a new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, no new application will be accepted. A notification will be sent out to existing CPO's and notice will be displayed on the GFSI website to indicate the starting date of this one-year period.

Additionally, GFSI will not accept any applications for scope extension from existing Certification Programme Owners in the last six months before the publication of a new version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. This does not apply to sub-versions of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

No new applications one year prior to publication of new benchmarking.

No scope extensions in the last six months prior to publication of new benchmarking.

Rebenchmarking:

- The Certification Programme requires adding a new scope of GFSI recognition (scope extension) to an already recognised Programme.
- The Certification Programme has already been recognised against the current version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements but wish to apply for recognition for an updated Programme version or subversion,
- For Certification Programmes undergoing changes that may impact existing GFSI recognition, such as modifications to governance, ownership, management systems, or normative documents.
- Where the GFSI recognition for a Certification Programme's has been suspended and the Programme Owner seeks to re-establish its recognition status.

Applicants shall meet all eligibility criteria and successfully complete all steps A to G.

Once the application is received and reviewed, the GFSI team will determine the steps of the benchmarking process that are required and where changes are deemed minimal may agree some steps eg office visit may not be required and can continue within the continued monitoring activities.

Extension of recognition of previously recognised certificates

A Programme is “undergoing recognition” when it is in the process of being evaluated by GFSI to determine if it meets the Benchmarking Requirements (BMRs). During this period, certificates issued under these Programmes are not GFSI-recognised.

GFSI only recognises certificates issued under fully benchmarked and recognized Programmes. Certificates from Programmes undergoing recognition do not yet meet the criteria for GFSI recognition, as the evaluation process is incomplete.

Sites that rely on GFSI-recognised certificates for their supply chain assurance may face gaps in recognition if they are certified under Programmes undergoing recognition. This can impact supply chain alignment or create the need for additional certification steps if customers demand it.

GFSI now allows certified sites to request an extension of the recognition of the previously recognised certificate. This extension covers the period between the lapse of a previously recognised certificate and the issuance of a certificate for the newly recognised programme. These extensions are voluntary.

A1 Completion of Application Form	The Certification Programme Owner downloads the application form from mygfsi.com, completes it and sends it and required supporting documents providing evidence that the Certification Programme Owner satisfies the GFSI Eligibility Criteria to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com. The Certification Programme Owner must define the GFSI scope of assessment they are applying for: • GFSI Part II (mandatory). • At least one GFSI scope of recognition (Part III).	Supporting Documents: GFSI Application Form available from mygfsi.com	The Applicant Certification Programme Owners are required to satisfy the eligibility criteria. Specify applicable scopes (AI to K).
Application Form 1	Name of Certification Programme in scope for this application, i.e. the name used in audit reports or certificates.		The same name that is used on the certificates issued against the Programme shall be used.
Application Form 2	GFSI scope(s) of application.		All scopes required within the recognition shall be selected (AI to K). Definitions of each scope is available in part I of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.
Application Form 3	Registered address of the Certification Programme Owner.		The legal address of the Certification Programme Owner shall be provided.
Application Form 4	Business address (Head quarter) of the Certification Programme Owner.		Business address of the Certification Programme Owner shall be provided and is likely to be used for the office visit.
Application Form 5	Additional local offices.		Addresses of all additional office locations shall be provided so that GFSI have a clear picture of the structure of the Certification Programme Owner.

Application Form 6	Name and position of the authorizing officer.	The authorizing officer is the person that is formally responsible for the agreement made and that signs the benchmarking application.
Application Form 7	Name and position of Certification Programme application liaison / key contact person.	This person will be the primary point of contact for GFSI during the assessment of the Certification Programme.
Application Form 8	Address / location of application liaison / key contact person.	
Application Form 9	Phone number of application liaison / key contact person.	
Application Form 10	E-mail address of application liaison / key contact person	
Application Form 11	Please provide a short summary of the Certification Programme's history and objectives.	Include details such as start date of operation, markets the Programme is operated, rationale for development, mission, objectives.
Application Form 12	Total number of valid accredited certificates against the Certification Programme.	Shall be Certification Programme applied for, numbers can be given for previous version but this should be clearly stated.
Application Form 13	List of countries where those accredited certificates have been issued.	Countries related to those certificated sites shall be listed.
Application Form 14	Date of application.	Date when the application was sent to CGF GFSI

eligibility criteria 1	The Certification Programme Owner is a legal entity.	Evidence provided of legal company registration documents in home country matching CPO name. This may include papers / legal constitution documentation. If the legal entity owning the Certification Programme is different from the entity managing the Programme, please provide clear evidence of the relationship between them.
eligibility criteria 2	There is commitment from a minimum of three organisations representing the retail / food service or producing / manufacturing sectors to use the Certification Programme.	Evidence provided from at least 3 organisations of use or specifying of the Programme eg brand owner statement of specification of Programme, evidence of organisations certificated to Programme. At least three letters of support specific to the Certification Programme in scope for this application shall be sent. These letters shall be signed by an appropriate person within their organisation, dated and written on a paper / e-mail with logo demonstrating its origin. The signatory will state the job title.
eligibility criteria 3	The Accreditation Bodies granting accreditation to the scope of the Certification Programme shall be members of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and shall be signatories to the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA).	Evidence of at least one Accreditation Body accrediting the programme whom shall be an IAF MLA signatory. Provide a letter from the Accreditation Body(ies), a reference to the website of the respective Accreditation Body(ies) or of the IAF website.
eligibility criteria 4	The Certification Programme Owner has contractual relationships preferentially with two Certification Bodies that have accreditation for the scope of their Certification Programme.	Evidence of contracts with at least two accredited Certification Bodies to the Programme.
eligibility criteria 5	The Certification Programme Owner is not undergoing any significant changes or situations that may impact the GFSI recognition status.	Changes shall not impact any of the eligibility criteria such as change of ownership.

eligibility criteria 6	The Certification Programme Owner does not have any practices deemed as restricting access to markets.		
eligibility criteria 7	The Certification Programme Owner has undertaken a self-assessment to validate that it is in alignment with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. The self-assessment shall be made available to the Benchmark leader when requested.		A self assessment shall have been undertaken to ensure that the CPO is in a position to meet GFSI requirements and therefore be successful in their application. The GFSI self assessment documents may be used as this is the start of the application process.
A2 Invoice to Certification Programme Owner	GFSI sends an invoice for the application fee; process progresses when the invoice is paid.	Typical Timeline 1 week	The application fee is non-refundable.
A3 Application Review	The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will review the application to ensure all necessary evidence is available or may request further information as required. The GFSI Technical Manager reserves the right to reject or refer an application back to the Certification Programme Owner if information provided is deemed unsatisfactory. Where the application is referred back to the Certificate Programme Owner, they shall resubmit an updated application with the requested amendments to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager.	Typical Timeline 2 weeks	Where the initial application is rejected, the Certification Programme Owner will be provided with a list of issues identified and recommended steps for remediation. Once the necessary actions are completed and the implemented corrective measures are verified by the GFSI Technical Manager, a new application may be submitted. However, the Certification Programme Owner are permitted to submit multiple applications for other scopes that are not included within the unsuccessful application.

Application Acceptance	The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will inform the Certification Programme Owner within 2 weeks of receiving the application if it is accepted, amends are required to process the application further or rejected. If the application is rejected, reasons for this decision will clearly be detailed.	Typical Timeline 2 weeks	If the information is complete and complies with the eligibility criteria defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part I, the application is accepted If the information is incomplete or does not satisfy the eligibility criteria defined in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part I, the application is rejected, feedback is sent to the Certification Programme Owner, back to step 1. NB: The Certification Programme Owner may address concerns regarding the eligibility criteria and re-apply. Application fee would be invoiced for this new application.
A4 Contract	If the application is accepted, a contract shall be signed between the Certification Programme Owner and GFSI.	The start date of the 12 month application process starts from the date of signature of the contract.	GFSI provides an agreement that all Certification Programme Owners applying for recognition must sign. This shall be resigned in all benchmarking applications including rebenchmarking.
Appointment of Benchmark Leader	Once the contract is signed by both parties, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager will appoint a Benchmark Leader for the Certification Programme assessment:	Typical Timeline 2 weeks Supporting Document GFSI Benchmarking contract	The GFSI Technical Manager shall inform the Certification Programme Owner of this appointment in writing. Upon request from the Certification Programme Owner, additional impartiality or confidentiality agreements may be signed between GFSI and the Benchmark Leader. Note all correspondence sent to the Benchmark Leader shall be copied to GFSI team mailbox: GFSIBM@theconsumergoodsforum.com

A5 Agreement of Work Plan

The Certification Programme Owner will agree the work plan of activities and key dates with the Benchmark Leader and the GFSI Senior Technical Manager based on the number of scopes and the volume of documentation submitted.

Typical Timeline 1 week
Supporting Document:
GFSI workplan

The Certification Programme Owner is accountable for their workplan. The workplan should allow the completion of the assessment and recognition process within 12 months from the date the application was accepted and contract signed.

The workplan must be agreed with the Programme Owner and the appointed Benchmark Leader through discussion generally on a conference call and will be based on the number of scopes included in the application, the amount of time needed to perform the benchmarking assessment and estimate of the cost involved.

B**DESKTOP REVIEW**

The objective of the self-assessment is to allow the Certification Programme Owner to demonstrate that the Certification Programme includes all the key elements listed in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, including Part II as well as the applicable scopes of GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part III.

B1 Self Assessment Forms

GFSI sends Self-Assessment form(s) for Part II and the scope(s) included in the application form.

Typical Timeline 1 week

GFSI will provide self-assessment forms for Part II and each of the GFSI scopes of recognition (from AI to K) included in the Certification Programme Owner's application form.

The information included within the self-assessment is the content of the Benchmarking Requirements (Part II and respective scope(s) of Part III).

**B2 Self
Assessment
Submission**

The Certification Programme Owner completes the Self-Assessment form(s) and submits them to the Benchmark Leader and GFSI with supporting evidence.

Typical Timeline 3 months

Supporting Document: GFSI
Self assessment forms

The objective of the self-assessment is to allow the Certification Programme Owner to demonstrate that the Certification Programme includes all the key elements listed in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, including Part II as well as the applicable scopes of GFSI Benchmarking Requirements Part III.

The Certification Programme Owner evaluates their Certification Programme against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

Clear and precise justification against each requirement, must be included:

- Whether and how the GFSI requirement is covered in the Certification Programme;
- The name of the Certification Programme's document covering the requirement with reference to the exact page and clause;
- The relevant documents as objective evidence. Files have to be numbered and a list of submitted documents provided together with the completed Self-Assessment forms.

All documents may be submitted by email or a secured document sharing platform agreed with GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.

The completed self-assessment forms will be emailed to the Benchmark Leader and copied to GFSIBM@theconsumergoodsforum.com for review.

B3 Self Assessment Review

The Benchmark Leader reviews the completed self-assessment and supporting documents:

The outcomes maybe as follows:

- Information is complete and allows a comprehensive review by the Benchmark Leader – the Benchmark Leader sends the self-assessment with their assessment and comments, move to step B4;
- Information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the Benchmark Leader sends feedback to the Certification Programme Owner, back to step B2.

Typical Timeline 4 weeks

Supporting Document: GFSI self assessment forms

The Benchmark Leader performs a preliminary desk review of the evidence provided by the Certification Programme Owner for each GFSI key element, to ensure it satisfies the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader will take note of any key elements where additional information is needed and / or where they do not agree with the self-assessment from the Certification Programme Owner. These notes will include comprehensive explanations. All these findings will be sent to the Certification Programme Owner in writing for consideration.

Findings will also be sent to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager for review.

The Benchmark Leader assesses the alignment of the submitted information from the Certification Programme Owner with each key element of the Benchmarking Requirements and rates them as follows:

- Aligned: the provided information addresses the key element
- Partly aligned: the provided information addresses some aspects of the key element. The Benchmark Leader highlights the unaddressed element(s) in their comment
- Not aligned: the provided information does not address the key elements. The Benchmark Leader clarifies the expected information in their comment.

**B4 Review
Conference Call**

The findings of the self-assessment review are discussed and clarified through a conference call with the Benchmark Leader, GFSI and Certification Programme Owner.

Typical Timeline 2 hours

GFSI will facilitate the scheduling and IT tools necessary for the execution of the call.

This will give the Certification Programme Owner an opportunity to further clarify and complete their evidence. It will also provide greater insight into what additional information and amendment to the self- assessment forms the Benchmark Leader requires. During the conference call, a timeframe is agreed to complete any corrections of the self- assessment forms and the workplan is reviewed accordingly.

The following points will be discussed:

- Review of Benchmark Leader's assessment and clarification of any findings;
- Agreement on a timeframe for the completion of the self-assessment;
- Review of the workplan in light of the results of the self-assessment.

The Certification Programme Owner ensures that relevant and competent representatives are present during the call.

**B5 Final Self
Assessment
Submission
by CPO**

Within the agreed timeframe the Certification Programme Owner will send the final version of the Self-Assessment forms to the Benchmark Leader.

Typical Timeline 2 weeks

In order to limit a possible back-and-forth exchange of information, the Certification Programme Owner will be required to provide the requested information and / or adjustments in the final self-assessment.

B6 Final Self Assessment Review by BML

The Benchmark Leader reviews the additional information provided:

- Information is complete and addressing the findings would not require a significant re-write of the programme – the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed list of findings to the Certification Programme Owner and GFSI, move to “office visit”;
- Addressing the findings would require a significant re-write of the programme - the Benchmark Leader sends the final validation of the self-assessments and a completed report including the list of findings to the Certification Programme Owner and GFSI, move to G;
- Information is incomplete or unclear – back to step B4.

Typical Timeline 3 weeks

The Benchmark Leader may recommend at this point that the process moves to gate G:

If the self-assessment review highlights that the programme requires significant changes to align to the Benchmarking Requirements

If the deadline of the process does not allow for an office visit and a public consultation.

In such situations, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager reviews the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader and agrees the next steps with the Certification Programme Owner.

C

Office Visit

This step focuses on an assessment of the application and implementation of a Certification Programme’s normative documents and governance rules against Part II and Part III of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

C1 Office Visit

The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner plan a visit to the nominated offices of the Certification Programme Owner.

The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the implementation of the governance reviewed during the previous gates.

Duration typically 1.5 – 3 days

The date is mutually agreed between GFSI, the Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner based on availability of personnel.

The Certification Programme Owner must ensure that all resources needed to support the office visit process are available during the visit, including expert staff members, documentation, and records.

Office Visit Duration	The office visit will be at the Certification Programme Owner's main office.	Typical Duration 1.5 - 3 days Supporting Document: GFSI office visit checklist, GFSI list of findings	The Benchmark Leader leads the office visit and determines its length. The duration of the office visit depends on the complexity of the certification programme, the number of scopes to cover, any needs for interpretation, etc
Office Visit Agenda	The Benchmark Leader will confirm an agenda and required documentation for review at least two weeks before the office visit.	Typical Timeline 2 weeks before the visit Supporting Document: GFSI office visit agenda	GFSI staff such as the GFSI Senior Technical Manager or other Benchmark Leaders may join the office visit as an observer and adviser to the Benchmark Leader for calibration purposes. The Benchmark Leader will lead the visit.
Remote Office assessment	CGF has agreed to officially introduce the use of ICT in the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements office assessments as an alternative when physical visits are not possible. This is seen as an exceptional occurrence and will be agreed with GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner.		The need for continuous assessment effectiveness and efficiency introduced by unforeseen scenarios has led to increased use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support and maintain the integrity and continuity of the audit/assessment process. In this framework, the Objectives: • Offer an alternative to physical assessments • Maintain the effectiveness of the Benchmarking Process • Maintain efficiency, safety, and level of confidence

**C2 Office Visit
Opening Meeting**

Office Visit Opening Meeting.

Benchmark Leader shall:

- Introduce – themselves, observers, guests and roles
- CPO shall introduce persons present and confirm job roles – attendance sheet shall be completed
- Confirm confidentiality
- Thank everyone for efforts involved in providing self-assessment / desktop review files
- Provide any positive feedback
- Confirm purpose of Visit is to assess alignment with benchmarking requirements and records will be sampled.
- Confirm forms part of the process of initial benchmarking and ongoing continued alignment activities
- Confirm the scope by quoting the detail of their benchmarking application form
- Confirm the audit plan particularly break times and closing meeting end time
- Confirm who needs to be involved in the office visit and their availability
- Confirm need access to internet, database and any other relevant points
- Clarify that any findings will be discussed during the visit and summarised and confirmed in writing at the closing meeting at the end of the visit
- CPO will have 15 working days to respond with a corrective action plan and the evidence of close out
- A full report will be written up and provided to CPO following review by GFSI
- Invite any questions at this stage

**C3 Office
Visit review of
Documentation**

Office visit will consist of challenge of the Certification Programme Owners policy's and controls over operation of their Programme by the Certification Bodies.

Supporting Document:
GFSI office visit checklist,
GFSI list of findings

The checklist shall be referenced throughout by the Benchmark Leader.

Typically will include:

- Selection of audit records taking into account the following risk factors - certification bodies, scopes, countries (where relevant) ensuring representative scopes and Certification Programmes are covered by the sampling.
- Discussion with Managers regarding implementation of their policies
- Review the CPO integrity reports for certification bodies.
- Review the CPO and certification body agreement.
- Review justifications of auditor scopes.
- Review certification body audit duration.
- Review KPI monitoring for certification bodies.

Potential findings shall be highlighted and discussed throughout the assessment

**C4 Office Visit
Closing Meeting**

Benchmark Leader will lead the office visit closing meeting to discuss the outcome of the visit and present the findings so that the Certification Programme Owner is clear on the issues that need to be actioned and resolved.

At the closing meeting the Benchmark Leader will:

- Confirm those present – check attendance sheet completed with roles
- Thank everyone for their time
- Outline positive findings
- Confirm that findings are confidential; they are based on a sample.
- Invite CPO to feedback thoughts on assessment to GFSI STM
- Confirm this is the conclusion of the office assessment
- Confirm the findings on conformities against the benchmarking requirements in writing
- Ask the CPO to confirm their understanding before moving onto the next finding
- Confirm a full report will be written up and submitted to GFSI for review
- Ask if the CPO has any questions / concerns
- Thank everybody again for their time

C5 Office Visit Findings

Office Visit Findings Sheet will be left with the Certification Programme on the day of the visit and shall be signed by both the Certification Programme Owner and the Benchmark Leader.

Findings will be clearly explained and documented by the Benchmark Leader and shall be classified as:

- Partly aligned: the provided information addresses some aspects of the key element. The Benchmark Leader highlights the unaddressed element(s) in their comment
- Not aligned: the provided information does not address the key elements. The Benchmark Leader clarifies the expected information in their comment

CPO and Benchmark Leader must digitally sign a copy of the findings sheet and return to the Benchmark Leader.

Agree timeline of 15 working days for CPO to send their corrective action plan and corrective action evidence to Benchmark Leader and GFSI team mailbox.

This will be subsequently reviewed and signed off by GFSI.

Where corrective action is not received within the timeline or evidence of effective close out is not received, the CPO will be permitted upto a total of 20 working days to submit evidence.

However the CPO shall be warned that where evidence of effective actions allowing the Benchmark Leader to close out the issue is not received within a maximum of 20 working days the open findings will be escalated to GFSI to review.

C6 Office Visit Report

The Benchmark Leader will be responsible for generating a full report from the office visit.

Within 15 days of the office visit

The Benchmark Leader shall submit the office visit report to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager 15 days after the last day of the office assessment.

D**Corrective Actions and Root Cause**

This step focuses on ensuring that an effective corrective and preventative action plan is put in place to provide confidence that a Certification Programme meets and can continue to meet GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

D1 Corrective Actions and Root Cause

Within the agreed timeline, the Certification Programme Owner sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan including a root cause analysis to address any findings raised during the office assessment.

Typical Timeline 4 weeks
Supporting Document:
GFSI list of findings

The Certification Programme Owner shall respond to the Benchmark Leader's report with a corrective action plan within 15 working days of the office visit.

This will be expected to include:

- A root cause analysis outlining why the finding has occurred. This is important to be carried out to ensure an effective corrective action is implemented.
- Outline summary of the corrective action undertaken.
- Evidence of the corrective action completed.

For example if the Certification Body has not completed something that is within the CPO policy, the evidence may consist of copy of the email reminder and action instruction from the CPO to (all) CBs as well as evidence that the specified CB from the finding has actioned that request. Where it is not possible for a CB to action the request within the timeframe, GFSI may accept a proposed action plan by the CB with a reasonable future timescale. Implementation will be subsequently checked by GFSI.

It is important that evidence of a robust action plan with evidence of implementation is received by the agreed deadline otherwise this may impact the recognition process.

Where corrective action is not received within the timeline or demonstrates effective evidence of close out, the CPO will be permitted upto a total of 20 working days to submit evidence.

However the CPO shall be warned that where evidence of effective actions allowing the Benchmark Leader to close out the issue is not received within a maximum of 20 working days from the office audit, the open findings will be escalated to GFSI to review.

D2 Corrective Actions and Root Cause Review by BML

The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan, outcomes:

- The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader accepts the corrective action plan, move to step D3;
- Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected, back to step D1.

Typical Timeline 10 working days

Supporting Document: GFSI list of findings

The Benchmark Leader will validate the corrective action plan and submit this to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager. If the Certification Programme Owner fails to implement it within the agreed timeline, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager and the GFSI Director may initiate the sanctioning process.

D3 Benchmark Assessment Report

The Benchmark Leader completes the benchmarking assessment report and confirms with the Certification Programme Owner that the content of the report is accurate.

Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report

The Benchmark Leader sends the assessment report including the list of findings to the Certification Programme Owner.

The Certification Programme Owner confirms that the content of the report is accurate.

The assessment report includes:

- The certification programme information (name(s), contact details),
- The assessment details (scope of recognition, benchmark leader etc),
- An executive summary (summary of findings from self-assessment, office visit, any particular complexities).
- Any findings from the self-assessment review and the office visit.
- Details of the corrective actions and root cause analysis completed by the CPO

D4 Benchmark Assessment Report Validation

GFSI reviews the report and validates its content.

Typical Timeline 1 week
Supporting Document:
GFSI list of findings

The Benchmark Leader sends the final report agreed with the Certification Programme Owner to GFSI.

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will review the assessment report and include their assessment of the Corrective Action plan to this report.

GFSI validates the finally agreed report.

E

Public Stakeholder Consultation

This step ensures that the GFSI Benchmarking Process is transparent and submitted to the scrutiny of GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner's stakeholders.

E1 Preparation of Public Stakeholder Consultation Documents

GFSI prepares the documentation for public consultation, this includes

An announcement statement;

The assessment report with the corrective action plan;

The completed and reviewed self-assessments.

Typical Timeline 1 week
Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report,
self assessment forms

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will make the self-assessment forms and the Benchmark Leader's assessment report available on the GFSI website for a stakeholder consultation of four weeks.

E2 Approval of Public Stakeholder Consultation Documents by CPO

The Certification Programme Owner is asked to approve the documents for public stakeholder consultation.

Typical Timeline 1 week

Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report,
self assessment forms

The Certification Programme Owner will be given the opportunity to approve the content of the published documents before it is made available in the public domain. The report will only be put to consultation once agreed by all parties.

The Certification Programme Owner is asked to approve the documents for public stakeholder consultation.

The Certification Programme Owner reviews the proposed documentation for the public consultation:

- The Certification Programme Owner approves the documentation: move to step E3;
- The Certification Programme Owner has concerns over the content of the report, they submit their suggested changes to GFSI, back to step E1.

E3 Start of 4 week Public Stakeholder Consultation

GFSI makes the approved documentation available for stakeholder consultation on mygfsi.com for four weeks.

Typical Timeline 4 weeks

Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report,
self assessment forms

The assessment report and the completed self-assessment forms are made available from mygfsi. com.

Comments are sent to gfsibm@theconsumergoodsforum.com.

E4 Close of Public Stakeholder Consultation

GFSI closes the public consultation and sends the list of received comments to the Certification Programme Owner and the Benchmark Leader.

Typical Timeline 1 week

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will collect any comments, observations or objections made by stakeholders and will share them with the Certification Programme Owner, who shall address them.

The Benchmarking Leader and the GFSI Senior Technical Manager will evaluate every response from the Certification Programme Owner.

F

Completion of Corrective Actions

This step ensures verification that the planned corrective actions to address any non-conformities are fully implemented in the Certification Programme so that a Recognition Decision may be made.

F1 Evidence of Corrective Action sent by CPO

The Certification Programme Owner completes all required corrective actions and:

Answers to any comments from the public consultation requiring an action or comment;

Provides evidence of implementation for all corrective actions for the findings of the assessment;

The Certification Programme Owner sends the final report with corrective action details and supportive documents to the Benchmark Leader.

Typical Timeline depending on corrective actions

Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager shall ensure that those stakeholders who submitted comments during the stakeholder consultation receive feedback.

The Certification Programme Owner shall complete all required corrective actions and provide evidence of implementation to the Benchmark Leader.

The Certification Programme Owner shall provide answers to any comments from the public consultation requiring an action or comment.

F2 Review of Corrective Actions by BML

The Benchmark Leader reviews the answers from the Certification Programme Owner to the comments and findings of the assessments:

- The Benchmark Leader accepts the comments and completion of the corrective actions from the Certification Programme Owner – move to gate G;
- The Benchmark Leader rejects the comments and evidence of completion of corrective actions from the Certification Programme Owner – back to step F1.

Typical Timeline 2 weeks

Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report

The Benchmark Leader will validate the answers from the Certification Programme Owner to the comments and findings of the assessments, and the implementation of the corrective actions.

All findings must be addressed with the corrective action plan completed before the process can progress to gate G.

F3 GFSI Review of Corrective Actions	The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report with the completed corrective actions to GFSI: → GFSI accepts the completed corrective actions: move to G → GFSI rejects the completed actions and/or asks for more information: back to step F1	Typical Timeline 1 week Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report	Once the corrective actions are fully implemented, the Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report including the completed corrective action plan and a recommendation for recognition to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager for validation.
F4 Final Assessment Report Agreed with CPO	The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to the CPO for agreement.	Typical Timeline	
F5 Final Assessment Report sent to GFSI	The Benchmark Leader sends the final assessment report, including the executive summary with their recommendation for recognition, to GFSI.	Typical Timeline 3 months after the public consultation Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report	
F6 GFSI validation of report of assessment report	GFSI reviews the final assessment report: → GFSI accepts the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: move to step G; → GFSI challenges the recommendation from the Benchmark Leader: feedback is sent to the Benchmark Leader for consideration, back to step F4.	Typical Timeline 1 week Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report	

G

**GFSI STEERING
COMMITTEE
FINAL DECISION
AND COMMU-
NICATION**

This step concludes the assessment of the Certification Programme and ensures communication of the result of this assessment to GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner's stakeholders.

**G1 GFSI submits
recommendation
to Steering
Committee**

GFSI submits the recommendation to the GFSI Steering Committee who votes for or against this recommendation. The Certification Programme Owner recognition status is based on the board majority vote.

Typical Timeline 2 weeks
Supporting Document:
GFSI assessment report

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will inform the GFSI Steering Committee of the results of the Benchmark Leader's assessment and the recommendation for recognition in the form of a final summary report previously agreed upon with the Certification Programme Owner.

**G2 GFSI Steering
Committee
Decision either
Recognised or
Non-Recognised**

The GFSI Steering Committee will come to a decision based on consensus following the recommendation presented by the GFSI Senior Technical Manager.

The outcome will be confirmed as:

- Recognition or
- Non-Recognition

The GFSI Steering Committee will come to a decision based on consensus following the recommendation presented by the GFSI Senior Technical Manager. If a vote is necessary, the votes of 75% of a quorum of the GFSI Steering Committee is required to determine the final decision. Vote may be organised during a face to face meeting of the GFSI Steering Committee where the quorum is present, or by email. In the latter case, GFSI must gather enough written answers back from GFSI Steering Committee members to respect the GFSI Governance rules.

Records shall be kept of the numbers of votes for, against and abstaining.

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager shall communicate the GFSI Steering Committee decisions in writing to the Certification Programme Owner, as soon as is practicable after the GFSI Steering Committee decision.

G2 a Steering Committee result of Non-Recognition	GFSI informs the Certification Programme Owner of the final decision of Non-Recognition and confirms next steps.	Typical Timeline within 1 week of the Committee Decision The Certification Programme Owner shall submit an appeal to the GFSI Director within 30 working days.	In the event that the final decision of the GFSI Steering Committee is non-recognition, the reasons for the decision shall be clearly documented and the GFSI Senior Technical Manager shall make the Certification Programme Owner aware of the decision together with the reasons. The Certification Programme Owner shall have the right to appeal against the GFSI Steering Committee's decision; the appeal shall be undertaken in accordance with the procedures specified in Section "Sanctioning".
G2 b Steering Committee result of Recognition	GFSI informs the Certification Programme Owner of the final decision and confirms next step: → The Certification Programme Owner agrees to communicate publicly the result of their assessment – move to step G3. → The Certification Programme Owner does not want the result of their assessment publicly communicated – move to step G4 In either case, GFSI posts a signed statement of alignment to the Certification Programme Owner.	Typical Timeline within 1 week of the Committee Decision Supporting Document: GFSI statement of alignment	In the event of recognition by the GFSI Steering Committee, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager and the Certification Programme Owner shall agree on a GFSI news release confirming this decision. The Certification Programme Owner will be expected to issue a similar news release. The timing of these announcements shall be agreed on by the GFSI Senior Technical Manager and the Certification Programme Owner.
G3 Publication of news release confirming recognition	GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner agree on a common news release text and publish this jointly on their respective media. Move to step G4.	Typical Timeline 2 weeks	GFSI and the Certification Programme Owner both publish a news release. The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will issue a statement of conformity to the Certification Programme Owner.

**G4 GFSI
Publication of
Recognition
Decision**

GFSI updates mygfsi.com and ensures the Certification Programme Owner updates their own website when applicable.

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will ensure that the GFSI website is updated with the new recognition status and scope(s) of the Certification Programme Owner.

H
**Annual
Monitoring
of Continued
Alignment**

This step ensures that the Certification Programme Owner is monitored regularly and continues to comply with the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Global Food Safety Initiative has the responsibility to create a transparent and level playing field for all Certification Programme Owners undergoing benchmarking against the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements. In order to ensure that recognised Certification Programme Owners have implemented all the controls necessary to ensure food safety, GFSI shall carry out an annual monitoring of continued alignment.

**H Completion
of Monitoring
Record**

Once a year, the Certification Programme Owner completes a monitoring record and sends this to GFSI and the Benchmark Leader.

Supporting Document:
GFSI monitoring record

The monitoring record is issued by GFSI and asks for a declaration of:

- Any significant changes in the Certification Programme Owner governance, including changes in procedures, ownership, organisation etc.
- Any requested scope extension
- Any planned or published new programme version

H Agreement between BML and CPO of Monitoring Programme Activities

The Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner schedule the required activities of the monitoring of continued alignment.

The GFSI monitoring of continuous alignment includes the following activities:

- Gap analysis: against a potential new sub- version of the Benchmarking Requirements or minor changes by the Certification Programme Owner
- Record review: desktop audit based on sampling exercise occurs twice a year.
- Office Audit: review of Certification Programme Owner's records based at their main office. This should occur once a year.
- Complaint investigation- incident driven

A programme plan will be agreed collaboratively between the Benchmark Leader and CPO the preceding year, typically at the office visit.

H Desk Top Review 1

The Benchmark Leader carries out the first record sampling review and the gap analysis with the Certification Programme Owner – 'Desk Top Review 1'.

Supporting Document:
GFSI monitoring checklist

This includes:

A gap analysis against a potential new sub-version of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements or minor amendments to the Programme normative documents or implementation guidelines the Certification programme Owner may have made since the last continued monitoring cycle.

Note that modifications to governance, management systems or normative documents shall instigate a rebenchmarking application and therefore only minor amendments should be reviewed at this stage.

A review of records associated with certificated sites selected by the Benchmark Leader.

H DTR1 Sampling

The Benchmark Leader will remotely select a minimum of five audits performed by various Certification Bodies against the Certification Programme.

The sample number will be increased where :

- 5 samples do not allow for a representative sampling of the Certification Programme Owner's scope(s) of recognition and / or number of certificates.
- authenticated complaints or results of previous assessments raise concerns over the continued alignment of the Certification Programme to the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements.

The Benchmark Leader will request a list of objective evidence and files related to these audits to verify alignment of Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements, including but not restricted to:

- Certificate and report and / or auditor notes,
- Contract with the Certification Body,
- Qualifications of the auditor,
- Scope allowance of the auditor.

H DTR1 Sampling of Certificated Sites for record Selection

CPO will provide the Benchmark Leader with an up to date list of GFSI recognised certificated sites.

This will ideally be in excel format including Date of Audit, Certificate Expiry Date, Site Name, Certification Body, Country, Scope, Audit Programme/Type, Auditor name

An assessment shall be made by the Benchmark Leader to pick samples across the scope of GFSI recognition considering variables including:

- Volume of audits by CB, country, auditor
- Risk rating of country
- Previous performance history of CB, auditor
- Audit programme/type and their risk
- Scope and their risk
- Records selected in previous DTRs and their outcome

H DTR1 Typical Documents Required

The Benchmark Leader shall confirm in an email a list of the typical documents required to demonstrate compliance to Benchmark Requirements Part II.

Typical documents required:

- Copies of scheme normative documents
- Copies of CB Accreditation - scope of accreditation for each CB
- Links to CBs websites
- Copies of agreements between CBs and AB
- Copies of agreements between CPO and CB's
- Copies of agreements between CB's and auditors/ certification personnel (including persons carrying out the technical review and certification decision) involved in the audits of the sites above
- Evidence that the CB's have documented all requirements of ISO/IEC 17065 or ISO/IEC 17021-1 with ISO 22003, and IAF MDF 4 - how have CB's trained these out to their staff
- Training evidence of Auditors from the CBs - professional qualifications, category assessment/ training/ competency, CVs, Degree, HACCP, experience in the relevant fields of competence, details of appraisal / witness assessments / ongoing review and training
- Details and evidence to show how CB's monitor and assess auditors behaviour in terms of their personal attributes and behaviour
- Evidence from CB to show they have rules for the appointment of auditors to ensure impartiality, including rotation of auditors and how does the CPO monitor this
- Evidence that the persons involved with Technical review of the report at the CB are competent to do so - evidence of training, assessment, how they're selected, what competency criteria they must have
- Confirmation of how audit duration is calculated and assessed

- Evidence of documented audit frequency
- Copies of finalised reports and certificates for each site, evidence of when CAs were submitted and when reviewed / closed out
- Evidence of Technical reviews of each audit report
- Confirmation if ICT was used during the audit and if so, were IAF MD4 requirements met - how is this checked
- Confirmation of whether the site was part of a multisite and a central function was involved - how sampling selection is made etc

H DTR1 Submission of records by the CPO

The Certification Programme Owner must submit the requested records within two weeks of the Benchmark Leader's request.

Typical Timeline: within 14 calendar days of request

The Certification Programme Owner must submit the requested records within the timeline agreed.

CPO shall be prompted to set up online access point of their choice including Benchmark Leader and GFSI team mailbox.

Records shall be provided in a tidy and logical format and labelled files and folders against the records of the chosen site and the clause requirement to which evidence it is provided for. Where a file relates to more than one clause, it shall be labelled with all clauses to which they relate.

Files should be provided in an openable format.

Evidence with 'embedded' file links are to be avoided as they often cannot be opened by the Benchmark Leader.

H DTR1 Files in English	Files for review shall be provided in a readable format and in English.		Where information is not in English, documents should be provided suitably translated. Online translation services such as google maybe used by the Benchmark Leader in exceptional circumstances. Files should be provided in an openable format. Evidence with 'embedded' file links are to be avoided as they often cannot be opened by the Benchmark Leader.
H Desktop Review 1 by BML	The Benchmark Leader reviews the documents provided against the Benchmarking Requirements Part II either remotely alone or as a conference call with the Certification Programme Owner.	Reviewed within 8 working days of receipt. Typical Duration 2-5 days depending on quality of information provided	The review can be undertaken as a desktop exercise by the Benchmark Leader with a subsequent conference call with the Certification Programme Owner to clarify information, alternatively this can be conducted as a conference call between the Benchmark Leader and Certification Programme Owner to review the evidence online together rather than downloading to a dropbox.
H Outcome of DTR1	The review outcome maybe: → The information is complete and allows a comprehensive review by the Benchmark Leader – the Benchmark Leader sends the self-assessment with their assessment and comments, move to next step; → The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the Benchmark Leader sends feedback to the Certification Programme Owner, and goes back a step.	Typical timeline – 5 working days for CPO to submit further evidence	Missing information may be discussed at a conference call or requested via email. One further opportunity will be provided for information to be submitted within 5 working days by the Certification Programme Owner before the Benchmark Leader collates their findings.

H Report of Findings of DTR1

The Benchmark Leader will report back their findings to the Certification Programme Owner and the GFSI Senior Technical Manager.

Reviewed within 8 working days of receipt of evidence

Supporting Document:
GFSI list of findings

The Benchmark Leader will email the list of findings to the Certification Programme Owner who will be asked to sign the report and return – a digital signature is acceptable.

The GFSI Senior Technical Manager and GFSI team mailbox shall also be copied.

H DTR1 Corrective Actions and Preventative Action together with Root Cause Analysis (CAPA)

Within the agreed timeline, the Certification Programme Owner sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan including a root cause analysis to address any findings raised during the office assessment.

Typical Timeline 4 weeks

Supporting Document:
GFSI list of findings

The Certification Programme Owner shall respond with a corrective action plan for all findings within 15 working days.

This will be expected to include:

A root cause analysis outlining why the finding has occurred. This is important to be carried out to ensure an effective corrective action is implemented.

Outline summary of the corrective action undertaken.

Evidence of the corrective action completed.

For example if the Certification Body has not completed something that is within the CPO policy, the evidence may consist of copy of the email reminder and action instruction from the CPO to (all) CBs as well as evidence that the specified CB from the finding has actioned that request. Where it is not possible for a CB to action the request within the timeframe, GFSI may accept a proposed action plan by the CB with a reasonable future timescale. Implementation will be subsequently checked by GFSI.

It is important that evidence of a robust action plan with evidence of implementation is received by the agreed deadline otherwise this may impact the recognition process.

Where corrective action is not received within the timeline or demonstrates effective evidence of close out, the CPO will be permitted upto a total of 20 working days to submit evidence.

However the CPO shall be warned that where evidence of effective actions allowing the BML to close out the issue is not received within a maximum of 20 working days from the office audit, the open findings will be escalated to GFSI to review.

H Desktop Review 1 Assessment Report	The Benchmark Leader completes the desktop assessment report and sends to the Certification Programme Owner.	Typical Timeline reviewed within 8 working days of receipt of documents Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report	The Benchmark Leader sends the assessment report to the Certification Programme Owner. The assessment report includes: • The certification programme name and version and scope, • The benchmark leader and date details, • Compliance details against each of the requirements, • Any findings from the desktop review
H DTR1 CAPA Review	The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan and evidence provided.	Typical Timeline within 7 calendar days of receipt of evidence Supporting Document: GFSI list of findings	The Benchmark Leader will validate the corrective action plan and evidence received to be able to close out each finding.
H DTR1 CAPA Review Outcome	The corrective action review outcome maybe: → The information and evidence is complete and allows close out of all findings by the Benchmark Leader – the Benchmark Leader sends the complete report to the CPO and GFSI. → The information is incomplete, and / or the evidence provided is insufficient – the Benchmark Leader sends feedback to the Certification Programme Owner.	Typical timeline – 5 working days for CPO to submit further evidence	Missing information may be discussed at a conference call or requested via email. One further opportunity will be provided for information to be submitted by the Certification Programme Owner within 5 days before the Benchmark Leader concludes the report.
H DTR1 Outcome - Corrective Actions Not Closed out	Where corrective actions are not able to be closed out in a robust and timely manner, these maybe referred to the Technical Committee and/or the Steering Committee for instigation of sanctioning procedures.		The Benchmark Leader will validate the corrective action plan and submit this to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager. If the Certification Programme Owner fails to implement it within the agreed timeline, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager and the GFSI Director may initiate the sanctioning process.

H DTR1 Assessment Report Validation by GFSI	GFSI reviews the report and validates its content.	Typical Timeline 1 week Supporting Document: GFSI list of findings	The Benchmark Leader sends the final report to GFSI. The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will review the assessment report and include their assessment of the Corrective Action plan to this report. GFSI validates the finally agreed report.
H Annual Continued Alignment Monitoring Office Visit	The purpose of the visit is to check continued alignment with the implementation of Part II of the GFSI Benchmarking Requirements by the Certification Programme Owner through a sample record review.	Typical Timeline within 12 months of the last office visit Supporting Document: GFSI monitoring checklist	The office visit focuses on record reviews as evidence of the continued alignment and implementation of the programme governance (Part II). All resources needed to support the office visit process must be available during the visit, including expert staff members, documentation, and records. Findings from the desktop review may be discussed at the office visit.
H Office Visit Duration and Agenda	The Benchmark Leader will confirm an agenda at least two weeks before the office visit. Typical duration is 1.5 to 3 days and will be determined by the Benchmark Leader depending on requirements and risk factors.	Typical Duration 1.5 to 3 days Typical Timeline 2 weeks before the visit Supporting Document: GFSI office visit agenda	The office visit will be agreed between GFSI, the Benchmark Leader and the Certification Programme Owner. The office visit duration will be determined by the Benchmark Leader and is typically 1.5 – 3 days. Factors considered to influence duration are: • Number of scopes • Number of findings at desktop review and previous outcome of office visit • Language issues e.g. where translation may be required • Complaints or Recalls received within the cycle of monitoring. GFSI staff such as the GFSI Senior Technical Manager or other Benchmark Leaders may join the office visit as an observer and adviser to the Benchmark Leader for calibration purposes. The Benchmark Leader will lead the visit.

**H Office Visit
Opening Meeting**

Benchmark Leader shall lead the
Office Visit Opening Meeting.

Benchmark Leader will:

- Introduce – themselves, observers, guests and roles
- CPO shall introduce persons present and confirm job roles – attendance sheet to be completed
- Confirm confidentiality
- Thank everyone for efforts involved in providing desktop review files
- Provide any positive feedback
- Outline purpose of visit is to assess continued alignment with benchmarking requirements and records will be sampled.
- Outline activity forms part of the process with the two annual desktop reviews
- Confirm the scope by quoting the detail of their benchmarking from myGFSI website
- Confirm the audit plan particularly break times and closing meeting end time
- Confirm who needs to be involved in the office visit and their availability
- Confirm need access to internet, database and any other relevant points
- Clarify that any findings will be discussed during the visit and summarised and confirmed in writing at the closing meeting at the end of the visit
- Confirm CPO will have 15 working days to respond with a corrective action plan and the evidence of close out
- A full report will be written up and submitted to GFSI for review
- Invite any questions at this stage

H Office Visit Review of Documentation

Office visit will consist of challenge of the Certification Programme Owners policy's and controls over operation of their Programme by the Certification Bodies.

Supporting Document:
GFSI office visit checklist,
GFSI list of findings

The checklist shall be referenced throughout by the Benchmark Leader.

Typically will include:

- Selection of audit records taking into account the following risk factors - certification bodies, scopes, countries (where relevant) ensuring representative scopes and Certification Programmes are covered by the sampling.
- Discussion with Managers regarding implementation of their policies
- Review the CPO integrity reports for certification bodies.
- Review the CPO and certification body agreement.
- Review justifications of auditor scopes.
- Review certification body audit duration.
- Review KPI monitoring for certification bodies.

Potential findings shall be highlighted and discussed throughout the assessment.

**H Office Visit
Closing Meeting**

Benchmark Leader will lead the office visit closing meeting to discuss the outcome of the visit and present the findings so that the Certification Programme Owner is clear on the issues that need to be actioned and resolved.

At the closing meeting the Benchmark Leader will:

- Confirm those present – check attendance sheet completed with roles
- Thank everyone for their time
- Outline positive findings
- Confirm that findings are confidential; they are based on a sample.
- Invitation to CPO to feedback thoughts on assessment to GFSI STM
- This is the conclusion of the office assessment
- Confirm the findings on conformities against the benchmarking requirements in writing
- Ask the CPO to confirm their understanding before moving onto the next finding
- A full report will be written up and submitted to GFSI for review.
- Ask if the CPO has any questions / concerns
- Thank everybody again for their time

H Office Visit Findings

Office Visit Findings Sheet will be left with the Certification Programme Owner on the day of the visit and shall be signed by both the Certification Programme Owner and the Benchmark Leader.

Findings will be clearly explained and documented by the Benchmark Leader and shall be classified as:

- **Partly aligned:** the provided information addresses some aspects of the key element. The Benchmark Leader highlights the unaddressed element(s) in their comment
- **Not aligned:** the provided information does not address the key elements. The Benchmark Leader clarifies the expected information in their comment

CPO and Benchmark Leader must digitally sign a copy of the findings sheet and return to the Benchmark Leader.

Agree timeline of 15 working days for CPO to send their corrective action plan and corrective action evidence to Benchmark Leader and GFSI team mailbox

This will be subsequently reviewed and signed off by GFSI.

H Continued Alignment Monitoring Office Visit Report

The Benchmark Leader will be responsible for generating a full report from the office visit.

Within 5 working days of the office visit

The Benchmark Leader shall submit the office visit report to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager 5 working days after the last day of the office assessment.

H Corrective Actions and Root Cause sent by CPO

Within the agreed timeline, the Certification Programme Owner sends the Benchmark Leader a corrective action plan including a root cause analysis to address any findings raised during the office assessment.

Typical Timeline 2 weeks
Supporting Document:
GFSI list of findings

The Certification Programme Owner shall respond with a corrective action plan for all findings within 15 working days.

This will be expected to include:

- A root cause analysis outlining why the finding has occurred. This is important to be carried out to ensure an effective corrective action is implemented.
- Outline summary of the corrective action undertaken.
- Evidence of the corrective action completed.

For example if the Certification Body has not completed something that is within the CPO policy, the evidence may consist of copy of the email reminder and action instruction from the CPO to (all) CBs as well as evidence that the specified CB from the finding has actioned that request. Where it is not possible for a CB to action the request within the timeframe, GFSI may accept a proposed action plan by the CB with a reasonable future timescale. Implementation will be subsequently checked by GFSI.

It is important that evidence of a robust action plan with evidence of implementation is received by the agreed deadline otherwise this may impact the recognition process.

Where corrective action is not received within the timeline or demonstrates effective evidence of close out, the CPO will be permitted up to a total of 20 working days to submit evidence.

However the CPO shall be warned that where evidence of effective actions allowing the Benchmark Leader to close out the issue is not received within a maximum of 20 working days from the office audit, the open findings will be escalated to GFSI to review.

H Review of Office Visit Findings CAPA by BML	The Benchmark Leader reviews the corrective action plan, outcomes: → The corrective actions address the findings – the Benchmark Leader accepts the corrective action plan; → Some of the corrective actions do not address the findings – the corrective action plan is rejected.	Typical Timeline 4 weeks after the office visit maximum Supporting Document: GFSI list of findings	The Benchmark Leader will validate the corrective action plan and submit this to the GFSI Senior Technical Manager for review and validation.
H Office Visit Report by BML	The Benchmark Leader completes the office visit report and sends to the Certification Programme Owner.	Supporting Document: GFSI assessment report	The Benchmark Leader sends the visit report including the list of findings to the Certification Programme Owner. The visit report includes: • The certification programme name, version number and scope, • Details of the benchmark leader, observers, dates, • Compliance details against each of the requirements, • Any findings from the office visit, • Details of the corrective actions and root cause analysis completed by the CPO
H GFSI Validation of Office Visit Report	GFSI reviews the report and validates its content.	Typical Timeline 1 week Supporting Document: GFSI list of findings	The Benchmark Leader sends the final report to GFSI. The GFSI Senior Technical Manager will review the assessment report and include their assessment of the Corrective Action plan to this report. GFSI validates the finally agreed report. If the corrective action plan cannot be closed out and validated or the Certification Programme Owner fails to implement it within the agreed timeline, the GFSI Senior Technical Manager and the GFSI Director may initiate the sanctioning process.

H Desk Top Review 2

The Benchmark Leader carries out a second sampled record review as per DTR1 with the Certification Programme Owner – ‘Desk Top Review 2’.

Supporting Document:
GFSI monitoring checklist

H Confirmation of Continued Programme Alignment

GFSI validates that the results of the annual continued alignment monitoring activities justify maintaining the Certification Programme Owner recognition.

If any findings raise concerns GFSI recommends next steps to the GFSI Steering Committee.