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1.1.1 Management Responsibility

- [ ] 1. The senior management team must develop and enforce a statement of intent demonstrating the facility's dedication to quality. This statement should, at the very least, cover:
  - The creation and upkeep of a system for quality management
  - Adherence to the quality stipulations of customers, regulatory bodies, and the company
  - Establishment of quality goals and the metrics for their evaluation
  - The pursuit of ongoing enhancements in quality outcomes
- [ ] 2. This declaration of commitment should be prominently placed and shared with the entire workforce, and it can be part of or separate from the company's food safety policy.
- [ ] 3. Senior site management shall cultivate and consistently advance a culture of quality on-site, which ensures, as a minimum:
  - The communication of quality goals and key performance indicators to the entire staff
  - The allocation of sufficient resources for achieving these goals and indicators
  - The enlightenment of all employees regarding their roles in quality and their accountability under the SQF Quality Code
  - The duty to inform management about any current or imminent quality issues and the authority to address these issues within their jurisdiction
  - Training for all employees to comprehend the significance of quality controls and the repercussions of deviations
- [ ] 4. It is crucial for the leadership team to identify and equip personnel responsible for critical process stages and quality objectives with the necessary competencies to fulfill these roles effectively.
- [ ] 5. It is required to document the roles of employees involved in critical process stages and quality objectives, including arrangements for their absence.
- [ ] 6. A designated SQF quality practitioner at each site must:
  - Manage, assess, and sustain the SQF Quality System, encompassing the essential quality principles and the quality plan
  - Initiate corrective actions to maintain the system's integrity
  - Disseminate all necessary information to ensure the system's effective operation and upkeep
- [ ] 7. The appointed SQF quality practitioner must:
  - Possess the capability to develop and maintain food quality plans using a risk-based approach such as HACCP
  - Have a thorough understanding of the Quality Code and the criteria for sustaining a quality management system
  - Be skilled, through education or experience, in process control and/or other quality methodologies to diminish process variability affecting quality and meet customer expectations

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- [ ] 8. Senior site management must establish a quality communication program ensuring everyone is aware of:
  - The organization's quality pledge, objectives, and the evaluation process of quality performance
  - The methods used to meet customer, regulatory, and company quality standards, where applicable
- [ ] 9. A process for tracking and benchmarking quality performance against predefined metrics should be set up by the leadership team. Performance data should be reported annually at the least and shared with all employees to showcase the quality management system's efficacy.

1.1.2 Management Review

- [ ] 1. The leadership team is accountable for evaluating the SQF Quality System's effectiveness, which includes necessary actions to:
  - Oversee adherence to specifications
  - Analyze and minimize variation in processes and products
  - Meet customer requirements
  - Implement corrective measures where needed
  - Guarantee the allocation of adequate resources for the system's upkeep and enhancement
- [ ] 2. Updates regarding the SQF Quality System's status and upkeep must be provided to the leadership team by the SQF quality practitioners at least monthly, with documentation of these updates and managerial responses. A comprehensive review of the SQF Quality System should be conducted annually.
- [ ] 3. Reviews of the quality system, including food quality plans, must be undertaken whenever changes affecting the site's ability to meet customer and corporate quality requirements are made.
- [ ] 4. Senior site management must safeguard the quality system's integrity and continuity in the face of organizational or personnel changes within the company or its affiliated entities.
- [ ] 5. A change management process must be documented and enacted by the leadership team to assess and communicate the impact of changes in specifications, materials, equipment, or resources on quality, as well as their implementation.
- [ ] 6. Documentation and preservation of records related to all reviews of the quality system, document amendments, and changes within the SQF Quality System are essential. These records should reflect decisions on enhancing the quality system and the effectiveness of processes.

1.1.3 Complaint Management

- [ ] 1. The procedure and responsibilities for managing complaints should be well-documented and executed, including:
  - A system for logging and recording all quality-related complaints from site activities
  - A protocol for complaint notification and follow-up with upper management and clients

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1.1.3 Complaint Management

- [ ] 2. Analysis of trends from quality complaints should be integrated into the quality system's performance metrics.
- [ ] 3. Actions, both corrective and preventive, must be put in place based on the severity and pattern of complaints, in line with guidelines set forth in section 2.5.3.
- [ ] 4. It is necessary to keep records of all quality complaints, including their investigation and, if relevant, resolution.

2.1.1 Quality Management Framework

- [ ] 1. The facility is required to maintain up-to-date electronic or hardcopy documentation that prescribes the strategies and processes for adhering to the SQF Quality Code standards. This documentation, accessible to all employees, should include:
  - An overview of the facility's quality policies and strategies to meet the SQF Quality Code
  - The statement of commitment and the organizational structure
  - A catalogue of products within the certification scope
  - Specifications for finished products that match customer demands or the facility's quality standards
  - An exposition on the utilization of process control methods and other quality tools to manage and minimize process variability and meet customer specifications. The manual for the quality system can be integrated into or separate from the manual for the food safety system

2.1.2 Document Control

- [ ] 1. There must be a documented procedure for the upkeep, storage, and distribution of quality-related documents.
- [ ] 2. A log of the current documents related to the SQF Quality System and any amendments to these documents must be maintained. All documents should be securely stored yet easily accessible.

2.1.3 Records

- [ ] 1. Procedures for the verification, maintenance, and preservation of records need to be clearly documented and implemented.
- [ ] 2. All records must be legible and validated by personnel performing monitoring tasks to confirm that inspections, analyses, and other crucial actions have been executed.
- [ ] 3. Strategies should be in place for the secure storage, easy retrieval, and preservation of records, protecting them from unauthorized access, loss, or damage. The retention period for records should comply with customer or regulatory requirements, or at a minimum, match the shelf life of the product.

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3.1.2 Specifications (Raw Material, Packaging, Finished Product, And Services)

- [ ] 1. Specifications for all inputs, such as raw materials and packaging, which include ingredients, additives, agricultural components, hazardous chemicals, and processing aids affecting finished product quality, should be documented and kept up-to-date.
- [ ] 2. Quality parameters for raw materials and packaging need to be verified upon arrival to ensure compliance with specifications.
- [ ] 3. Approval from customers is required for product labels designed or specified by them, with records of such approvals maintained.
- [ ] 4. The registry of current specifications for raw materials and packaging must encompass materials affecting product quality and customer-specified labels.
- [ ] 5. Specifications for finished products, which must be documented, current, approved by the facility and its customers when necessary, and accessible to relevant employees, should detail product quality attributes, service delivery specifications, and packaging and labeling requirements.
- [ ] 6. Communication of customer-specific product specifications and delivery requirements to appropriate departments and employees within the facility is essential.
- [ ] 7. Documented and current specifications for contracted services affecting in-process or finished product quality should provide a comprehensive service description and outline relevant training for contract personnel. The list of contracted service specifications should identify those affecting product quality.

3.1.3 Contract Manufacturers

- [ ] 1. Agreements with contract manufacturers regarding quality and delivery requirements for products must be clearly defined, documented, agreed upon, and enacted.
- [ ] 2. The facility must ensure that contract manufacturers have processes in place capable of consistently fulfilling customer and corporate quality expectations, comply with the SQF Quality Code, and meet all customer requirements. Annual audits of contract manufacturers are required to confirm adherence to the SQF Quality Code and contractual agreements, or accept the manufacturer's certification to the SQF Quality Code or its equivalent. Any changes to contractual terms must be approved by both parties, agreed with customers as necessary, and communicated to relevant personnel.
- [ ] 3. Keeping records of audits, contracts, and modifications to contractual agreements and approvals is mandatory.

3.1.4 Approved Supplier Program

- [ ] 1. Ingredients, raw materials, packaging, processing aids, and services impacting finished product quality must only be procured from approved suppliers.

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- [ ] 2. The selection and approval of material suppliers should be based on their capability to provide materials that meet established quality specifications. The evaluation should require suppliers to maintain up-to-date specifications, demonstrate process capability, provide proof of compliance with agreed specifications and quality metrics, and possess an effective complaint management system including corrective action processes.
- [ ] 3. Acceptance of materials by the facility should be based on a certificate of analysis for each inspection upon receipt to ensure compliance with specifications. All received materials should be visually inspected for integrity and potential damage.
- [ ] 4. The approved supplier program must include provisions for the return or disposal of materials that do not meet the required specifications or are damaged or contaminated.
- [ ] 5. Audits of suppliers should be carried out by individuals with knowledge of applicable regulatory and food quality standards and trained in audit techniques.

4.1.1 Customer Requirements

- [ ] 1. A documented process must be in place for managing customer requirements and/or consumer expectations. This should include, at the very least, a:
  - Procedure for reviewing and approving new or revised customer requirements as they arise
  - Method for gathering and analyzing data on product quality attributes to ensure ongoing alignment with consumer expectations
  - Communication strategy for informing relevant customers of any disruptions in the ability to supply compliant products.
- [ ] 2. Measures must be instituted to protect customer-provided products, materials, or equipment within the facility, ensuring their correct and intended use.

4.1.2 Quality Fundamentals

- [ ] 1. Buildings and equipment must be designed, constructed, and maintained to support the production, handling, storage, and/or delivery of food that satisfies customer specifications, regulatory standards, and/or corporate quality requirements.
- [ ] 2. Calibration of measuring, testing, and inspection equipment utilized for quality assessments of raw materials, work-in-process, and finished products, as well as for food quality plans and process controls, must be documented and carried out. Software employed for these purposes should be appropriately validated.
- [ ] 3. The storage and transportation of raw materials, work-in-process, and finished products must be conducted in a manner that preserves product integrity and meets customer inventory and shipping requirements, where applicable.

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4.1.3 Quality Plan for Food

- [ ] 1. A risk-based method, such as HACCP, must be employed to develop, implement, and maintain a food quality plan that can be standalone or integrated with the food safety plan. This plan should identify quality hazards and critical quality control points.
- [ ] 2. The plan must detail the management of quality attributes for products or product groups and their associated processes.
- [ ] 3. The development and maintenance of the food quality plan should involve a multidisciplinary team, including the SQF quality practitioner and staff with technical, production, and marketing knowledge of the relevant products and processes. External expertise may be sought if necessary. The team composition can differ from that of the food safety team.
- [ ] 4. The scope of the food quality plan, including the processes and inputs/outputs considered, must be documented.
- [ ] 5. Comprehensive product descriptions for all items within the scope of the food quality plan should be created and include any agreed-upon quality or service attributes in addition to the information found in finished product specifications.
- [ ] 6. The intended use of each product, including target consumer groups, ease of use, consumer instructions, tampering evidence, and other quality-impacting information, must be documented.
- [ ] 7. The food quality team is responsible for ensuring that the flow diagrams from the food safety plan include all process steps, delays, inputs, and outputs affecting product quality.
- [ ] 8. All potential quality hazards that could occur at each process step, including those related to raw materials and other inputs, must be identified and documented by the food quality team.
- [ ] 9. A quality hazard analysis for each identified threat should be conducted to determine significant hazards, i.e., those requiring control to ensure or maintain product quality. The methodology used to assess hazard significance should be consistently applied.
- [ ] 10. Control measures for significant quality hazards must be determined and documented. It may be necessary to apply multiple control measures for a single hazard, and a specific control measure may address multiple significant hazards.
- [ ] 11. The food quality team must identify and document the process steps (Critical Quality Points or CQPs) where controls are needed to eliminate or reduce significant hazards to an acceptable level based on the hazard analysis results.
- [ ] 12. Quality limits distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable products at each CQP must be established and documented by the food quality team. These limits and their effectiveness in controlling identified quality hazards must be validated.
- [ ] 13. Monitoring procedures for CQPs, ensuring they remain within set limits, should be developed and documented, specifying assigned personnel, sampling and testing methods, and frequency of tests.

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- [ ] 14. Deviation procedures for addressing products affected by a loss of control at a CQP must be developed and documented, outlining affected product disposition and corrective actions to prevent recurrence of the quality failure.
- [ ] 15. The approved food quality plan must be fully implemented and its effectiveness monitored by the food quality team. A comprehensive review of the documented and implemented plans should occur at least annually or when changes in process, equipment, specifications, or inputs could impact product quality.
- [ ] 16. Verification of implemented food quality plans as part of the SQF Quality System verification activities is required.

4.1.4 Inspection, Sampling, and Analysis of Products

- [ ] 1. Processing parameters or in-process measurements for ensuring compliance with customer, regulatory, and/or corporate requirements must be established, validated, and verified at specified frequencies.
- [ ] 2. Facilities for on-site laboratory testing and inspection stations must be equipped and staffed to perform testing on in-process and finished products to meet customer, regulatory, and company quality objectives. External laboratories used must hold accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025 or an equivalent international standard, and be listed in the site's contract service specifications.
- [ ] 3. Effective process control methods must be employed to optimize production processes, enhancing process efficiency, product quality, and minimizing waste. The use of control charts and other quality tools is essential for managing key processes.
- [ ] 4. A sensory evaluation program should be established to ensure products align with agreed-upon customer and company standards. Results from sensory evaluations must be shared with relevant staff and, where appropriate, with customers.
- [ ] 5. Documentation and preservation of all quality inspection and analysis records, including statistical analyses, are required.

4.1.5 Management of Non-conforming Products or Equipment

- [ ] 1. Products that do not meet in-process or finished product quality requirements must be identified as non-conforming, segregated, and managed appropriately, with records of these actions maintained.
- [ ] 2. Equipment found unsuitable for use or incapable of producing products that meet quality requirements must be identified as non-conforming. Where possible, such equipment should be removed from production areas, with relevant documentation kept.
- [ ] 3. A procedure for handling returned products not meeting finished product specifications must be documented and implemented. This procedure should cover the identification, handling, and disposition of returned goods to prevent their redistribution or the contamination of other products.

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4.1.6 Product Rework

- [ ] 1. Procedures for reworking must ensure that the quality or formulation of the product is not compromised. Reworked material must be clearly identified and traceable, with oversight provided by qualified personnel.

4.1.7 Product Release

- [ ] 1. A procedure for the positive release of products must be documented and implemented to guarantee that products delivered to customers meet all agreed customer, regulatory, and company requirements, including product specifications, sensory attributes, packaging integrity, labeling, delivery, and service requirements.
- [ ] 2. Documentation of all product releases or dispositions must be maintained.

5.1.1 Validation And Effectiveness

- [ ] 1. Validation activities must include necessary measures to verify the adequacy of critical quality limits, process controls, and other quality tests established to meet customer requirements.
- [ ] 2. Documentation of the validation of quality criteria must be kept.

5.1.2 Verification Activities

- [ ] 1. The schedule for verification activities should encompass measures designed to confirm the effectiveness of process controls and quality tests.
- [ ] 2. Documented procedures for verifying the effectiveness of monitoring critical quality points and other process and quality controls must be established. These procedures should ensure that personnel responsible for verification activities authorize each record.
- [ ] 3. Verification activities must compare process control limits with specification limits to guarantee alignment and make necessary process control adjustments.
- [ ] 4. Documentation of quality verification activities must be maintained.

5.1.3 Corrective And Preventive Action

- [ ] 1. Methods for corrective and preventive action must include identifying the root causes and addressing non-compliance with critical quality limits and deviations from quality requirements.

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5.1.4 Internal Audits

- [ ] 1. Internal audit plans and methods should assess food quality plans, process controls, quality tests, and other activities undertaken to meet finished product specifications as well as customer and company requirements.
- [ ] 2. Personnel conducting quality internal audits must be trained and competent in audit procedures and possess knowledge and experience in quality processes and control methods relevant to the certification scope. Ideally, auditors should not audit their own work area.

6.1.1 Product Identification And Traceability

- [ ] 1. Finished products must be labeled according to agreed customer, regulatory, and/or company requirements.
- [ ] 2. Procedures for product changeovers must verify quality attributes necessary to meet finished product specifications and customer requirements.
- [ ] 3. Finished products must be traceable forward to the customer, such as retailers, distributors, or manufacturers.
- [ ] 4. Traceability must extend backward to all raw materials, ingredients, and packaging materials used in the manufacture of a finished product, including processing aids, each identified with the finished product lot number.

6.1.2 Product Withdrawal And Recall

- [ ] 1. The facility's recall and withdrawal procedures must apply to products recalled or withdrawn due to failure to meet customer specifications or corporate quality requirements, with records maintained according to customer, regulatory, and company needs.

6.1.3 Crisis Management

- [ ] 1. Senior site management must prepare a crisis management plan outlining procedures for maintaining continuity of supply that meets customer, regulatory, and/or company quality and service requirements in the event of a crisis.
- [ ] 2. In a crisis affecting the facility's ability to supply quality products, customers must be promptly informed.

7.1.1 Addressing Food Fraud

- [ ] 1. The assessment of food fraud vulnerability must encompass the site's susceptibility to ingredient or product substitution, mislabeling, dilution, and counterfeiting actions that could detrimentally affect food quality. This evaluation should consider both food safety and quality aspects.
- [ ] 2. A food fraud mitigation plan must be established and executed, detailing the strategies for managing identified vulnerabilities that could negatively impact food quality.

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8.1.1 General Requirements for Identity Preserved Foods

- [ ] 1. Documented procedures must be established for identifying, labeling, approving, and processing foods and other products that require their identity preserved status (such as Kosher, Halal, organic, GMO-free, regional origin, allergen-free, fair trade, etc.) to be maintained.
- [ ] 2. The identification must include a declaration of the product's identity preserved status and all ingredients, including additives, preservatives, processing aids, and flavorings.
- [ ] 3. Specifications for raw materials and ingredients of identity preserved foods must cover requirements for their handling, transport, storage, and delivery before use.
- [ ] 4. Assurances regarding the raw material or ingredient's identity preserved status must be secured through agreements with the suppliers.
- [ ] 5. The processing procedures must ensure the maintenance of a product's identity preserved status throughout manufacturing.
- [ ] 6. Conditions for processing identity preserved foods should ensure: 1. Physical separation of ingredients incompatible with the identity preserved food 2. Processing in separate areas, as the first production run or following extensive sanitation of processing areas and equipment 3. Storage and transport in separate or physically isolated units from non-specialty products
- [ ] 7. Declarations of the identity preserved status must comply with regulatory requirements.
- [ ] 8. Additional customer-specific requirements for identity preserved foods must be documented in the finished product specification or label register and implemented by the site.

9.1.1 Requirements for Training

- [ ] 1. Personnel involved in critical tasks for the effective implementation of the SQF Quality System and for maintaining and enhancing quality requirements must receive appropriate training.
- [ ] 2. Written instructions should be provided, detailing the execution of all tasks critical to meeting customer and company specifications for quality and process efficiency.

9.1.2 Training Program

- [ ] 1. The training program for employees must cover the necessary skills for specific roles and the training methods for those involved in:
  - Process control and monitoring of critical quality points (CQPs)
  - Steps deemed crucial for the effective execution of the food quality plan and for sustaining food quality
  - Inspection and testing of products

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- [ ] 2. The employee training program should include:
  - Training on applicable process control and quality tools for those overseeing key manufacturing processes
  - Calibration training and proficiency testing for internal laboratory personnel
  - Sensory evaluation training for relevant personnel
  - Training on the application of risk-based principles such as HACCP for those involved in identifying and managing quality hazards
  - Identification and fulfillment of ongoing training needs for site personnel.

- [ ] 3. Maintenance of training records is required, documenting:
  - The name of the participant
  - Description of acquired skills
  - Details of the training provided
  - Date of training completion
  - Information about the trainer or training provider
  - Confirmation of the trainee's competency to perform the required tasks

This free SQF Audit checklist is a template based on the SQFI Food Safety Code: Food Manufacturing Edition 9. It's meant to help you get started with conducting internal audits according to SQF standards. You can edit the contents as well as add or remove rows as needed. But always consult with your own regulatory body and knowledge of your business's specific operations to ensure that your final template can be used for internal auditing purposes.