



CASE STUDY TITLE

The Benefits of Voluntary Food Safety Standards in Meeting National and Regional Regulation

SUMMARY

The objective of this case study is to show the value of encouraging industrial food production companies to enter into voluntary partnerships with third-party certification programmes to demonstrate their adherence to international food safety standards. This promotes responsible business practices while also ensuring the provision of safer and higher quality food to world markets.

Introducing certification to recognized standards is a significant factor in raising awareness – among both businesses and consumers – of the importance of more sustainable production and consumption. In addition to supporting the health and well-being of people of all ages, it can increase trust in the security of food supply chains and help to reduce waste in both commercial and home environments.

Strong global partnerships and cooperation are more important than ever as countries around the world strive to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. These partnerships will play an important role in revitalizing action towards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

BACKGROUND

This case study explores how operating one of the recognized Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) third-party certification programmes within a regulatory framework can deliver a clear competitive advantage for food production and storage businesses everywhere.

It is based on a research project carried out by the Department of Management at Birkbeck, part of the University of London, to explore the interplay between regulations and standards, and the value that third-party certification provides as means to ensure that food is safe for consumers.

AT A GLANCE

COUNTRY

- Netherlands

LEVEL

- National

SDG ADDRESSED

- SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals

The data behind the study was provided by the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) as part of its annual evaluation of the collaboration between international third-party certification programme and standards owner BRCGS and the Dutch Regulator.





STRATEGY

During its inspection regime for the 2015-2020 period, the Dutch Regulator monitored the results of the supervision of a number of industrial food production companies in the Netherlands – and shared the results of these audits with the research team at Birkbeck.

Over that six-year period, the Regulator recorded compliance performance against the food-associated regulations and whether businesses were certified to one of the recognized Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) third-party certification programmes, including BRCGS and other schemes.

Of the 20,142 industrial business-to-business and cold store Food Business Operators (FBOs) analyzed in the study, 15.48% (3,118) were certified to the BRCGS Global Standard for Food Safety. A further 20.27% (4,083) of businesses were certified to other GFSI programmes, while 64.25% (12,941) were not certified at all.

RESULTS & IMPACT

The findings of the study showed that voluntary partnerships with third-party certification programmes result in improved compliance with industry standards and safer food for consumers. The choice of partnership appears to have a demonstrable impact on resulting food safety performance and consumer protection. While several third-party schemes are available, the research concluded that BRCGS-certified FBOs perform better than other companies.

During the monitored 2015-2020 period, these businesses required significantly fewer interventions for regulatory non-compliance than companies using other certification programmes or those operating without any third-party certification.

The Birkbeck study revealed that FBOs operating to BRCGS certification were shown to be:

- Less likely to require a major intervention by the Dutch Regulator: BRCGS-certified companies were 31.9% less likely than non-certified businesses and 16.1% less likely than other GFSI-certified businesses to require major intervention.
- Less likely to require any form of non-compliance intervention: FBOs operating to BRCGS certification were 22.8% less likely than non-certified businesses and 8.3% less likely than other GFSI-certified businesses to require any form of intervention.





CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

The results for the last year of the study were clearly affected by the outbreak and impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic - and this had a knock-on effect on the average performance reports.

Overall, it is clear that the steady increase in the adoption of voluntary partnerships with international third-party food safety certification schemes is helping FBOs to ensure safer and higher quality operational outputs.

Offering insight into why companies with BRCGS certification perform better than businesses operating under other third-party food safety certification schemes, the researchers suggest this may be attributed to the more stringent requirements, management and operational delivery of the BRCGS certification programme.

This is partly because the standards set by BRCGS certification extend beyond those set by GFSI. The use of prescriptive language and rigorous enforcement provides a clear framework for global application. Delivery partner performance management, management of auditor competence based on exams and training, analytics to benchmark performance and a confidential reporting system to register issues also combine to provide control over the operational delivery of the BRCGS certification programme in a way that promotes consistent and reliable outcomes.

POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION

As this study covered only a proportion of all the FBOs in the Netherlands, there is clear potential for it to be expanded to include a larger number of businesses. The research could also be easily replicated with businesses in other countries around the world.

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