

A critical review of the SALSA Scheme and  
its benefit to small businesses

London Metropolitan University approached SALSA Operations in September 2008, offering to provide research into the Scheme. A MSc Food Science student agreed to research SALSA and the Scheme's progression in improving food safety standards in small businesses. This paper provides a summary of the main findings.

The study focused primarily on an analysis of all the non conformances and all the partial compliances for action from all the SALSA audits carried out between February 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2008. Telephone conversations were also conducted with a small sample of SALSA Members and Mentors. The research identified some important findings about SALSA Members; their reasons for gaining SALSA approval, the benefits enjoyed by many members gaining approval, their readiness for the audit and the areas they found most difficult in complying with the Standard. The research has been used by the Scheme to provide more guidance for Members and useful resources for Mentors when advising companies.

The following points have been extracted from the research illustrating the key findings:

1. 75-85% of SALSA members are from small/family run businesses
2. Most producing companies experienced a sales increase after gaining SALSA approval because this enabled them to trade with suppliers such as Waitrose, Tesco, Sainsbury's, ASDA, local supermarkets, Co-ops and various distribution companies.
3. Companies found the HACCP section of the SALSA Standard the most difficult and time consuming to implement due to the complex nature of the subject.
4. Traceability, labelling and specification sections were also time consuming to deal with because they required a considerable amount of work from Members to ensure compliance. Money was spent mainly on equipment purchases, product testing and improvements to premises.
5. Most companies interviewed found the SALSA Guidance Notes and Self Assessment Checklist understandable, very helpful and easy to use during their audit preparation.

6. Upon analysis of the audits conducted in the data set, the ten most frequently clauses requiring supplier action before gaining approval were as follows:

<b>SALSA Clause</b>	
<b>1.4 Contamination / Cross Contamination Prevention</b>	
1.4.1	The business shall identify all potential contamination risks associated with raw materials at each process step, and have in place systems of working and process flow to reduce any potential physical, chemical or microbiological contamination risks.
<b>1.6 Control of Raw Materials</b>	
1.6.1	The business shall ensure that appropriate specifications exist, and are regularly reviewed, for all raw materials including packaging materials.
<b>1.4 Contamination / Cross Contamination Prevention</b>	
1.4.5	Written procedures for handling all glass and brittle breakages in raw material handling, preparation, processing, packing and storage areas shall be in place to ensure the necessary precautions are taken.
<b>1.5 Temperature Control</b>	
1.5.4	Monitoring shall be carried out in accordance with product specification requirements and/or specified operating procedures
<b>1.3 Cleaning</b>	
1.3.1	Documented cleaning schedules shall be in place and maintained for the building, services, plant and all equipment in direct contact with food.
<b>1.9 Pest Control</b>	
1.9.1	The business shall either contract the services of a competent pest control organisation, or shall have trained personnel, for the regular inspection and treatment of premises to deter and eradicate infestation. Where the services of a pest control contractor are employed, the service contract shall be clearly defined and reflect the activities of the site.
<b>3.2 Specifications</b>	
3.2	Specification for raw material and packaging shall be adequate, accurate and regularly reviewed
<b>2.0 HACCP and Management Systems</b>	
2.1.7	Establishing procedures, which shall be carried out regularly, to verify that the measures outlined in subparagraphs 2.1.2 to 2.1.6 are working effectively
<b>2.2 Internal Systems Review</b>	
2.2.2	Results of the systems review shall include any action taken, and if appropriate, a timetable for correction of any non-compliances found.
<b>2.0 HACCP and Management Systems</b>	
2.1.4	Establishing critical limits at critical control points which separate acceptability from unacceptability for the prevention, elimination or reduction of identified hazards

7. The HACCP Section received the highest number of non conformances and partial compliances for action. This was closely followed by the section on Contamination/Cross Contamination and then the section on Pest Control.
8. Interviews with a selection of SALSA Mentors highlighted the following points:
  - a. All mentors stated that HACCP followed by traceability and labelling were the sections that took the most time and effort for companies to implement. This was due to the technical demands, complexity of the subjects combined with the companies' lack of knowledge in these particular sections.
  - b. Mentors mentioned that the majority of companies they worked with have found the SALSA Guidance Notes and Self Assessment Checklist insufficient to gain SALSA approval on their own. This was due to a lack of technical knowledge in conjunction with a poor understanding of how to implement the requirements of the standard in a practical way.
  - c. Mentors spent anywhere between 2 and 20 days in total preparing companies for their SALSA audit depending on their state of readiness and the prevailing standards in operation.
  - d. Mentors have suggested that the Standard needs clarification on shelf life testing, specific HACCP training, metal detection procedures and corrective actions in the event of glass breakage.

The research has made the following recommendations based on the information obtained from the study:

1. SALSA should make the recommended changes to the Standard and Guidance Notes.
  2. Resources should be developed by SALSA to help companies with devising and maintaining certain procedures and record forms.
  3. A control mechanism should be put in place to ensure that staff responsible for production on a daily basis, take ownership of their HACCP system.
  4. A local resource centre devoted to HACCP should be developed to help companies with HACCP implementation, the identification of appropriately qualified HACCP consultants and suitable HACCP training courses as well as other information needed for a HACCP system to be compliant with the SALSA standard.
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