

Food Safety Culture - Success with SALSA “Doing things right even when no one is watching”

Joining SALSA and implementing the Standard supports the development and maintenance of an effective food safety culture. SALSA businesses are owned by people who already express a passion for their products and who exemplify a great food safety culture by choosing the SALSA Standard.

SALSA certification is a commitment by small and micro producers to produce safe food by continually meeting the requirements of the SALSA Standard. Initially, this is through the successful implementation of food safety controls for the first audit, to the development and maintenance of enhanced food safety and quality management controls for the annual audit.

SALSA Food Safety Culture Definition: The attitudes, values and/or beliefs which are prevalent at the site, relating to the importance of product safety and the confidence in the product safety systems, processes and procedures used by the site.

Success with SALSA regarding food safety culture is not about meeting the requirements of a single clause, it is about implementing the guiding principles that support an effective food safety culture.

SALSA has identified six attributes that demonstrate a business’s ability and commitment to comply with and continuously develop their systems on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. These attributes cannot be implemented quickly, before an audit, but are areas where the result of their implementation over time can be assessed. By successfully establishing a robust food safety culture based on these principles, the business’s food safety and quality management system will be effective between audits.

In other words, businesses with a strong, embedded food safety culture will be “**audit ready every day**”, whether that be their SALSA audit, an EHP inspection or a customer audit. The attributes we expect our members to embrace as they commit to Safe Food First are:



Food Safety Culture – Key Attributes

1. **LEADERSHIP**, having a strategy and plan to ensure the consistent production of safe food:
 - Training procedure and records, plus evidence of staff competency to carry out their specific role
 - A documented HACCP system with a clear scope developed and maintained by a competent person or team
 - Product descriptions that include all relevant safety factors and information. Awareness of food standards, legal regulations, industry codes of practice and how they apply to the products produced, traded, handled, stored or distributed.
 - A documented review of the HACCP system annually and before any changes are introduced
 - A food safety and internal systems review – recorded at least annually, which includes all the SALSA Standard requirements and identifies areas for action or improvement
 - A timetable for completing actions and improvements identified in the food safety and internal systems review

2. **ENGAGEMENT**, awareness and commitment of all employees in the importance of safe production and distribution of food:
 - Training procedure and records, evidence of staff competency to carry out their specific role
 - A personal hygiene procedure stating the controls used to reduce the risk of contamination from personnel and personal items, with evidence that this has been understood and implemented by all personnel
 - A site that is visually clean and tidy, and a standard of cleaning and housekeeping that is suitable to minimise the potential for product contamination
 - A procedure that ensures all complaints are logged, investigated and responded to
 - Ensuring that all documents and completed records relating to the safety, legality and quality of products are genuine, legible, retained in good condition and stored securely for an appropriate period.

3. Clear **COMMUNICATION** and understanding of roles and responsibilities and their interactions for all employees in the food business:
 - Training procedure and records, evidence of staff competency to carry out their specific role
 - A programme of recorded annual refresher training for all food handlers and key staff
 - Adequate supervision of all personnel throughout the working period
 - A documented HACCP system with a clear scope developed and maintained by a competent person or team

4. Maintaining the **INTEGRITY** of the food safety management system by verifying controls in a timely and efficient manner and ensuring that documentation is up to date:
 - A documented risk assessment in relation to food fraud, adulteration, or substitution for all raw materials, including food contact packaging, that is reviewed at least annually
 - Monitoring procedures and records established to verify that the critical limits and controls identified in the HACCP system are consistently working effectively
 - A documented review of the HACCP system annually and before any changes are introduced
 - A food safety and internal systems review – recorded at least annually, which includes all the SALSA Standard requirements and identifies areas for action or improvement
 - Ensuring that all documents and completed records relating to the safety, legality and quality of products are genuine, legible, retained in good condition and stored securely for an appropriate period.

5. **CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT** of the food safety management system, considering changes and developments in science, technology and best practices:
 - A documented risk assessment in relation to food fraud, adulteration, or substitution for all raw materials, including food contact packaging, that is reviewed at least annually
 - A food safety and internal systems review – recorded at least annually, which includes all the SALSA Standard requirements and identifies areas for action or improvement
 - A timetable for completing actions and improvements identified in the food safety and internal systems review
 - Procedures to investigate, record and remedy the cause of any non-conformances (product, process or procedural)
 - A procedure that ensures all complaints are logged, investigated, and responded to

6. **RESOURCES** and facilities to ensure the consistent, safe and hygienic handling of food:
 - A site that is visually clean and tidy, and a standard of cleaning and housekeeping that is suitable to minimise the potential for product contamination
 - Equipment that is fit for purpose, constructed of appropriate materials, designed to allow hygienic processing and not be a source of foreign body contamination
 - Building structure (walls, ceilings, doors, floors, drains and lighting) that is sound, fit for purpose and regularly maintained.

During the SALSA Audit process, Auditors are looking for good examples of the above attributes that underpin your ability and commitment to comply with the individual requirements of the SALSA Standard.

These key attributes support an effective Food Safety Culture.

SALSA Support Resources

SALSA Self-Assessment Checklist (SAC)

SALSA Interpretation Guide

Tools & Tips

SALSA Mentors – experienced, knowledgeable and able to guide your business.

These resources are designed to support you at every stage of your SALSA membership. You can use them to:

- Carry out a gap analysis when preparing for your first SALSA audit
- Prepare for your SALSA renewal audit
- Record your annual Food Safety Systems Review
- Build an action plan for continuous improvement, with realistic timescales and clear responsibilities
- Measure and improve your Food Safety Culture

Tips

- Managers and Supervisors should lead by example
- Posters to keep messages visual. Change them regularly to avoid complacency
- Prepare for your audit and book your audit on time
- Send your corrective action to SALSA on time
- Continuous improvement
- Involve your staff in food safety related activities, e.g. writing or reviewing procedures, work instructions or asking for feedback and suggestions

Further Resources

Table 1: Level 1 Understanding

Category	Tick which category applies
<p>a) Calculative non-compliers: Intentionally breach regulations for the sake of financial gain, disputing or disregarding the potential impact on consumers – without assessing the potential impact on people and making decisions without due deliberation or consideration of regulations or other requirements. <i>e.g. 'I never bother wasting time on something that will cost me time but not make me money.'</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>b) Doubting compliers: Doubt the significance of the hazard posed by food safety and hygiene and the effectiveness of food hygiene regulations and requirements in managing these hazards. May have the capability to understand requirements but doubt the risk. May express cynical view to staff and do not promote compliance other than for purposes of regulatory compliance. <i>e.g. 'We've never had a problem in all the time we have been trading.'</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>c) Dependent compliers: Wait upon advice or instruction from regulators and other third parties to make improvements and view food safety and hygiene as something driven by third parties. Tend to view requirements as unfairly complex and that it is unreasonable to expect them to take a lead in understanding and applying. May have low levels of knowledge and training. May not have any clear perception or knowledge of the potential issues posed by food safety and hygiene. <i>e.g. 'Just give me a list of what you want me to do and I will do it.'</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>d) Proactive compliers: Understand that hazards posed by poor food hygiene and poor process controls are significant and accept that requirements are effective and necessary. Wish to ensure food safety controls are proportionate and effective, and will positively debate (internally and externally) how best to manage food safety hazards in a cost effective and proportionate way, implementing food safety controls after careful deliberation. Management provides a lead in encouraging compliance for the sake of the business as well as regulatory compliance but may not go beyond "good practice". <i>e.g. 'We encourage all staff to take ownership and responsibility for food safety and we challenge non-compliance.'</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>e) Leaders: View food safety and hygiene as critical business issues that they must tightly manage and offers potential business benefits through achievement of a good reputation for food safety and hygiene. Provide visible leadership in continually reviewing food safety and improving food hygiene. <i>e.g. 'We pride ourselves on the safety and hygiene practices of our business.'</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: Food Standards Agency – Food Safety Culture Diagnostic Toolkit for Inspectors (Greenstreet Berman, 2012)

[Food Safety Culture Diagnostic Toolkit for Inspectors - Definitions of Categories of Businesses by Expressed Attitudes Towards Food Safety.](#)

(Food Standards Agency and Greenstreet Berman, July 2012 - Michael S Wright, Paul Leach and Gill Palmer)

FOOD STANDARDS Australia New Zealand			
What does a strong food safety culture look like?			
	Who?	What?	How? (examples)
Strong leadership	Business owners, board members, general managers, site managers	Senior leaders show the way, openly commit to making safe food the top priority throughout your business	<p><i>I make sure there is a regular meeting or get-together where we report and discuss our food safety performance.</i></p> <p><i>I personally follow up on things we decided need to be done (e.g. assign time, people or money to specific tasks, make sure corrective actions are done).</i></p> <p><i>I review our food safety performance and budget with my team as part of our overall business performance at least once month.</i></p>
Committed managers	Production managers, field supervisors, store supervisors, maintenance managers	Managers show their commitment to food safety through dedicating time and effort	<p><i>I communicate and follow up on my expectation that all staff spend 10 minutes each week in team meetings discussing and solving our food safety challenges.</i></p> <p><i>I schedule and lead a regular event (e.g. team meeting, webinar, safety demonstration) where I personally speak to my teams about food safety.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure my leadership team discusses and acts on suggestions about improving food safety at least monthly.</i></p>
Everyone contributes	Production pickers, truck drivers, factory workers, shop assistants, restaurant waiters, as well as managers and senior leaders	Everyone in the business believes making safe food is important and everyone plays a part	<p><i>I speak up and correct anyone's behaviour if I see something wrong (if it goes against our food safety practices or principles).</i></p> <p><i>I offer suggestions I think could improve the business's food safety performance.</i></p> <p><i>I ask questions if I don't understand why food safety practices are changed.</i></p>
Everyone's accountable	All people at all levels in the business	Everyone understands that they are held responsible for ensuring food is safe	<p><i>I understand my role and responsibilities in food safety and that if I do not take them seriously consumers could become ill or die and the business could be harmed.</i></p> <p><i>I help new colleagues and share my pride in what our business expects and achieves when it comes to food safety.</i></p>
Knowing and acting	All people at all levels in the business	More than training people – making sure they know the risks and do the right thing, every time	<p><i>I assign time and budget for staff to receive food safety training, as well as regular updates or refresher sessions.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure there is a plan for everybody to be involved in food safety observations (e.g. food temperatures, equipment sanitation), so we are all checking that we know and do what is expected.</i></p> <p><i>I actively encourage and reward people/teams who have shown a strong commitment to food safety.</i></p> <p><i>I always speak up and/or take action if I see something (e.g. a food safety observation) is wrong.</i></p>
Continual improvement	All people at all levels in the business	Be proactive – monitor what goes on, look for ways to improve, prevent problems happening in the future	<p><i>I discuss findings from food safety observations with my team at a pre-set and regular time so we can find better ways to do things and remove obstacles.</i></p> <p><i>I am encouraged to bring ideas about improving food safety to my supervisor and often do this.</i></p> <p><i>I see my supervisor and the business as a whole taking my comments and suggestions seriously. This makes me feel proud and valued.</i></p>

Source: Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) – What does a strong food safety culture look like? (2023)

“What does a strong food safety culture look like?”, Food Standards Australia New Zealand

Further reading:

- [A Culture of Food Safety](#) – Published March 2026, GFSI **NEW!**
- [Building and Sustaining a Food Safety and Quality Culture](#), BSI